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(RE)THINKING THE STATE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract. *In this article, we argue that social sciences generally and political science in particular are faced with a peculiar epistemological challenge while researching the state in the 21st century. Namely, the state has often been either naturalised, seen as a static and ahistorical entity resistant to changes in the environment, or naïvely rejected as a form of political organisation that is with neoliberal globalisation withering away. In either instance, the processes of redefining and redistributing of the state, and hence its de-/reterritorialising and rescaling, have largely gone unnoticed. Our analysis reassesses the hegemonic theories of state and shows that in the mainstream of political science research on the state is still anchored to the (geographical) assumptions that limit or even define the state and its exercise of power to a geographically demarcated and fixed territory. Drawing on recent approaches to space, scale and territory, this article calls for a heterodox and pluralist methodology in further research on state as well as non-state spaces.*

Keywords: *the state, non-state spaces, globalisation, territory, political geography*

Introduction

Throughout history political science has often suffered from the short-sightedness of statism. Yet, in the last few decades it has witnessed a different kind of myopia. As globalisation processes have accelerated, political science has, with few exceptions, completely overlooked the state. Political science has disregarded the state due to its apparent withdrawal from the new political geography or, as Kenichi Ohmae (1995) vividly put it, because the state is a dinosaur waiting to die. Still, political science has also disregarded the state by naturalising it, understanding the state as a static and ahistorical entity resistant to changes in the environment. At best, political scientists' interest in the state has seen ebbs and flows yet has always been

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buttressed by the use of old, often outdated, theories, methodologies and vocabularies. If we take the title of this article seriously, we soon realise the social sciences generally and political science in particular are faced with a peculiar epistemological challenge while researching the new forms of statehood in the 21st century. Saul Newman notes that political theory must still catch up with this new terrain since it "generally looks for visible, representative identities situated on an ontological field organized by sovereign power; it is concerned with how we are governed, or with the normative principles or constitutive logics upon which political power is founded" (Newman, 2014: 94).

Ever since the Ancient Greeks, issues of politics and political community have been related to territory and borders (Plato's *Republic*) or their relativisation (Zeno's *Republic*). In particular, this kind of conception was strengthened by the Westphalian arrangements that developed and deepened an inside/outside divide as the core of the state and our imagining(s) of it (Jessop, 2009). This article starts by assumption that the few decades of the neoliberal (better the neoconservative) project have significantly redefined and redistributed the state.[1] In our brief exploration of the hegemonic theories of the state and especially their limits in detecting processes of redefining and redistributing the state, we address a broader question of the state and the perspectives in studies on the state. This is a relevant and topical issue, even more so when we consider that the state is losing its role as the only centre of sovereignty and an arena in which key political decisions are made. In recent decades, the state has encountered fierce competition from the rising power of (global) cities, TNCs, IGOs, NGOs and social movements that according to Saskia Sassen (2012) signal the emergence of "different territorial vectors", where the place and role of the state is significantly altered.

This means the political science community must face up to the difficult task of (re)thinking and reconceptualising the state in the 21st century. For this purpose, in December 2019 the Slovenian Political Science Association organised a conference that addressed "optical challenges" (Appadurai, 2004) in understanding the Janus-like face of the (post)modern state. We tried to highlight this challenge by modifying Abraham Bosse's frontispiece for Hobbes' *Leviathan* from 1651 in the visuals used for the conference. We could say that by 'blurring' the crowned figure we also sought to draw attention to the changed ontological status of the state that often goes undetected: if the Westphalian model made the state and its existence conditional

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[1]   *We argue that the state did not wither away as the neoliberal project emerged since it is a constitutive element of its expansion. It should be clear by now that there is nothing more and nothing less of the state, but it is completely different.*

on relations vis-à-vis other states, even if they were unable to perform the main state functions, today their (non)existence is a condition of their internal capacity to be a space for autonomous political action. This fissure in the state system is seen in the existence of states that no longer function as states and non-state spaces that are becoming autonomous political entities and are already performing the main state functions.

