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LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND BOUNDARY DISPUTES IN THE EMERGING VIRTUAL STATE: CHALLENGES FROM THE INTERNET, GOOGLE AND SOCIAL MEDIA WORLDS

Abstract:

Traditional themes of our study of the state, including cores, peripheries, boundaries, national identities, treaties and laws are important in our understanding of the virtual or cyberstate. These fluid, three and four-dimensional worlds, associated with speed, networks and the compression of tie and space, call for a renewed focus on contemporary topics facing a polycentric, internet-connected, visually-oriented and social media world. I address seven major themes that challenge virtual state leaders; the political and legal status of their residents, immigration and citizenship, minority group rights, transnational identities, language nationalism, the emergence of visual geopolitics, and the resolution of cyberstate conflicts. I close with suggesting some innovative maps that illustrate the distinctive features of his emerging virtual state world.

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"The Internet is less 'about' a technology of communication than a way of looking at the world" (Everard, 2000, p. 160)

"The state is like an email discussion list – an identity to which we subscribe and thereby derives the benefits and responsibilities of a cooperative society.' (Everard, 2000, p. 152)

"Like software, the state …is a very complex piece of software written in a number of programming languages, such as economic, military, security, environmental discourse and so on." (Everard, 2000, p. 7)

"The state is already always becoming. It is always in a state of flow and its identity emerges from the focus of narrative upon this or that confluence of flows, be it an economic, military or cultural or some combination or mixture of the three." (Everard, 2000, s. 54)

"All virtual worlds are computer-based simulated environments, as opposed to just programs. They look like a "place" sometimes a real place, sometimes a fanciful one, but always a visual environment." (Duranske, 2008, p. 2).

"The question of governance in virtual worlds, is surprisingly controversial." (Duranske, 2008, p. 57).

"The very nature of virtual worlds in a sense encourages behavior that civilized society would consider outrageous." (Durankse, 2008, p. 188).

"Virtual worlds represent a completely new set of privacy challenges.   They combine four elements in a brand new, and potentially dangerous, form:

(1) indefinite data storage,

(2) widespread availability of invasive technology,

(3) widespread pseudonymity, and

(4) widespread availability of forms for social experimentation." (Durankse, 2008, p. 215).

"The traditional print media have been slow to understand how the Internet, with its traditional transmission and global circulation of images, has force-multiplied this effect and transformed the political as well as media game." (Der Derien, 2010, p. 37).

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'Hollywood, as one of the most influential producers, "has always loved colonialism" and has had a special fondness for the British Empire in particular."   "Africa remains almost as much of a "Dark continent" for movie-goers today as in the past." (Campbell and Power, 2010, p. 183).

"The scopic regime of 'Africa' has thus created a place in the world marked by either war and disaster or exotic natives and animal tourism." (Campbell and Power, 2010, p. 188).

"All of this affirms that there is much to be done on the relationship between geopolitics and visual culture, which can go beyond an analysis of texts or images, to address more search questions about what it means to see." (MacDonald, 2010, p. 288).

"…contesting the authenticity of images is now part and parcel of contemporary statecraft." (MacDonald, Hughes and Dodds, 2010, p. 2).

"In its pure form – an ideal model toward which many states are leading – the virtual state carries with it the possibility of an entirely new system of world politics. (…) this does not mean that states will be abolished as territorial entities, that conflict over land

will never occur, or that politics can take place without geographic space." "They inaugurate a world based on mastery of flows of production and purchasing power rather than stocks of goods." "A new kind of corporation has emerged. The virtual corporation, economic analogue of the virtual state, has become increasingly pervasive." "The world may become further divided into head and body nations, or nations representing some combination of the two." "Mastery of flows is more important than possession of large fixed territorial stocks of resources." "The technological revolution of today and tomorrow is a revolution of intangibles: ideas, knowledge, technique, software, new creative products and capital." "A virtual world will not be without conflict, but it will represent a step toward a world free of war." "Despite economic globalization, religious fervor, and ethnic claims, the state has not succumbed to transnational or localist influences. It provides an arena in which individuals can decide or at least influence their collective fates. Nor other institution performs this paramount unction." (Rosecrance, 1999, pp. 4-25, 211) "In the twenty-first century, nation-states will remain the major organizing factor in international politics. Nations will continue to compete." (Rosecrance, p. 211).

