

Workshop “The Cluster of Water, Energy and the Human Environment: Towards an Extra Territorial Concept for the Middle East”, organized by the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy in cooperation with the Saskawa Peace Foundation, Dead Sea Movenpick Resort and Spa, Jordan, October 20-21, 2001

Territoriality and Modernization

by

Mathias Albert

Institute for Global Society Studies
University of Bielefeld
P.O. Box 100131
33501 Bielefeld
Germany
Tel: +49-521-106-3999
Email: mathias.albert@uni-bielefeld.de

Bitter conflicts have been fought, are currently being fought, and will continue to be fought over and in the name of territory. Even if conflicts are not about the direct control over a territory and the resources it harbours, territoriality comes into play since many of the important actors define themselves primarily on its terms - the modern nation-state providing the prime example in this respect. Territory seems to be so prone to evoke fierce conflicts and territorial conflicts so difficult to resolve for two main reasons: on the one hand, in many constructions of collective identity, territory is coded in a primordial fashion. The belonging to a land is seen as constituting the very essence of being a people, an ethnic, a state - "essence" meaning here that like kinship relations the belonging to a land is not open to questioning. On the other hand, *territoriality* not only refers to the relations to a specific territory which can be located geographically, it also forms an epistemological principle, a cognitive framework through which the world is observed. Under the reign of this principle, the primarily territorial differentiation of the world into enclosed territorial spaces - states, national economies, national societies, etc. - appears as the rule while all social forms differentiated in a non- or trans-territorial fashion - multinational corporations, global financial markets, transnational social movements etc. - appear as the exception challenging the rule. Of course, territory and territoriality are not in an by themselves the causes for conflicts. The establishment of the principle of exclusive territoriality in the Peace of Westphalia not only brought one of the fiercest and longest wars in history to its end and enabled the modern state to develop. And it is of course almost trivial to note that territorial conflicts can only emerge when there are simultaneous claims by different groups to control the same stretch of land and its resources. Yet, it is here that the principle of territoriality as a cognitive framework and a code underlying the construction of collective identities itself seems to undermine the very possibility of a durable territorial resolution of territorial claims in the sense that at some ideal point all existing territorial claims could be reconciled with each other by clear and unambiguous territorial separation and boundary drawings: it is the principle of territoriality itself and its deep embeddedness as a cognitive and epistemological framework which mandates that all *new* articulations of ethnic or national identities do base themselves on a strong territorial component and do evoke the belonging to a specific territory over which control is claimed as a central component of identity-construction.

These preliminary observations point out that in order to assess the prospects for the territorial as well as the non-territorial resolution of conflicts, a closer examination of the way in which territorially functions and is embedded in the contemporary world system is needed. Particularly the idea of non- or extra-territorial conflict resolution is in danger to remain

nothing more than wishful thinking at best (or becoming counter-productive at worst) if it is not based on a thorough understanding of what the principle of territoriality entails and how it is deeply engrained in the world political system and in constructions of collective identity. It is in this sense that the present contribution seeks to argue that the principle of territoriality has to be understood in three complementary yet distinct dimensions and that any assessment of the prospects for non-territorial order and conflict resolution must take these dimensions into account: territoriality is, first, an epistemological and social-structural principle intimately linked to processes of *modernisation* and *rationalisation*; territoriality is, second, a *code*, a *symbolic reference* to territory which underlies the construction of collective identities. And territoriality is, third, a *form of segmentary differentiation* of world society. The following three sections will briefly sketch each of these dimensions of territoriality. This is to illustrate one basic point, however: “overcoming” territoriality must not be seen as a readily available deliberate political strategy in many cases. Framing it as such would grossly overestimate the possibilities of political regulation and control as such in relation to a basic ordering and identificatory principle of modernity. Rather, the aim is to look out for pointers in the evolutionary processes characterising these dimensions and to ask which *openings* can be discerned which allow for strategies of non-territorial (or, for that matter: innovative territorial) strategies for conflict resolution in the first place.