In the introduction to his over 1,600-page work entitled *De l'État*, Henry Lefebvre asks a simple question: "What is the state?". He answers:

> *Enumeration of hypotheses. The State? A conscience, the consciousness of the nation? A 'moral' or 'legal' person? A 'substance' or a set of relations? A reality? A firm? A 'subject'? An 'object'? Or the name for an absence, a simulation? For 'being' or collective presence? Would it be the 'reflection' or the result of a social structure (classes)? A sum of functions? The exercise of Power? Or 'something' else, to be discovered and defined?* (Lefebvre, 2009: 95)

To this end, the article attempts to repoliticise the state and show that the state is first and foremost constituted by political, not economic relations. This means the state must chiefly be understood as a political and not an economic entity, even if in fact it is (anti)political in its drive to eliminate the diversity, autonomy and differences that hinder the creation of the national whole or what James C. Scott terms "synoptic legibility".[2] We analyse how the hegemonic theories of state have responded to the new political landscape and how up-to-date and relevant they remain in helping to explain what Sassen (2012) calls a "new geography of centrality", where the place and role of the state is significantly redefined. We explore the thesis that in the mainstream of political science research on the state is anchored to outdated (geographical) assumptions that limit or even define the state and its exercise of power to a geographically demarcated and fixed territory. Drawing on recent approaches to space, scale and territory, we call for a heterodox and pluralist methodology while researching the state. In other words, we show how novel (meta)theoretical, epistemological and methodological pluralism in analysing the state enables a much broader and deeper understanding of statehood as a process, overcoming the territorial reification of the state.

Political science, then, should be able to understand the state in its respective historical mediations, while avoiding any naïve reification of the state or what Edward W. Soja (1978) and John Agnew (1994) describe as

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[2] *We thus show the contradictions and limits of state politics and call for academic attention to the non-state spaces concept.*

"spatial fetishism" and a "territorial trap", respectively. According to Agnew (2005: 441, 456), political science is entrapped by the territorialised understandings of state that emerged from the traditional Westphalian images of states and were further shaped by the development of mercantilism and industrialist capitalism, along with Enlightenment and Romantic aspirations to popular rule and nationalism.

However, since the state is at once globalising and localising, it faces a "multi-scalar meta-governance" challenge (Jessop, 2009) to adapt to the ongoing spatial and scalar restructurings. Put differently, the state continues to function as a form of the territorialisation of capitalism, yet the expansion of capitalist economy and its rescaling of territoriality call for the state's de-/reterritorialisation on different levels. These are complex and contradictory processes that should not be misinterpreted as the demise or erosion of the state. Saul Newman thus argues that an alternative theoretical and methodological arsenal is required to fully explore the new terrain of politics that is relocating "the political relationship away from the state and its formal representative structures towards the movements of autonomy that increasingly transcend it" (Newman, 2014: 93). This necessitates new, heterodox and post-disciplinary approaches to the state, an area the article explores in the second part. In the final part, we paradoxically shift our gaze to the relevance of non-state spaces and politics constituted beyond or sometimes in opposition to the state as a way to (un)think the state from the outside.

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The State and New Thinking

When John Keane (2009; 2015) was reflecting on the state of democratic theory, he concluded that one very simple thing was missing: new thinking. Keane argues that the development and mutual enrichment of democratic ideas and practices over the last few decades have completely changed the language, institutions and normative ideals of democracy. The old criteria, like sovereign state, party pluralism, elections, representation, national identity, market economy etc., are today wholly obsolete categories that no longer have any connection to the current dynamics of democratic innovations. This is why an entirely new approach is required, building on a new grammar, metaphors, perspectives, theories and methods themselves. We imagine that Keane would similarly argue for the theories of state and studies of the state; namely, that what is missing is new thinking. The hegemonic theories of the state continue to be dominated by territorial myopia whereby states are viewed as stable geographical containers of social, economic, political and cultural relations (Brenner, 1999).

In the mainstream of political science, research on the state is still anchored to the (geographical) assumptions that limit or even define the

state and its exercise of power to a geographically demarcated and fixed territory.[3] In his elaboration of the "territorial trap", John Agnew (1994) notes that political science has largely been dominated by reified understandings of the state, that "it has been too geographical and not sufficiently historical". Conventional state research has relied on three problematic geographical assumptions which are called into question by current developments: a) the ahistorical or naturalised understanding of states as fixed sovereign spaces; b) binary logic delimitating inside/outside or domestic/foreign; and c) regarding states as 'containers' of societies.