I. Introduction: Our World Political Map

When we think about the "world political map," what does it look like? Is it a Mercator projection with distorted shapes of countries such as Russia and Greenland in the high latitudes? Is it a Eurocentric map with Europe at the 'center' and East Asia at the right margin? Or is it a map the world's nearly 200 countries all bunched together like ancient Gondwanaland, that is, no oceans separating the land masses? Or is a map with major world capitals such as Beijing, Moscow, London, Tokyo, Paris and Washington DC in the center and little know capitals such as Mogadishu, Maputo, Bishkek, Suva and Port Moresby in a "deep periphery?" These are all familiar maps that one might think of ways to depict the present "countries" in a flat surface.

II. Mapping Power

A second major question for us to contemplate today has to do with power? How do we define power? Is power control, and if so, over what and whom? Is it in the size of a country's armed forces or its perceived or actual "military muscle?" Its financial standing on a world scene? Its technological abilities to dominate others by legal and illegal practices? Its ability to influence regional and global decisions through persuasive negotiations and legal institutions for international not individual state ends? Is invisible power supplanting visible power on the world's political stage? Or is it one's ability to

manipulate events in cyberspace to serve its own ends? Or might be that power is no longer the most important objective of a state, that it, power has been replaced by issues regarding representation, regional cooperation and pluralistic diversity and the rights of one's own citizens and also others within its borders? Great Powers in the past are probably "less-great" today. Perhaps the "lessening" of power has something to do with the "rise" of non-state actors on national and global scenes. One could make a legitimate case today that many humanitarian groups are probably equally or perhaps even more important than many of the world's states and United Nations members. These international, interfaith, transborder and non-state groups, which are often labeled as "soft power," are able to address issues about refugees, transborder conflicts, disease outbreaks and disaster relief easier, faster, fairer and with less bureaucratic than many traditional states and their own political agencies. I suggest the above because I think the definitions of power and the role of power are shifting in some new directions and challenging some of our traditional ways of measuring power and geopolitical influences. We need to remember that most of the world's population live in states with little or limited power in a traditional sense. What does this portend for the future?

III. What Is News?

The third set of questions I want us to think about are the following: what do we know about the "world political map" today? How we "know" about that map comes from our knowledge of "what makes news?" Perhaps more importantly: what do we want to know? All news items have a geographical coordinate, that is, the story or event or development comes from somewhere – in some place or places. It may come from a global capital, a regional or provincial capital, a little known place or even a completely unknown place. That place may be close to a major center of commerce or political activity or it may be distant from a major center of political and economic power. The point I am making here is that if one constructed a "map" that included the places of news events during a week or month, it would reveal something about what we know about the political worlds. The map would also reveal to us something about what "we don't know" about political worlds. That is, there would likely be gaps and voids, some wide, in our knowledge. But we know that "there is always something happening of a political nature" everywhere and all the time. We need to remember that all news, words or visuals, is socially and politically constructed. It may not be reported or shared with others, but it does occur. "The geographies of political, social and environmental "silences" are with us all the time. A comparison of national and global news coverage by a major newspaper or a major television organization would certainly reveal to us "stories about

favored or favorite locations" and also "absences or silences elsewhere." As you think about these previous sentences, I am sure you are thinking of items, events, *and* places in the news. All these are associated within some geographical framework or context. We can think recently these items: massive numbers of Central American children along the US/Mexican border, religious groups facing persecution in Syria and Iraq, the Scottish national referendum on independence, the outbreak of Ebola in west Africa (not all of Africa), natural disasters in China, conflict in eastern Ukraine, and gang and drug wars in the Honduras capital. But I would also ask you to think about places that are seldom in the news, for example, former Soviet republics in southern Central Asia, religious/judicial conflicts in East Africa, elections in Indonesia and educational reforms underway in the Arabian peninsula or even good news about green energy developments, women in government offices and healing efforts at local levels.

What I want to do in this presentation is to think about not only the location of countries on a world map, but also on places within countries on a world map. I also want us to think of "what countries or states" mean when we think about boundaries, cores, peripheries and people within and along these political spaces. The world political map is certainly one that I would describe as messy, complex and confusing and overlapping with all kinds of boundaries, borders,

border landscapes, border zones, some which are invisible and important, others which are visible and but also important. I suggest that this messiness, complexity and confusion about states does not only exist for citizens, but also non-citizens, non-state holders and organizations. Below I will raise some important questions about seven major topics that I think are important and worth raising in our continued ongoing discussion with others in scholarly communities who are also concerned about place, culture, boundaries, human rights, environmental well-being and the state.

