

This article was downloaded by: [82.173.141.66]

On: 01 April 2015, At: 23:33

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Territory, Politics, Governance

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtep20>

The particularities of territory

Justus Uitermark

Published online: 16 Feb 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Justus Uitermark (2015) The particularities of territory, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 3:1, 1-6, DOI: [10.1080/21622671.2015.1002194](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2015.1002194)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2015.1002194>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

EDITORIAL

The particularities of territory

JUSTUS UITERMARK

The sequence of the words that make up the title of this journal is deliberate. Territory comes first. A central idea underlying this journal project is that “territory and related spatial terms (place, space, and territoriality) offer a profitable theoretical lens through which to analyze the workings of governance and politics” (AGNEW 2013, p. 2). By making territory central to our theoretical enterprise, we hope to address crucial dimensions of politics and governance. Demarcating a bounded space is a foundational move as it prepares the ground for the exercise of governmental control.

Sassen’s recent work offers one illustration as it charts the mutual imbrication of new types of territory and new modes of governance. Global firms and financial networks actively work to construct their own cross-national jurisdictions in which they are shielded from state authority and profit from regulatory invisibility. Private global trading networks called “dark pools” are one example (SASSEN, 2013). Traders in these networks are anonymous and can effectively evade regulations that governments impose on public stock exchanges. Examples like dark pools are testimony to the dynamic and complex territorialities of today’s financial-political governance.

The importance of the construction of territorial shells for exercising power often escapes analysts of politics and governance because they implicitly assume that nation-states are naturally the players and containers of politics and governance. Some tenets of International Relations, notably realism, have elevated these common sense assumptions to the level of foundational theoretical premises. Other approaches, like game theory, do not have explicit assumptions about the spatiality of politics but make the problem disappear by abstracting away from geography. These approaches generate elegant models by only considering a limited set variables and specific types of motivations. Their generality is obtained by virtue of their abstraction from geography. There is thus something unsettling to territoriality – it mitigates against elegant abstraction and forces analysts to consider the geographical foundations of politics as well as the particulars of governance. While grounding analysis in geography brings to light crucial issues in governance and politics, it also raises vexing questions. Two of these questions run through the articles in this journal and this issue. The first question is how to define

what territory is and what the analysis of territory entails, the second is how to strike a balance between generalization and particularity.

DEFINING TERRITORY, DOING TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS

It is not an exaggeration to say that today the importance of territoriality and space is firmly on the agenda, and not just the agenda of geographers. While the argument that space generally and territory specifically matter has gained wide currency, exactly how these geographical concepts should inform the analysis of politics and governance is subject to ongoing debates. There are different conceptions of territory that imply different ways of doing territorial analysis.

One conception emphasizes the discursive construction of territory and its formalization in law and regulations. This conception of territory implies we need an approach that carefully reconstructs what historical actors meant when they spoke and wrote of territory. As one important exponent of this approach, ELDEN (2013) chooses not to provide a historically invariant definition of territory but rather analyses how the concept came into being and accrued meaning and significance. ELDEN (2013) looks closely at how Foucault translated and interpreted the work of scholars and strategists writing on territory. Did they really write about territory or did they use different concepts? What were the connotations and implications of concepts that they used? In what kinds of broader frameworks or epistemes were they embedded?

Another conception of territory views it not as a discursive-legal construct but as dimension and outcome of material practice. This conception can be found in Schindler's piece in this issue (SCHINDLER, 2015). When Schindler writes about the "territorial moment" in the governance of metropolises in the Global South, he understands territory as a configuration of place and power. Whether the authorities use the concept of territory matters less for Schindler than for Elden. Schindler is concerned with the ways in which governments configure space to govern and how they reconfigure it through governing. This results in different types of questions. What sorts of territories does the state demarcate? How do states extend their reach into territories? In this more materialistic or infrastructural understanding, the modern state is "a set of central and radial institutions penetrating its territories" (MANN, 1993, p. 59). As governments have become "enthralled with the possibility of accumulating capital while remaking the city" (SCHINDLER, 2015), they are also allured by the prospect of exercising their power over places that were hitherto beyond the state's reach (SCHINDLER, 2015). Schindler analyses precisely how governments in the Global South use a variety of means to bring places under the sway of governmental control, ranging from channelling tourists to previously impenetrable urban territories to designing entirely new cities where security for elite inhabitants is a primary design concern.