In path-breaking study *New State Spaces* (2004), Neil Brenner concurs and argues that political science has lost its analytical edge by approaching the state "as a preconstituted geographical unit of analysis". The state is viewed "as the self-enclosed geographical container of socioeconomic and politico-cultural relations" and frequently as the only one, preventing researchers from seeing beyond state-centric modes of inquiry. In his attempt to construct "new modes of analysis", Brenner combines fragments of heterodox, interdisciplinary and even post-disciplinary methodologies that challenge spatial fetishism, methodological territorialism, methodological nationalism and, thus, state-centric epistemologies. What is becoming evident is that new territorial constellations, nexi and vectors are producing a new geography of strategic spaces that Sassen (2012) refers to as a "new geography of centrality", where the place and role of the state is significantly redefined. Here it is useful to paraphrase the important, if not the key, question Sassen considers in her analysis of the new configurations of territoriality and transnational politics: Are we able to see and detect the formation of new *political* forms among the old *political* conditions?

In fact, many studies have moved beyond the state-centric geographical assumption yet, as Brenner (1999: 41) points out, the old errors have been remedied by introducing a new one: mainly through the state's conceptual negation. In other words, these new reconceptualisations have been able to perceive the emerging spatial forms and corollary new political geographies, but completely overlooked the state in them – i.e. the state's new position and, hence, novel forms of its de-/reterritorialisation and rescaling. Brenner acknowledges that the state continues to function as a form of territorialisation for capital, yet warns that the expansion of the capitalist economy continues to produce new scalar configurations of territorialisation under capitalism that make the state-centric conceptions outdated. Namely, the expansion of capitalism should be seen as a complex, conflictual process

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[3] *It should be clear that the state, or any political organisation for this reason, can exercise power without a delimited and fixed territory and, even in this case, the state has been "unbundled" (Agnew, 1994: 55) by formal and informal agreements, networks, markets, movements, problems etc.*

not only transcending regulatory systems on the national scale – that is what we usually see and study – but is simultaneously producing the new sub- and supra-national modes of accumulation and (state) control needed to facilitate and coordinate this process.

By referring to "scalar shift", Brenner indicates that the current wave of globalisation means that the global scale depends on simultaneous reterritorialisation on a sub-global scale, mostly the new sub- and supra-national scales, and no longer exclusively on the national one (ibid.: 62). Moreover, the capital–state relationship is being inverted since "it is no longer capital that is to be molded into the (territorially integrated) geography of state space, but state space that is to be molded into the (territorially differentiated) geography of capital" (Brenner, 2004: 14). (Post)modern statehood thus means complex and continuous rescaling "at once upwards, downwards and outwards", resulting in polymorphic institutional geographies (ibid.: 67).[4]

In recent years, an important contribution to studies of the state, which overcomes the theoretical/methodological *Scylla* and *Charybdis* mentioned above, has come from scholars who conceive of globalisation processes and the expansion of capitalism as a contradictory socio-spatial dialectic, constantly making and remaking new configurations of territoriality. In studies on the emerging spatial and political forms, they observed that the contradictions of neoliberalism (short term) on one hand, and the broader project of modernity (long term) on the other, are simultaneously: i) expanding and accelerating movements of goods, services, labour and capital; and ii) creating and imposing a (relatively) fixed socio-territorial infrastructure for enabling and controlling these processes:

> *Globalization therefore entails a dialectical interplay between the endemic drive towards space-time compression under capitalism (the moment of* deterritorialization*) and continual production of relatively fixed, provisionally stabilized configurations of territorial organization on multiple geographical scales (the moment of* reterritorialization*).* (Brenner, 1999: 43)

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[4] *These processes not only make the Westphalian models of statehood outdated and useless, but the main concepts and metaphors in our categorical apparatus as well. Anderson (in Brenner, 2004: 63), for instance, suggests entirely new imaginings of the emerging political geographies: "A complex set of climbing frames, slides, swings, ropes and rope ladders, complete with weak or broken parts […] might be nearer the mark. The metaphor of adventure playgrounds, with their mixture of constructions, multiple levels and encouragement of movement – up, down, sideways, diagonally, directly from high to low, or low to high – captures the contemporary mixture of forms and processes much better than the ladder metaphor".*