IV. Seven Emerging Features of the Changing World Political Map

1.   Political and Legal Status of Residents. This a perplexing issue to many states, especially those experiencing an influx of new residents. Countries in the "Global North" with associated with human rights and freedoms are most affected by those fleeing religious or political persecution or those seeking permanent residence after studying or working (legally or illegally) outside their countries of citizenship. For the "global cosmopolites" that is, those with multiple countries of family, friends, and work experiences, the "single country/single citizenship" country is often a barrier to

personal satisfaction. For those who have worked for lengthy periods in another country, have family members born there and an extensive network of friends, not being granted citizenship or facing lengthy penalties or delays for potential citizenship are considered as being highly discriminating, prejudicial and unfair. Traditional-bound state policies defining citizenship by birth in the country of origin (the same regulations that existed a century ago) are facing challenges from those who wish to grant newcomers citizenship or amnesty to those who are active and committed members of the work force and culture.

2.   Immigration and Citizenship. This feature is an extension of the previous one and specifically looks at the rights and privileges of new immigrants and their paths to citizenship. European countries as well as the U.S., Canada and Australia among others face challenges to those entering the country legally, but also seeking asylum. It is not only their legal status that is brought into question, but also their own and their children's access to education opportunities, work permits, health care and engaging in the political arena of their new home country. It is again the dilemma facing traditional states with long-held definitions and policies regarding the above citizen rights that are facing the stiffest challenges from new groups who are welcomed into the country and who wish to become fully engaged in the political processes.   Individual countries usually often face these issues

individually and independently, leaving an uneven pattern of legal rights. However, some concerted international cooperative agreements are needed to prevent the uneven legal landscapes that exist.

3.   Minority Group Rights. With larger numbers of non-native born residents in states, questions about their legal rights present challenges to existing states where for long periods of state history, there was agreement on what was considered legal, acceptable and proper. Now questions are being raised about a number of issues by a small, but also increasingly, growing number of minorities whose ethnic status, language background and religious beliefs may be at odds with the traditional and longstanding native-born population. These are not only ethnic and racial minorities, but also linguistic minorities and even stateless minorities whose distributions cross multiple national borders. For example, what are the languages to be taught in public schools? What languages are acceptable in the work place? What rights do the newly arrived mothers and fathers and their children have when it comes to health care? What rights do those born in a new country have when applying for jobs or entering a university? What about the religious rights of the new minorities? As places to worship or assembly or even constructing places of worship? Again, it is the traditional views of rights and policies that are brought into question. These are issues, it should be pointed out, that do not

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affect all countries, but those which are the destinations of those seeking freedoms and rights, both which were denied in their country of exit.

4.   Transnational Identities. The questions raised here have to do with those who have multiple identities. It would include those who flee oppression and seek a new life in a new country as well as those who seek to work, study and live in different countries. The "personal identity" worlds includes those who have single country citizenship and those who have multiple citizenships. And it includes those who are able to cross international borders easily, such as those in the European Union, and those who cannot. In the latter group would be those who have to apply for temporary or permanent visas for each country they visit or reside. In a highly mobile and fluid world, traditional land borders and boundaries are often viewed as a hindrance not only to transit, but to employment and the enjoyment of life. Challenges face states where the "local" world is the norm or was the norm and those whose employment, lifestyles and worldviews are global. Creative and imaginative solutions to these problems are probably best solved by international agreements rather than individual country policies, which leave the person having to navigate complex, unfair and difficult legal systems. Identities in today's world also have to include the role of technological

innovations, which also help to "identify" who one is and where one is at any given moment. This topic is addressed further below.

5.   Language Nationalism. Two issues are salient when discussing language issues. First is what is or are the dominant languages within a state. State identity in the past was strongly tied with a national language. That language was taught in the schools, used in commerce and diplomacy and help the state gain its unique territorial identity. However, favored language nationalism is being tested and contested, at least in Europe and North America, by new residents whose first language is not the official language of the state. Questions about language usage, curriculum materials, and even teaching modes are part of these ongoing discussions as states seek creative ways to become inclusive rather than exclusive in a globalized world. The second salient issue involves the increasing dominance of English even in countries where it was not an official language. English as a second or third language is certainly the case in much of non-English Europe, but also Russia and especially in China. Young generations are being taught early in elementary schools the importance of being able to write, read and speak English (and often American not British English). The popularity of the Internet and various social media serve as catalysts for what may become "planetary English globalism, not nationalism."