Territoriality and modernisation/rationalisation

The history of the modern system of states is a history of defining political power in exclusively territorial terms. The Peace of Westphalia symbolically marks and normatively enshrines the principle of a sovereignty defined in territorial terms. At the same time, of course, it only marks the 17th-century beginnings of a long process of territorialisation which was completed only with the waves of decolonisation in the 20th century. With so many conflicts having been fought over territory it is easy to overlook that in its inception, the principle of exclusive territorial rule marks an achievement of tremendous proportions in that it provided a solution to seemingly endless religious conflicts. It also unleashed a substantial evolutionary potential for modernizing societies in the sense that it allowed for a full “inclusion of an unprecedented number of local people into systems of economic exchange, of

learning, medical care, social security, and finally politics”.¹ This modernizing process mainly proceeded as a process of a rationalisation enabled by clear territorial differentiation: economic and legal systems could increasingly be imagined as being congruent with political systems, giving rise to a “container” model of society. This “imagination” must however also be seen as being intimately linked to the evolution of modern science and the arts. An abstract representation of space through clear-cut territorial lines, together with the paradigm of exact natural sciences fostered an all-pervasive structuring of modernizing societies according to the territorial model through the use of cartography and demography by the state. Taken together, this created a “social epistemology” of territoriality. John Ruggie, in his famous 1993 article, remarks: “political space came to be defined as if it *appeared from a single fixed viewpoint*. The concept of sovereignty, then, was merely the doctrinal counterpart of the application of single-point perspectival forms to the spatial organisation of politics”.² Yet, while the idea of sovereignty also firmly underpinned the imagination of a primacy of politics over the other functional realms of society, these other realms underwent individual processes of rationalisation by relying more and more on *organisations* in order to structure themselves. Taken together, a social epistemology of territoriality and a rationalisation of society through the process of organisation gave rise to what John Meyer and colleagues have called a “world culture” which is not to be understood as meaning a commonly shared set of norms and values, but which is *enacted* by societies’ inevitably being drawn into this double process of modernisation and rationalisation. All societies and states are different, of course; but they are essentially similar in that all organize themselves according to the territorial model and rely on similar organisational models (in establishing medical, social, educational systems and organisations on a national scale). It is necessary to note, however, that this process of territorialisation did not take place as short-term structural revolution of the world system. Quite to the contrary, for quite some time it remained limited to the European system of states. On a global scale, the exclusivity administered by a clear-cut separation of political spaces remained more of an exception rather than the rule well into the 19th and 20th centuries. Territorial differentiation came in much more varied ways than suggested by the maps of Europe, allowing for fuzzy boundaries and boundary areas and varying degrees of territorial control in imperia, dominions, spheres of influence and interest etc. Indeed, only with the evolution of a strong *normative* account of the legitimacy of clear territorial differentiation of

¹ Lothar Brock, “Observing change, ‘rewriting’ history: a critical overview“. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28 (3/1999), 489.

² John Gerard Ruggie, “Territoriality and beyond: problematizing modernity in international relations“. *International Organization* 47 (Winter/1993), 159.

political spaces, enabled by the merger of the ideas of territoriality and collective identity in the modern *nation*-state, and with the definition and global acceptance of the principle of national self-determination as a *right* did the principle of territoriality attain universal validity. It might seem almost paradoxical at first, but if territorialisation is understood as such a long-term process inextricably linked to processes of modernisation and rationalisation, it has achieved full swing on a global scale only with the final big wave of decolonisation in the 1960s, roughly at the same time when the availability of nuclear weapons led the first observers to speculate about the “demise of the territorial state”³ or to diagnose a seemingly decreasing power of sovereignty in the light of the power of multinational corporations (“sovereignty at bay”⁴)!

However, what may seem as a paradox at first is to a large degree due to an often misunderstood basic characteristic of the nature of territoriality itself. Arguably, many of the seeming intricacies in picturing non-territorial or alternative territorial orders as well as the debate on whether territoriality stands to “lose” or to “gain” as an ordering principle under the influence of “globalization”, stem from a misconception of territoriality as a *state of affairs* rather than as a *process*. However, it follows from the diagnosis that territoriality is a framework of reference, a social epistemological principle, that the territorial differentiation of politics and other societal realms are not “given” and cemented by building boundary markers of stone, by erecting fences and walls at boundaries and by deploying border guards. Rather, territoriality is a process in need of a constant reproduction to “keep going”; boundaries need to be constantly redrawn in social practices and through rules. Such rules are particularly rules of inclusion and exclusion: yet territoriality as an organizational principle is not only reproduced by regulating who is allowed to enter a territorial state and who isn’t; it is rather reproduced in many, often minuscule rules which define territorial applications of law, which define whether only citizens or all residents are entitled to benefit from social welfare provisions, or which, for that matter, define the relative autonomies of subterritorial units in a state. And it is against this background that it seems misplaced to seek to avoid the negative consequences of an exclusive territoriality by juxtaposing it to or confronting it with grand non-territorial designs. Rather, what is required are activities which aim at disrupting the reproduction of the logic of territoriality at exactly this “micro-level”, and by orienting the definition of rules and policies not towards their full and equal applicability on a homogenous territory, but towards functional needs, a “common good”, or universal values to which territorial differentiation then comes to serve as a mere secondary feature.