It is then unsurprisingly that Brenner's novel (meta)theoretical, epistemological and methodological pluralism in analysing the state enables a much broader and deeper understanding of the statehood as a process, overcoming territorial reification of the state. As mentioned, an alternative theoretical and methodological arsenal is required to explore this new terrain of politics (Newman, 2014: 93). This merely confirms Appadurai's remark about research imagination (or the lack of it) because it reveals that our task is not simply a unique political and theoretical challenge is but above all an epistemological one. What we then need is not only conceptual clarity and theoretical thoroughness, but a wider epistemological transformation that will enable intersectional research, freely merging previously disciplinary delimitated methodological registers and approaches. Namely, many concepts and categories are too elusive for the traditional disciplines, classical theories and Western epistemologies, in turn calling for a new, more flexible epistemology.

If previous explorations of the state in political science often resulted in an "escape from reality", as Ian Shapiro (2008) put it, it is still possible to formulate an alternative research orientation. To fully understand the redistributions and redefinitions of the state, new concepts, methods and even research logics are needed. Instead of addressing the key challenges and problems of (post)modern statehood, political science has fallen into the trap of theoretical and methodological monism in explaining the state. According to Shapiro, contemporary political science is thus largely defined by method- and theory-driven research, which are safe and attractive research orientations, yet also problematic for research itself as they lead to predetermination of the research subject itself.

Thus, with method- and theory-driven research Shapiro does not negate the sophisticated use of methods and theories in research, but methodological and theoretical monism, which necessarily results in a pre-selection of visible or relevant research topics, problems and approaches. These thus limit researchers in their perception of political reality – e.g. what is (ir)relevant, what are the problems, what are the possible solutions, what is worth researching, who the subjects are. In other words, Shapiro points out that method- and theory-driven research automatically leads to the establishment of research paradigms (cf. Kuhn, 1962) that not only determine the selection of problems but the selection of the right methods for their research as well. It is a kind of theoretical-methodological self-referentiality that does not acknowledge the possible fallacy of the theory and method itself.

The shortcomings of method- and theory-driven research can, according to Shapiro, be avoided by a different research orientation – problem-driven research. It starts by realising that political science must tackle the critical problems of (post)modern societies, while in its methodological and theoretical approach allows or even demands certain levels of innovation,

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improvisation and eclecticism, as required by the research into a given problem. In a way, it is a reaffirmation of Paul Feyerabend's (1975/1993) epistemological and methodological maxim that *anything goes* if a particular problem is to be fully explored. In explaining the political reality, detecting and resolving vital challenges, political science must adjust its methods and theories to problems, not *vice versa*. Problem-driven research thus offers a radical critique of the canon of authority and authorisation which reproduces the hegemonic political theories, while rejecting the idea of interdisciplinarity that implicitly still builds on the separation of individual disciplines and methodological registers. It enables and contributes to what Brenner describes as the "postdisciplinary" mode of inquiry, "where conceptual tools and methodological strategies are adopted with reference to the challenges of making sense of particular social phenomena rather than on the basis of traditional disciplinary divisions of labor" (Brenner, 2004: 23).

Contradictions of/in the State

While the article principally deals with how the state may be reconceptualised in the 21st century, we shall make a brief detour by highlighting the need to explore politics that is constituted beyond or in opposition to the state. Our analysis of the state's de-/reterritorialisation and rescaling should paradoxically also include critique of modernity and its political forms, including the state. These political forms face an irreversible crisis due to their insistence on sovereign territory and the hierarchy of power and people. As Bookchin (2007: 93–94) argues, politics and the state are not only inherently different, but can be in direct opposition.[5] As we have shown elsewhere (cf. Vodovnik, 2011; Vodovnik, 2012), politics has always had a troubled relationship with the state because it has been closer to a philosophical concept of praxis as a free and creative activity in fluid polities. Only in our present has politics been integrated into state-making projects and strengthened the belief that there is no distinction between the political and statist realms, even though the modern state was born exactly as a reactionary response to Renaissance humanism. As a result, according to Richard Day (2005: 38) the struggle to dismantle community through the demutilisation being waged between politics and democracy on one side, and state and corporate forms on the other, is indeed the struggle of the (post)modern condition.

