Rethinking International Political Geographies

Political Geography (GEOG 329)

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Beyond the Territorial Trap

“to the extent that the current round of globalization has significantly reconfigured, and at least partially undermined, the container-like qualities of states, this inherited model of territorially self-enclosed, state-defined societies, economies, or cultures has become highly problematic”

-Brenner
Beyond the Territorial Trap

“space is still commonly understood throughout the social sciences as a realm of stasis, as a pregiven, unchanging territorial platform upon which social action occurs. Even within contemporary globalization studies ... major strands of research are grounded upon implicit, relatively unhistorical geographical assumptions that are derived from an earlier, now largely superseded state-centric configuration of capitalist development.”

-Brenner
Beyond the Territorial Trap

“globalization researchers who have moved beyond such state-centric geographical assumptions have generally done so by arguing that state territoriality and even geography itself are shrinking, contracting, or dissolving as a consequence of processes of ‘deterritorialization.’ A break with state-centrism is thus secured through the state's conceptual negation, a move that sidesteps the analysis of newly emergent, reterritorialized forms of state power and their associated political geographies.”

-Brenner
Rethinking Globalization’s Territoriality

Brenner argues:
1) globalization is resulting in the transcendence of the territorial organization of capitalism at the scale of the state;
2) globalization is producing new configurations of territoriality on both sub- and supra-national geographical scales.
Reterritorializing the State

As a corollary to his argument, Brenner further suggests that our fixation on imagining states as operating over a closed territory as a container that operates at a fixed scales severely limit our understanding of the role of the state in globalization. He suggests the state is a site, a medium, and an agent of globalization. Thus, the state can be understood as both being remade through globalization and an agency that is working to reterritorialize itself.
Reterritorializing the State

In effect, Brenner offers an immanent critique, in which he demonstrates that the traditional territoriality of the state is a necessary foundation for subsequent processes of globalization. Globalization is not simply a fading of the historic form of state territoriality; rather the reterritorialization of global capitalism is fundamentally reliant upon building off the existing infrastructure of state territoriality in order to establish new global spatialities.
Globalization

NAFTA
FREE TRADE AT LAST, FREE TRADE AT LAST, THANK GOD ALMIGHTY, WE HAVE FREE TRADE AT LAST!
WTO
U.S. WORKERS
CORPORATE AMERICA
WORKERS ABROAD
MASSIVE LAYOFFS, VANISHING WORKER RIGHTS
SLAVE WAGE, NO WORKER RIGHTS
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Globalization

Brenner approaches globalization in terms of a geographical political economy, examining the spatial organization of world capitalism. Thus, his interest centres on the continual deterritorialization and reterritorialization of space that has accompanied capitalism since its invention in the English industrial revolution.
Globalization

“...I understand globalization as a double-edged, dialectical process through which: 1) the movement of commodities, capital, money, people, images, and information through geographical space is continually expanded and accelerated; and 2) relatively fixed and immobile socioterritorial infrastructures are produced, reconfigured, redifferentiated, and transformed to enable such expanded, accelerated movement. Globalization therefore entails a dialectical interplay between the endemic drive towards space-time compression under capitalism (the moment of deterritorialization) and the continual production of relatively fixed, provisionally stabilized configurations of territorial organization on multiple geographical scales (the moment of reterritorialization).”
Capital’s Deterritorializing Effects

- Marx’s “annihilation of space by time”
- Harvey’s “time-space compression”
- Brenner’s “impulsion to eliminate all geographical barriers to the accumulation process in search of cheaper raw materials, fresh sources of labor-power, new markets for its products, and new investment opportunities”
Capital’s Reterritorializing Effects

- Harvey: “spatial organisation is necessary to overcome space”
- Brenner: “only through the production of relatively fixed and immobile configurations of territorial organization -- including urban built environments, industrial agglomerations, regional production complexes, large-scale transportation infrastructures, long-distance communications networks, and state regulatory institutions -- that capital's circulation process can be continually accelerated temporally and expanded spatially.”
Space as Co-constituted with the Social

Lefebvre: “the production of space”
Brenner: “Space is not merely a physical container within which capitalist development unfolds, but one of its constitutive social dimensions, continually constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through an historically specific, multi-scalar dialectic of de- and re-territorialization.”
State-Centrism

• Agnew’s “territorial trap”
• Brenner: “State-centrism can be defined in terms of its two most essential, if implicit, geographical assumptions: 1) the conception of space as a static platform of social action that is not itself constituted or modified socially; and 2) the conception of state territoriality as a preconstituted, naturalized, or unchanging scale of analysis.”
Territorial States and the Geographies of Accumulation

“territorial states have operated as provisionally stabilized forms of territorialization for successive rounds of capital accumulation, particularly since the second industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century.”
Territorial States and the Geographies of Accumulation