³ John H. Herz, “Rise and demise of the territorial state”. *World Politics* 9 (July/1957), 473-493.

Territoriality and collective identity

Yet, as already hinted at in the preceding paragraphs, the structuring and staying power of territoriality, its primacy in ordering politics and other societal realms on a global scale can only be understood if what Lothar Brock in his contribution calls the “emotional agenda” of territoriality is also taken into account. After all, social structural and epistemological principles, however deeply embedded in society, *do* change over time. Yet it is so difficult to *imagine* change in relation to territoriality since through the merger of the idea of territoriality and national self-determination large-scale collective identities have come to increasingly rely on territorial frames of reference. National identity is pictured as and associated with the control over territory (and not least the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exemplifies how serious this association between territorial control and national identity can become). Yet it is important to point out that the role of territoriality in defining collective identities is not a natural given and that it *can* change. However, two things merit attention in this respect: first, despite the fierceness of disputes over land and all the attachment that people may feel towards it: beyond the territorial space which every human being as a “social animal” claims for her- or himself (and the size of which varies from culture to culture), territoriality does not constitute a primordial feature of identity as most notably ties of kinship do. National collective identities are however often encoded *as if* territory would form a basic, unquestioned, primordial feature of that identity. However, this secondly also means that this encoding of collective identities is difficult to change. But it can be changed. This diagnosis however must not be confused with an all-too-optimistic styling of “deterritorialized” identities: there are of course new forms of identity evolving, such as in the transnational communities constituted through transnational migratory networks; yet neither these transnational communities nor a cosmopolitan identity which may be that of a part of the so-called global “jet-set” do offer viable alternatives to the integrative functions which are served by large-scale collective identities: so a research agenda in this respect should not consist of conceiving instant and wholesale alternatives to national-territorial identities; but it should consist of a theoretically informed, yet empirically rich inquiry into the possibility that territory assumes a different and decreasing importance in the construction of national identities. This point might be illustrated by some anecdotal speculation about the process of European integration: in debates on the finality of the integration process and about the

⁴ Raymond Vernon, *Sovereignty At Bay*. New York: Basic Books 1971.

“democratic deficit” of the European Union, the argument can frequently be heard that national identities would remain so strong and dominant that no “European identity”, no European public space could emerge. Yet what seems to be systematically overlooked in this argument is that although such a European public space, a European identity may still be quite some way off, the process of European integration is slowly shifting the ways in which national identities are constructed – and, it could be claimed: changes them in way so they become less and less reliant on territorial frames of reference and the symbolic markers that go along with them: thus, for example, in Germany for quite a while some emotional bemoaning could be heard about the loss of “our” German mark, an important symbol of national identity and pride symbolizing the achievement of the post-war “economic miracle”. Yet it seems that this moaning faded continuously with the realization of the imminent introduction of Euro coins and it seems a safe guess to assume that after people have become accustomed to the new currency, the idea that a national identity does need the symbolic code of a currency specific to but one national territory will sound strange to people in the Euro zone. It is developments with a symbolic value such as this which carry the potential to change the fixation of identities to a territory. Another anecdotal illustration may be found in the abolition of border controls between the Schengen states: only a few years ago it was a normal and routine experience that people were actively and in a symbolically laden way reminded of the fact that they were leaving one state and entering the next by having their cars stopped and being asked to show their passports; today, it more seems to be the case that it is necessary to actively look out for differences in order to find out whether an international boundary has been crossed. And very often little more is to be found in this respect than different colours and designs of road signs. And speculating further, one could even imagine a harmonization of these road signs in the EU – a presumably not very “emotional” but highly bureaucratic act - in order to create a situation where hardly any difference is visible to the eye. And if building styles on both sides of, for example, the Dutch-German border are very much alike, but look strange to a traveller from Bavaria, such a traveller may very well come to ask (at least implicitly) what a territorial specificity of a national identity is all about.