6. Visual Geopolitics. One of the major features of the contemporary world is the rise of visualization and resulting visual geopolitics. News producers, especially states, are conscious of the importance of producing "the visual" for internal and external consumption. Images of leaders, leaders at events and prominent "photo opportunities" are strategically choreographed and even manipulated to inform viewers about what is going on at home or some distant place on the planet. "Manipulated geopolitics" is not something that started with Google or the Internet; the practice has been around prior to the written word and electronic messaging. Photos, Google images, and even hastily constructed maps inform the "viewer" about "what is happening where." We know that powerful and seductive images can trigger emotions in ways that "the written word" cannot. Images replace the speech, the news story, and a lengthy document as ways to inform. These images can come from anywhere instantly and inform both local audiences, neighboring states and but also viewers around the world who probably would be unable to locate the location of that event or state on a world map. One can think of news items that display vivid images of refugees, disaster victims, genocide, civil wars, disease outbreaks and civil unrest. Think how many of those images of despair come from the Global South. (Think how Hollywood has constructed images of Muslims, non-whites, Africa and colonialism that are difficult to erase.)

The Global North's images, I would maintain, are heavily 'sanitized, political correct and less disturbing.' It is indeed a fascinating world of "images" that is emerging, one where "what people know about a subject comes from what they see" depicted on a computer screen or news channel. Because of the ease in producing and disseminating (and also manipulating) visual information, it also comes as no surprise that some countries place "filters" on global images, filters that are ostensibly designed to "prevent" certain images from being telecast to inform their own citizenry.

7.   Resolution of Cyberspace Conflicts. We live in worlds where technological innovations associated with information and technology are played out against backdrops of a legal system whose foundation was landed "2-dimensional" territorial boundaries, not a porous, open and bottom-up world that depicts much of contemporary society around the world. Governing in a 3-D and 4-D world is different than a 2-D world as longstanding states are painfully discovering. Information or knowledge conflicts and wars are different than wars over natural resources, which are fixed and territorial, whereas knowledge wars are fluid, flexible, and often invisible. Cyberwars and also cyberlaws and cybertreaties are porous cross-border conflicts and states are always, it seems, 'behind the curve" when it comes to resolving conflicts. Regulating invisible electronic information and technologies is a quagmire at best. The actors in this case are

multiple; they include legitimate owners and users, but also hackers (sometimes state hackers), the murky worlds of the underworlds, and a whole generation of thieves who can wreak havoc on almost anyone, anytime and anywhere. The internet, Google Earth and social media are informing as well as empowering technologies which are altering a whole set of political relations whose impacts are not currently known. They promote "multiple and diverse voices" about subjects rather than a single-dominant view of the state. It might also be said that social media is a prime example where "the local becomes the global," that is an isolated newsworthy event reported (factually or fictionally) in some know or obscure location is captivated by the multiple visual media for dissemination, manipulation and action. I suggest the following are especially important: (a) the growing use of social media in the Global South, we simply do not know the "power" of the local in a globalized cyberworlds; (b) the short and long term consequences are of an internet culture on the knowledge politics of the global poor and powerless, (c) the definitions of or limits on human rights and freedoms in mobility, representation and security in open as well as closed states, (d) the role these technologies place on non-state actors (NGOs) and also stateless populations and (e) the "blurred" borderline between news, factual news and entertainment. As more and more people across the globe cross boundaries daily, not only political, or class or time zone, but also internet/social media

boundaries, their lives and identities and communities are impacted, both in enhancing and positive ways as well as for short and long-term potential conflict.

V. New Mapping and New Maps

In my view the current world political map is one of many different features than ones we are used to seeing or reading about. It is a map that has speed, fluidity, networking and new identities as its basic underpinnings. It is a world with longstanding cores, new cores and even intermittent cores; it is a world that is asymmetrical and fragmented in many ways with deep gaps in income, gender relations,   representation and access to power; there are islands, archipelagoes, peninsulas but also peripheries, some that are permanent, some semipermanent and some deep permanent. There are longstanding centers of power, emergent powers, awakened peripheries and even sleepy peripheries. Many of these political worlds exist within the same territorial boundaries of existing state; some also exist within the major centers of political, financial, military and technological power.

We need to engage in thinking about real and virtual geopolitical worlds: thinking "outside the box," doing more than "linear thinking,:" and preparing maps that reflect current realities. In short, the political worlds are an interesting, complex and complicated mix of the

past and the present, the elites and the awakened, the bounded and boundless citizens on the planet and states where some residents have stronger identities to territorial and extraterritorial non-state institutions (religion, economic, human rights, etc.) than the political worlds where they reside. Globalization failed to produced homogeneity, nor will a knowledge economy or society; rather both have uncovered the gaps, new ad hoc and permanent "tribes," and an unevenness, slipperyness and balkanized world that exists at home and distant places on the planet.

These observations geographers have known for a long time, but, as we know, it sometimes takes economists and political scientists a while to realize that "space, place, territory and identity" and "gaps" (temporary and permanent) within them are part of the daily lifeblood of most of the planet's residents.

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