The approach taken to territory also influences what sorts of developments are discussed. Analysts using Elden's approach seem inclined to historical analysis and are especially interested in the work of states and state theorists. Analysts using Schindler's approach seem more inclined to use a territorial focus for extending political analysis beyond the state (AGNEW, 2013, p. 2). In this issue, ADDIE *et al.* (2015) do just this by examining "the territorialization processes unfurling at the nexus of globalized urbanization and neoliberalizing higher education systems". Although city governments like to think of universities as local partners, universities are composed of many different and increasingly "unbundled" compartments that each are located in complex and geographically extensive webs of interdependencies. The establishment of satellite campuses and Massive Open Online Courses are just two expressions of universities expanding

beyond their immediate environments. Addie *et al.* suggest that the effects of these processes is ambivalent and uneven but that the expansion of universities beyond central cities are proving “beneficial for local young people and students from lower-income backgrounds in terms of access to educational opportunities” and moreover have “great potential to redefine and reshape higher education and urban landscapes while opening new channels for R&D linkages between industry and universities”. Such positive conclusions from researchers renowned for their critical approach give reason for optimism.

THE PARTICULAR AND THE GENERAL

Although the tension between the particular and the universal is in some way or form present in all academic fields it seems to me that it is singularly and unescapably pressing for analysts of territorial politics and governance. While other researchers may ignore particulars for purposes of generalization and position their units of analysis on an abstract plane, analysts of territoriality are sooner or later pulled back into the map. There is, we might say, a territorial imperative to consider the particulars of places and people. That being said, geographically sensitive researchers have developed approaches that highlight either particularity or generality.

COLE and PASQUIER's paper (2015) focuses squarely on particularity. They show that regional elites have cultivated and mobilized “symbols of regional identity and cultural distinctiveness” and understand and respond to general developments, like the outbreak of the economic crisis, in regionally specific ways. Cole and Pasquier's research suggests that there is no linear development in the direction of more or less regionalism but that regionalism does change qualitatively over time. While it is often assumed that global and national pressures undermine regional particularity, their findings thus suggest that such pressures are filtered in regionally particular ways. Although this is an analysis of a single case, the larger analytical point is that changes in a particular region cannot be read off from global and national pressures. RODRÍGUEZ-POSE and STERMŠEK (2015) also provide a single case study of territorial capacity, focusing on the question of whether independence has generated increased economic growth for the nations making up the former Yugoslavia. Through their detailed investigation they disentangle drivers of economic growth and conclude that there is no evidence of an “independence dividend”. These models and findings are important not only for analysts of economic performance but also for others as they suggest that desires for secession cannot be explained as veiled strategies for economic self-interest.

Schindler's contribution sits on the other side of the continuum and is ambitiously general in its scope. He argues that governance and politics in cities of the Global South are “increasingly geared toward controlling urban space and transforming the city itself” (SCHINDLER, 2015). While Foucault believed that populations had become the key subjects of governmental interventions, Schindler argues that such biopolitical strategies are increasingly abandoned. The major reason for this is that the sheer abundance of labour makes it both difficult and unnecessary to focus governmental energies on creating a skilled and disciplined workforce. Authorities and corporations instead direct their attention to real estate and urban development in an effort to attract and harness capital. Schindler covers a lot of ground. Although he allows for geographical variation in the intensity and combination of the different territorial strategies he identifies, he emphasizes generality rather than variation: no matter the exact local circumstances, cities across the South are in the same territorial moment. Such sweeping statements will perhaps draw ire from scholars with particularistic sensitivities but I

think that Schindler's argument is not just convincing but can be extended to countries outside of the Global South. Governments of countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK have stepped up efforts to manage marginality *in situ*, investing heavily in urban policies aiming to restructure deprived and stigmatized neighbourhoods (UITERMARK, 2014).