Territoriality and the differentiation of world society

It is however less anecdotal speculation about possible changes of constructions of national collective identities, but sociological theory which most convincingly demonstrates that

territoriality is not there to “stay forever”. Yet what is required in this respect in the first place is to leave territoriality’s epistemological cage, what John Agnew has called the “territorial trap”: if social relations are seen to be constituted by communication and if social relations are what constitutes “society”, then it makes little sense to talk about “societies” in the plural today. Yet the mistake needs to be avoided to try to envisage a “world society” in analogy to national societies. “World society” in this theoretical sense does not refer to something integrated internally by norms or bounded territorially, but simply the highest-order social system possible. Yet to adopt such a view permits to arrive at important insights drawing on sociological theory which for decades focused on characterizing the modernization of national societies in the first place. Simplifying grossly, the modernization of societies is a story of functional differentiation taking more and more precedence over segmentation and stratification as main differentiating principles of society. Where persons stand, which role they play in the political, in the economic, in the legal and in other function systems of modern society is no longer exclusively determined by where they live or where they are located in a class, a caste, or the like. It is rather determined by the functional logics of these function systems themselves. The important analytic move now consists in the insight that this increasing importance of functional versus other forms of societal differentiation does equally apply to world society: functional differentiation becomes or already is the main differentiating principle of world society. The world economic system is the most prominent case which illustrates how a global function system can operate according to its own logic, paying little respect to territorial boundaries. Similar developments can be observed in relation to the global legal system, for example, where new forms of commercial dispute resolution are being invented by private actors, creating a law not reliant on being installed by a national sovereign. And in this perspective, then, the global political system is probably the only one left which *internally* is primarily differentiated in a segmentary fashion, namely into state territories. But if sociological theory is correct to have observed in relation to national societies a long-term trend from segmentary and stratificatory differentiation to functional differentiation as the main differentiating principle, then, from this theoretical point of view, there seems to be no reason why this trend should not apply globally and why it should not apply to the global political system.

In fact, most of research in the field of international relations which is not situated within the limits of a narrow realist/structural realist framework, and particularly the majority of the globalization literature in the field, can be seen to provide an account of a fading primacy of territorial differentiation *within* the political system of world society. International politics can

no longer be described as the mere interaction of foreign policies, but needs to be conceived as *functional politics* in the sense that it orients political processes to the processing of functionally defined problems - and not on the pursuit of interests ascribed to actors. This perception is reinforced by the empirical observation of an increasing *denationalization* of the perception of the relevant problems for political action, as well as by the observation of an increasing density of functionally specific regulatory regimes through processes of legalization. Although it is a difficult if not impossible task to determine a 'threshold value' at which a functional differentiation assumes a primacy over regional differentiation within the political system of world society, the combined insights of much post-realist IR research can be read to point to a steadily increasing importance of functional differentiation within world society.

Of course, this refers to a long-term trend which can be discerned by looking at probably the highest macro-level of analysis possible (i.e. societal evolution). But signs that it takes place on the ground are there if the emerging forms of political cooperation, of problem-oriented communication irrespective of boundaries not only between states but many other non-state actors are viewed in this light. This is in no way intended to present an idealistic picture of a cosmopolitan future; differentiations and differences of many different kinds will remain and conflicts will remain to characterize human relations; but it is to diagnose from a theoretical perspective that differentiation and conflict will not always remain about and in the name of what the most fierce wars in history have been fought about: territoriality.

Again: talking about non- or extra-territorial concepts as an alternative to the territorial order of things, one does not necessarily talk about something which can easily be administered if the concept of territoriality is appreciated in its historical role and in its embeddedness in the process of modernization. Territoriality cannot simply be "replaced". But it is possible to observe from the vantage point of theory that there are openings and changes in the way in which territoriality structures the world and the way it is perceived and conceptualized. How to take advantage of these openings and changes in practice then becomes an issue not of grand designs, but needs to be investigated thoroughly for various practical realms; only then is it possible to arrive at judgements on whether these openings and changes in the principle of territoriality are best taken advantage of by devising non- or extraterritorial, or by either classical or new territorial orders in these realms.

Literature

Territoriality and modernisation/rationalisation

- Agnew, John 1994: "The territorial trap: the geographical assumptions of international relations theory". *Review of International Political Economy* 1, 53-80.
- Agnew, John/Corbridge, Stuart 1995: *Mastering Space. Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Albert, Mathias/Jacobson, David/Lapid, Yosef (eds.) 2001: *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Biersteker, Thomas J./Weber, Cynthia (eds.) 1996a: *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kratochwil, Friedrich 1986: "On systems, boundaries, and territoriality: an inquiry into the formation of the state system". *World Politics* 34, 27-52.
- Lyman, Stanford M./Scott, Marvin B. 1967: "Territoriality: a neglected sociological dimension". *Social Problems* 15, 236-248.
- Meyer, John W./Boli, John/Thomas, George M./Ramirez, Francisco O. 1997: "World society and the nation-state". *American Journal of Sociology* 103, 144-181.
- Spruyt, Hendrik 1994: *The Sovereign State and its Competitors*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, Paul 1996: "Embedded statism and the social sciences: opening up to new spaces". *Environment and Planning A* 28, 1917-1928.
- Taylor, Peter J. 1994: "The state as a container: territoriality in the modern world system". *Progress in Human Geography* 18, 151-162.