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[5]   *We might also argue that political theory often understands politics too literally, especially when we note that the word real comes from the Latin word regal or king's. This means that for a large part of political theory only what is 'royal' or situated in the ontological field organised by sovereign power is real, while counter-hegemonic and autonomous politics are discredited as a trivial pursuit.*

Still, we should reiterate that non-state politics should not be understood as a rupture from the main forms of political subjectivation, but as an explication of its original intent and meaning. Political membership beyond the state is, according to James C. Scott (2009: 3–4), the regularity of history, despite the nation state's inscription on the political map and hence the sedentarisation or, in other words, the administrative, economic and cultural standardisation of fluid political entities. The concept of uniform, homogeneous state politics emerged as a political or depoliticising tool that according to Scott (1998: 32) is a poor abstraction that may be compared to the invention of metre, kilogram and other units of measurement, standards and reforms needed for the administrative, economic and cultural standardisation of mixed and fluid political entities. We can thus understand universal state citizenship as a political equivalent to other 'state simplifications' as the metre that was introduced with a revolutionary decree stating: "The centuries-old dream of the masses of only one measure has come true! The Revolution has given the people the meter" (ibid.). If the universal metre swept away differences in the units that it measures, then universal state citizenship swept away differences among a heterogenous and plural multitude.[6] Scott contends the tension between modern citizenship and statecraft should be understood as an "uneasy bargain", that has led to completely new forms of political membership and legibility – i.e. the modern nation state and an abstract, un-marked citizen:

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> *Statecraft proved difficult in these conditions of vernacular measures and vernacular resistance to assessment … It is no exaggeration to claim that the conquest of illegibility is the most momentous achievement of the modern state. This required the standardization of weights and measures against determined local resistance. It required elaborate censuses and population rolls, cadastral surveys of landed property, and, not least, the institution of individual freehold properly adapted to cadastral science. The project of legibility allowed the state to "see" the human activity of interest to it through the simplified approximation of documents, lists, and statistics.* (Scott, 2013: 97)

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[6] *Although the etymological origin of the word citizenship – from civitas, civitatus, to the modern citoyen – always linked political membership to smaller and more fluid polities, we still find it difficult to understand the relationship between citizenship and the state in societies where the equating of political membership with national or even ethnical identity results from a linguistic or semantic similarity in the two concepts. We often forget that at the very beginning citizenship was not related to the state but solely meant a specific 'urban relationship' between rights and duties in the city (Delanty, 2006: 12). Citizenship therefore meant political membership of a city. It is thus erroneous to talk only about a "citizen of the state" since we can also identify other citizenship types built on different – e.g. territorial or functional – criteria.*

In a short and very rough sketch of his massive, four-volume work *De l-État* (1976–78; On the State), Henry Lefebvre writes that the modern State is founded precisely on the "principle of equivalence", which secures unity, identity and political integration. In his pondering on the state in the modern world, he counters prevailing Marxist theorisations of the state that also in the 1970s perceived the state as a form of "heavenly life" in contrast to the "earthly life" of civil society, where man "regards other men as means, degrades himself to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers" (Marx in Lefebvre, 2009: 75). Lefebvre notes:

> *Foundations of the modern State: The (forced) equivalence of non-equivalents: the (forced) equalization of the unequal, the identification of the non-identical … The logic of homogenization and identity as the logic and strategy of State power. The State as reducer (of diversities, autonomies, multiplicities, differences) and as integrator of the so-called national whole.* (ibid.: 108)

Needless to say, this question calls for another *excursus* which, unfortunately, lies beyond the scope of this article. Still, we can briefly illustrate the paradox of state politics – i.e. the state as reducer *et* integrator – that should be explored in greater detail elsewhere. In his recapitulation of Plato and Aristotle, Rancière (1995) points to the important demarcation between the political subjectivities of *dēmos* and *ochlos*, which not only entails a simple divide between the "power of the people" and the "unification of individual turbulences". For Rancière, *dēmos* is not and cannot become a singular, delimited subject, which explains, contrary to *ochlos* or a multitude of individuals in the illusion of the totality of One, why it is able to denaturalise and change the existing. *Dēmos*, as the "part of those who have no part", is not the sum of social partners or even the totality of all differences, like state polity is often understood, but quite the opposite – the power of revealing the contingency and imperfection of such counting of partners and summing up of differences, since a people is "always more and less than what it is".