Pushing for general arguments entails risks. In the field of gentrification research, a number of scholars have suggested that familiar concepts from the literature have been applied unthinkingly in contexts for which they are unsuited, a practice LEES (2012, p. 156) calls "imitative urbanism". In a process of conceptual colonization, realities outside of the Anglo-American core are rendered legible but at the same time become distorted. As scholars from the Anglo-American heartlands of academia hasten to expand their geographical scope, there is a danger of falling back into "modernist ideas about universalism, scientism and problematic discourses on developmentalism, especially when we are researching the Global South" (LEES, 2012, p. 157). These risks are real and not only present in colonial or post-colonial constellations. Even a "decentred" approach that does not take the USA or the UK as the measure of things can suffer from conceptual imperial overstretch as more cities, regions, and countries are grasped through a limited set of wide-reaching – even planetary – concepts. Yet although the risks are real, so are the rewards in terms of theory development and empirical scope.

How the trade-off between the general and the particular is handled defines academic disciplines and scholarly projects. Given the ambition of *Territory, Politics, Governance* to provide a platform for a range of different perspectives, it is not surprising – and in fact very welcome – that the journal offers contributions that span the continuum from the particular to the general and discusses the trade-off between approaches that emphasize one or the other. This comes out especially in the debate included here between RADIL and FLINT (2015) and VERWEIJEN and VAN MEETEREN (2015). In the article that sparked the debate, RADIL and FLINT (2013) argued that post-colonial African states developed territorialized strategies of state consolidation that crucially involved extraterritorial actions: governments attempted to promote and secure their sovereign power by forging alliances with non-state actors beyond their national borders. RADIL and FLINT (2013) both explain these territorial strategies (as a response to democratization) and use them as an explanation (for the expansion of war throughout the region). Only after states reoriented their territorial strategies by forging alliances with other states rather than non-state actors, could tensions in the region be pacified, at least to some degree. Even though RADIL and FLINT (2013, p. 185) emphasize that territorialized strategies of state consolidation had to be "considered within a particular historical-geographic context", they are interested in moving beyond and abstracting away from regional particulars. For them, studying the relational underpinnings of wars in east and central Africa is part of the same research programme that explains patterns of gang violence in Los Angeles (RADIL *et al.*, 2010) or the involvement of countries in the First World War (FLINT *et al.*, 2009). Their project thus raises the important question of whether it is possible and desirable to develop a general account of territorial strategies, alliance formation, and armed conflict. VERWEIJEN and VAN MEETEREN (2015) do not argue against general arguments *per se* but do suggest that RADIL and FLINT (2013) overstate their point. Wedding arguments against Radil and Flint's network analysis with detailed accounts of conflicts in east and central Africa, VERWEIJEN and VAN MEETEREN (2015) suggest that the causal links between democratization, alliance formation, and pacification are more tenuous and complex than RADIL and FLINT (2013) allow for. RADIL and FLINT (2015) rebut that the response their paper elicited is emblematic of a

tendency among political geographers to embrace a “postmodern epistemology that emphasizes ‘situated’ and place-specific knowledge”.

GLOBAL IMAGINATIONS AND THE BIG DATA DELUGE

The debate among these authors raises the crucial question how and to what extent particularities should be acknowledged in studies of territorial politics and governance. The question of what geographically sensitive analyses have to offer is more pressing now that a range of disciplines are engaging in questions of spatial conflicts. Enabled by the availability of large data sets and sophisticated algorithms, quantitative researchers in political science, international relations, and even physics aim to uncover general regularities underlying conflicts and cooperation (AXELROD and BENNETT, 1993; TRAAAG and BRUGGEMAN, 2009). The much vaunted “big data” deluge also raises a series of issues as new patterns and relations come into view. MAARTEN HAJER (1995, p. 8) argues the photo of planet Earth from outer space opened up new vistas on environmental politics as the “colorful ball, partly disguised by flimsy clouds, and floating seemingly aimless in a sea of utter darkness, conveyed a general sense of fragility that made people aware of human dependence on nature”. While in the 1960s a picture of planet earth performed a crucial role in spurring the global imagination, currently it has become almost a matter of routine to display air traffic, social media activity, or conflicts on world maps, broadening the global imagination but perhaps also numbing geographical sensitivities. LATOUR *et al.* (2012, p. 599) argue the wide availability of data sets negates distinctions between micro and macro, agent and structure, and the particular and the general:

The experience of navigating through profiles available on digital platforms is such that when you move from one entity – the substance – to its network – the attributes – you don’t go from the particular to the general, but from particular to more particulars.