“the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries actually entailed the consolidation of the state's role at once as a territorialized scaffolding for accelerated capitalist expansion.”
The Rise of the Territorial State

Through this historic period, we can witness “1) territorialization of state power, through which each state strives to exercise exclusive sovereignty over a delineated, self-enclosed geographical space; and 2) the globalization of the state form, through which the entire globe is subdivided into a single geopolitical grid composed of multiple, contiguous state territories.”
The Rise of the Territorial State

The frames of state-centred analysis provide an account of territorialization of state power, through which each state strives to exercise exclusive sovereignty over a delineated, self-enclosed geographical space; but they fail to think through the globalization of the state form, through which the entire globe is subdivided into a single geopolitical grid.
The Failed State Theories

Brenner critique the two dominant approaches to re theorizing territory in the contemporary moment where the multi-scalar architecture of politics is being remade.
The first method of rethinking the state has been through an effort to theorize territorial stretching. Brenner critiques this approach for simply transposing state-centric spatialities onto the global scale. This continually reproduces the territorial frameworks of state-centred theory.

The Failed State-Centric Theories
Ultimately these account produce as static idea of state territoriality. They lack the historicity to account for the transformation in the spatialities of politics in globalization. Moreover, in freezing their notion of state spatiality they also freeze their notion of the state, failing to account for the ways that states are both sites and agents of global change.
The Failed State-Phobic Theories

The second failed theory is one that focuses on processes of ‘deterritorialization,’ on the way the state no longer exists as a territorial entity. Where the former approach still held the state acted in line with a stretched concept of territory, here theorists assumes that the state cannot operate in deterritorialized forms. Thus, they grasp a historical change in the workings of territory.
However, they mistake the reterritorialization of capital for an imagined borderless and stateless world. This frame presents deterritorialization as possessing an antithetical rather than dialectical relation to (re)territorialization. It presents global rescaling as operating at only the global and obscures its multiscalar effects. Moreover, it fails to apprehend how global flow rely upon territorial infrastructures.
“the contemporary round of globalization has radically reconfigured the scalar organization of territorialization processes under capitalism, relativizing the significance of the national scale while simultaneously intensifying the role of both sub- and supra-national forms of territorial organization.”
I conceive the contemporary round of globalization as a re-scaling of the nationally organized forms of territoriality that have long served as the basic geographical scaffolding for capitalist expansion. In the context of this ongoing scalar shift, processes of deterritorialization can be coherently reinterpreted as concerted yet uncoordinated strategies of denationalization through which the national scale of state territorial organization is being at once decentered, relativized, and reconfigured."
“This denationalizing strategy of "jumping scales" has also been tightly intertwined with various, highly conflictual forms of reterritorialization through which new sub- and supra-national forms of state territorial organization are being constructed. As in the previous state-centric round of globalization, however, it can be argued that the territorial state remains a crucial geographical infrastructure upon, within, and through which this multi-scalar dialectic of de- and reterritorialization is currently unfolding.”
“the neoliberal project of deregulation and liberalization, which has been pursued since the 1980s, has been closely intertwined with various forms of reregulation through which states have actively promoted the globalization process. These internationalizing, reregulatory strategies have included the deployment of new forms of industrial, technology, and urban-regional policy; the construction of new legal regimes and financial regulations; and the establishment of new entrepreneurial institutional forms to enhance the productive force of selected urban-regional growth poles within each state's territory.”
Rescaling Politics

“re-scaling of the state is not merely a defensive response to intensified global economic competition, but a concerted strategy to create new scales of state regulation to facilitate and coordinate the globalization process. On one scale, states have promoted economic globalization by forming supra-national economic blocs such as the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, and the like, which operate at once to enforce regional structural competitiveness and as protective barriers to global competition. Supra-national agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank have likewise acquired an expanding role in enforcing market-led strategies of socioeconomic restructuring.
Rescaling Politics

“On sub-state scales, meanwhile, states have devolved substantial aspects of their governance capacities to regional and local institutions, which are better positioned to restructure major urban regions. This downward devolution of state power has also frequently served as a centrally organized strategy to promote efficient capital investment on urban and regional scales, whether through large-scale infrastructural projects, locally organized ‘workfare’ policies, or through other entrepreneurial initiatives such as public-private partnerships. The current wave of state re-scaling can therefore be interpreted as a strategy of political restructuring that aims to enhance the locationally specific productive forces of each level of state territorial organization.”
Methodological Considerations

1) Recognizing the historicity of social space
2) Recognizing that the scalar organization of politics provides a foundation for political economic process, as well as a medium through which they occur, even as these processes restructure the scales of politics
3) Recognizing the multi-scalar, mosaic territorialities of politics, which are no longer discrete Cartesian blocks