Rancière stresses this idea gives birth to politics, even though politics (*la politique*) is too often understood as referring to problematic systems of distribution and legitimation, which we might define as state politics and lead to it being simply named the police (*la police*). As a self-managing practice of democracy, politics only emerges when the assumption of intrinsic equality is realised. The "scandal of democracy" is therefore that it no longer involves any a priori justification of one's adequacy for political life. If we place this alongside Rancière (2014: 49), democracy is neither a form of society nor a form of government, it is precisely

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the "ungovernable".[7] It follows that, as a practice of democracy, politics appears when the assumption of intrinsic equality is realised. We may understand politics as one of the rare examples when subjects act as subjects that do not have the rights they are entitled to and hold rights they do not have an entitlement to and thus disturb the hegemonic (police) order. For Rancière, a declassification of order and political subjectivation is the *sine qua non* of politics – that is, the acknowledgement of the political existence of *part des sans-part*. That is, this is exactly the opposite of the "synoptic legibility" (Scott, 2013; Scott, 1998) the state-making projects are producing and struggle to maintain. Efforts to make state populations legible and that would enable the state effective in performing its main functions – e.g. taxation, conscription, monopoly of coercion – have namely always called for diverse strategies and policies aimed at sedentising the unruly *dēmos*.

Thinking from the Outside

Any serious attempt to understand recurring crises of state politics should build on the recent academic attention paid to the *non-state spaces*. According to Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016), *non-state spaces* can be understood as *exilic spaces* because they are inhabited by communities trying to (in)voluntarily escape both state regulation and capitalist accumulation. Exilic spaces may be defined as areas in social and economic life where individuals and groups seek to extricate themselves from capitalist economic processes by either territorial escape or attempting to build structures independent of capitalist accumulation and social control.[8]

As we have noted elsewhere (Vodovnik and Grubačić, 2015), we can analyse non-state spaces on the "micro-political" level when we talk about their "infrapolitical" aspects that provide "much of the cultural and structural underpinning of the more visible political action on which our attention has generally been focused" (Scott, 1990: 184). We suggest it is necessary to shift our attention from the most visible – and thus the most mediatised – aspects

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[7] Hence, in his explanation of democracy, Ranciére follows Plato's idea of a political regime that is not a political regime since it lacks any foundation. The "scandal of democracy" is manifested in the very idea that the principle of distinction according to birth, wealth and knowledge has no place in the democratic world because democracy is always a matter of the declassification of order, the process of political subjectivation, and the (re)counting of the political community that is "always more or less than it is".

[8] In her account of the occupy movements, Saskia Sassen (2012: 6) emphasises the importance of such projects, albeit limited in time and space, due to their ability to overcome "even if temporarily, territory's embedded and often deeply undemocratic logics of power, and to redefine the role of citizens, mostly weakened and fatigued after decades of growing inequality and injustice Indeed, the occupations have revealed to what extent the reality of territory goes beyond its dominant meaning throughout the twentieth century, when the term was flattened to denote national sovereign territory".

of institutional, state politics to attempts at redefining democracy and political membership which may be found in the "immense political terrain ... between quiescence and revolt" (ibid.: 200). In its "micropolitical" sense, the concept of infrapolitics can help highlight the overlooked or at best marginalised aspects of non-state spaces, which "like infrared rays" are "beyond the visible end of the spectrum". These spaces, communities and practices should therefore be understood as "hidden transcripts" since they are "invisible ... in large part by design – a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power" (ibid.: 201).

On the "macropolitical" level, the infrapolitics of non-state spaces should be understood as a process of producing forms of place-based politics within the cracks of the global capitalist system. The infrapolitics of the capitalist world economy describe the efforts to break off from the systemic processes of the state and capital. It is a process of the (self-)organisation of relatively autonomous and only partially incorporated spaces, which then leads to the antagonistic relationship that emerges between exilic spaces and the hierarchical organisations of the capitalist world economy. It is also a predictable response to the enduring logic of exit and capture inscribed in the *longue durée* of historical capitalism. Instead of ruptures and breaks, we can see a long-term, large-scale historical process of state making and state breaking, of state formation and state de-formation, of an ongoing and uneven incorporation and exilic re-appropriation and recovery.[9] In *The Art of Not Being Governed*, a book that has changed the way we theorise state-making projects and non-state spaces, Scott develops a provocative thesis:

> *Not so very long ago, however, such self-governing peoples were the majority of humankind. Today, they are seen from the valley kingdoms as 'our living ancestors,' 'what we were like before we discovered wet-rice cultivation, Buddhism and civilization.' On the contrary, I argue that hill peoples are best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys – slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare.* (Scott, 2009: ix)

The politics of zones of refuge or, better, exilic spaces, is usually not regarded as relevant to our understanding of politics, capitalist development and change, which is not surprising as these territories are above all spaces of refuge for *etceteras* of societies. This is an important oversight since exilic

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[9] *Moreover, by paying attention to non-state spaces we can detect and explore what Carolyn Nordstrom (2000) defines as the "shadows". For Nordstrom, the "shadow powers" remain largely invisible to formal inquiry but enable us to rethink the established theories of state sovereignty and the state system.*

spaces should be seen as part of the economic structuring and restructuring of the capitalist world economy and political power. Exilic spaces are always in the making, they are always being (re)made and (de)composed through a series of, at first glance, unrelated tactics and strategies:

> *Virtually everything about these people's livelihoods, social organization, ideologies, and (more controversially) even their largely oral cultures, can be read as strategic positionings designed to keep the state at arm's length. Their physical dispersion in rugged terrain, their mobility, their cropping practices, their kinship structure, their pliable ethnic identities, and their devotion to prophetic, millenarian leaders effectively serve to avoid incorporation into states and to prevent states from springing up among them.* (ibid.: x)

With a Rancièrian reading, we understand these spaces as rare instances of politics. With the inscription of the part that has no part (yet), the "communities of sharing" overcome the "political agoraphobia" (Dupuis-Déri, 2018) that defines and underpins modern representative governments.[10] After all, politics arises when a (mis)count – to be more precise, "the gap created by the empty freedom of the people between the arithmetical order and the geometric order" (Rancière, 2005: 34) – leads to the assertion of equality of anyone with anyone else, reminding us that democracy is nothing but "anarchic 'government,' one based on nothing other than the absence of every title to govern" (Rancière, 2014: 41).

The depoliticisation processes that accompany etatist projects must nevertheless be understood as complex and multidimensional transformations which are not necessarily characterised by a lack of the political. Depoliticisation is hence not merely non-politics, it is instead anti-politics or the marginalisation of politics, especially in the case of a new political becoming that is being constituted in response to the trivialisation of politics in liberal democracies. In this perspective, depoliticisation is seen as an inhibition of politics, which rejects political subjectivities and forms of agency from its ontological register and merely admits the establishment of sovereign power. However, the state can at the same time – and especially in the age of neoliberal or neoconservative triumph – offer the public space in which people can participate, organise themselves and influence political process, even if in limited ways and scope. Although the state is sometimes perceived as Leviathan, current events simply confirm that without its implications for curbing the neoliberal agenda the state could become

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[10] *As Dupuis-Déri argues, republicanism hinges on an understanding of 'the people' as irrational, susceptible to demagoguery, factious or unable to support the common good.*

even more illegitimate, violent and unfair. In the "post-democratic" world (Crouch, 2004), the state can shield from the complete subjection of politics to the interests of capital, which is today manifested in the economisation of all social structures, spheres and practices.

Conclusion

In the article, we analysed how the hegemonic theories of state are responding to the new political geography and how up-to-date and relevant they remain for helping to explain the "new geography of centrality", one in which the state's place and role have been significantly redefined. The analysis confirmed our initial thesis that in mainstream political science research on the state is still anchored to outdated (geographical) assumptions that limit or even define the state and its exercise of power to a geographically demarcated and fixed territory. Drawing on recent approaches to space, scale and territory, we argued for a heterodox and pluralist methodology while researching the state. In other words, we explored how novel (meta) theoretical, epistemological and methodological pluralism in analysing the state enables a much broader and deeper understanding of statehood as a process, overcoming the state's territorial reification.