Territoriality and collective identity

- Alonso, William 1995: "Citizenship, nationality and other identities". *Journal of International Affairs* 48, 585-601.
- Appadurai, Arjun 1996: "Sovereignty without territoriality". *Public Culture* 8, 40-57.
- Ardrey, Robert 1966: *The Territorial Imperative. A Personal Inquiry Into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations*. New York: Dell.
- Barth, Frederick (ed.) 1969: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Construction of Cultural Differences*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Basch, Linda/Glick Schiller, Nina/Szanton-Blanc, Christina 1994: *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicament, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Lanhorne, Penn.: Gordon and Breach.
- Bauman, Zygmunt 1992: "Soil, blood and identity". *The Sociological Review* 40, 675-701.
- Brubaker, Rogers 1996: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, Anthony P. 1985: *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood and Tavistock.
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel Noah/Giesen, Bernhard 1995: "The construction of collective identity". *Archive Européenne de Sociologie* 36, 75-102.
- Hall, Rodney Bruce 1999: *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ingram, Attracta 1996: "Constitutional patriotism". *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 22, 6, 1-18.
- James, Paul 1996: *Nation Formation. Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*. London: Sage.
- Oommen, T. K. 1997: *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity. Reconciling Competing Identities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Paasi, Anssi 1996: *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Preston, P. W. 1997: *Political/Cultural Identity. Citizens and Nations in a Global Era*. London: Sage.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1991: *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books.
- Soysal, Yasemin 1994: *Limits of Citizenship. Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.

Territoriality and the differentiation of world society; functional differentiation of politics

- Albert, Mathias 1999b: "Observing world politics: Luhmann's systems theory of society and international relations". *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28, 239-265.
- Albert, Mathias/Brock, Lothar 1996: "Debordering the world of states. New spaces in international relations". *New Political Science* 35 (Spring), 69-106.
- Albrow, Martin 1997: *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
- Boli, John/Thomas, George 1997: "World culture in the world polity: a century of international non-governmental organization". *American Sociological Review* 62, 171-190.

- Buzan, Barry/Little, Richard 2000: *International Systems in World History. Remaking the Study of International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cutler, A. Claire/Haufler, Virginia/Porter, Tony (eds.) 1999: *Private Authority and International Affairs*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Friedman, Lawrence M. 1996: "Borders. On the emerging sociology of transnational law". *Stanford Journal of International Law* 32, 65-90.
- Hasenclever, Andreas/Mayer, Peter/Rittberger, Volker 1997: *Theories of International Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Held, David/McGrew, Anthony/Goldblatt, David/Perraton, Jonathan 1999: *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics and Culture*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
- Hettne, Björn/Inotai, András/Sunkeö, Osvaldo (eds.) 1999: *Globalism and the New Regionalism*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kaul, Inge/Grunberg, Isabelle/Stern, Marc A. (eds.) 1999: *Global Public Goods. International Cooperation in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kohler-Koch, Beate/Eising, Rudolf (eds.) 1999: *The Transformation of Governance in the European Union*. London: Routledge.
- Luhmann, Niklas 1972: "Die Weltgesellschaft". *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 57, 1-34.
- Luhmann, Niklas 1995e: *Social Systems*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
- Newman, David, 1999: "Real spaces - symbolic spaces: interrelated notions of territory in the Arab-Israeli conflict". In: Diehl, Paul F. (ed.), *A Road Map to War: Territorial Dimensions of International Conflict*. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 3-36.
- Reinicke, Wolfgang H. 1998: *Global Public Policy. Governing Without Government?* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Reus-Smit, Christian 1997: "The constitutional structure of international society and the nature of fundamental norms". *International Organization* 51, 555-589.
- Rosenau, James 1990: *Turbulence in World Politics. A Theory of Change and Continuity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Shelton, Dinah H. (ed.) 2000: *Commitment and Compliance. The Role of Non-Binding Norms in the International Legal System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strassoldo, Raimondo 1982: "Boundaries in sociological theory: a reassessment". In: Strassoldo, Raimondo/Delli Zotti, Giovanni (eds.), *Cooperation and Conflict in Border Areas*. Milano: Franco Agnelli, 245-271.
- Vertovec, Steven 1999: "Conceiving and researching transnationalism". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, 447-462.
- Wiener, Jarrod 1999: *Globalization and the Harmonization of Law*. London: Pinter.
- Young, Oran R. 1994: *International Governance. Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.