HOCHMAN and MANOVICH (2013, p. n.p.) similarly argue that even if many

social media visualizations and computer science papers focus on large data sets aggregated in space and time, ... social media can also be used for reading of local social and cultural events. ... The individual and the particular do not have to be sacrificed for the sake of data aggregation ...

These developments and propositions at the very least raise new issues of how politics and governance are mapped and located. Although it is perhaps functional that subdisciplines develop their own approaches – with some stressing particularity and others generality – *Territory, Politics, Governance* aims to provide a platform for different perspectives and facilitate a dialogue among proponents of different approaches.

REFERENCES

- ADDIE J.-P. D., KEIL R. and OLDS K. (2015) Beyond town and gown: Universities, territoriality and the mobilization of new urban structures in Canada, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 27–50.
- AGNEW J. A. (2013) Territory, politics, governance, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **1**(1), 1–4.
- AXELROD R. and BENNETT D.S. (1993) A landscape theory of aggregation, *British Journal of Political Science* **23**(2), 211–233.
- COLE A. and PASQUIER R. (2015) The Breton Model between convergence and capacity, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 51–72.
- ELDEN S. (2013) How should we do the history of territory? *Territory, Politics, Governance* **1**(1), 5–20.

- FLINT C., DIEHL P., SCHEFFRAN J., VASQUEZ J. and CHI S.-H. (2009) Conceptualizing conflict space: toward a geography of relational power and embeddedness in the analysis of interstate conflict, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **99**(5), 827–835.
- HAJER M. (1995) *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- HOCHMAN N. and MANOVICH L. (2013) Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the local through social media, *First Monday* (available at: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4711>).
- LATOUR B., JENSEN P., VENTURINI T., GRAUWIN S. and BOULLIER D. (2012) ‘The whole is always smaller than its parts’ – a digital test of Gabriel Tarde’s monads, *British Journal of Sociology* **63**(4), 590–615.
- LEES, L. (2012) The geography of gentrification. Thinking through comparative urbanism, *Progress in Human Geography* **36**(2), 155–171.
- MAANN, M. (1993) *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation States 1760–1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- RADIL S. M. and FLINT C. (2013) Exiles and arms: the territorial practices of state making and war diffusion in post–Cold War Africa, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **1**(2), 183–202.
- RADIL S. M. and FLINT C. (2015) A tale of two audacities: a response to Verweijen and van Meeteren, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 111–116.
- RADIL S. M., FLINT C. and TITA G. (2010) Spatializing social networks: using social network analysis to investigate geographies of gang rivalry, territoriality, and violence in Los Angeles, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **100**(2), 307–326.
- RODRÍGUEZ-POSE A. and STERMŠEK M. (2015) The economics of secession: analysing the economic impact of the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 73–96.
- SASSEN S. (2013) When territory deborders territoriality, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **1**(1), 21–45.
- SCHINDLER S. (2015) Governing the twenty-first century metropolis and transforming territory, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 7–26.
- TRAAG V. and J. BRUGGEMAN (2009) Community detection in networks with positive and negative links, *Physical Review E* **80**(3), 036115.
- UITERMARK, J. (2014) Integration and control: The governing of urban marginality in Western Europe, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **38**(4), 1418–1436.
- VERWEIJEN J. and VAN MEETEREN M. (2015) Social network analysis and the de facto/de jure conundrum: security alliances and the territorialization of state authority in the post–Cold War Great Lakes Region, *Territory, Politics, Governance* **3**(1), 97–110.