The critical issue is therefore that any spatial/temporal fix, even if convenient for research(ers), in fact prevents change being detected. The spatio-temporal framing in the mainstream of political science that ties state, politics and citizenship to bounded and generally less fixed territory has become a *fait accompli* in the field. To evoke Jessop's musings (2016: 1), these postulates about the state return to the research agenda from time to time, only to be (re)addressed by a new generation of scholars or another epistemic community. Still, the ebbs and flows of scientific interest do not suggest the dilemmas and paradoxes these assumptions open up have been resolved, but often only that over time they go out of style or the scientific community becomes bored with them.

As evident, the social sciences generally and political science in particular faced a peculiar epistemological challenge while researching transformations of statehood in the new millennium. Namely, the state has often been either naturalised, analysed as a static and ahistorical entity resistant to changes in the environment, or naïvely rejected as a form of political organisation that in the age of globalisation is withering away. In either instance, the processes of redefining and redistributing the state, and hence de-/reterritorialising and rescaling it, have gone largely unnoticed. Torn between the myopia of etatism and the naturalisation and/or trivialisation of modern statehood, political science is forced to recalibrate its theoretical and methodological registers.

In a way, we sought to follow Robert Dahl's (2004) call to reconsider political science in the 21st century and its "state of the art". First and foremost, Dahl argued that political science must overcome physics and economics envy when reconsidering its own methodologies and epistemologies. Research ethics and goals should also be reconsidered since we must abandon pretentious goals of building a grand theory of politics; mechanistic and econometric explanations (and even predictions) of the political in the past have proven not only to be a waste of time but also to hinder better understanding of the paradoxes of the political. Dahl also warned against the risks of theoretical and methodological monism, which typically stems from the belief that the incredible complexity of the field can be overcome precisely by such self-restraint. Finally, we must reject reductionism in understanding of the political or attempts to explain the operation of complex systems with a single factor.

In my view, Dahl's account of political science is a useful recapitulation of the biggest deficiencies of the hegemonic approaches to the state and politics. Even more importantly, it can also help us develop new epistemologies that enable a more complex understanding of the state and, finally, a gaze beyond it: in rejecting the economic reductionism and state-centric modes of analysis in political science; in warning against the theories of (state) politics that systematically erase or trivialise vernacular political subjectivities, practices and traditions; in repudiating theoretical and methodological monism in exploring the political; and last but not least, in abandoning research approaches that regard the unruliness of the political realm as a problem to be resolved and not as a possibility to be seized both academically and politically.

Overview

The articles in this thematic issue were first presented as papers at the *(Re)thinking the State in the 21st Century* conference organised in December 2019 by the Slovenian Political Science Association. Although the articles selected and gathered for this issue reflect on the state and studies of the state from different perspectives and in various contexts, they all share the conference's overall goal of re-examining hegemonic theories of the state in the new millennium.

In "The Political Versus the State? The Relevance of Carl Schmitt's Concept of the Political", Tihomir Cipek offers a new reading of Carl Schmitt, focusing on his concept of the political and exploring whether it poses a threat to the state and the democratic political order. The article clearly comes at the right time as it should not only be read as a fresh recapitulation of Schmitt, but at least as much as a theoretical deconstruction of the current political

regressions and their ideological foundations. In Cipek's (re)reading of Schmitt in a new context, he considers how Schmitt may be used to explain the ideology of the new "conservative revolutionaries" in Central Europe. His lucid analysis of illiberal democracies in the region shows they seem to follow the ideas of Carl Schmitt. First, their idea of the political reduces it to the antagonist, friend–enemy dichotomy. Second, they claim that liberal and democratic elements of the political order are in an irreconcilable conflict. Third, they imagine the state as a body of an ethnically defined nation.

In "Nativist and Anti-liberal Narratives in Conservative Populist Agenda in Central Europe", Ladislav Cabada ponders nativism as a tool of identity politics and conservative populism in the region. The author offers a detailed theoretical analysis of nativism and inspects the most important expressions and characteristics of this phenomenon. In the second part, the article compares conservative populist and/or nativist political actors in six Central European countries. The analysis shows that nativism should be understood as the main ideological edifice of the neoconservative project, promoting a genuinely new way of political mobilisation and collective action. Although not so important in the early years of the political and economic transition, nativism today informs the conservative populist agenda of right-wing parties in Central Europe and might even entail the core of their politics.

In "The crisis of 2008 and the rise of the Slovenian consolidation state", Marko Hočevar reflects on the Slovenian state's transformations since 2008. He explores the rise of the debt state in Slovenia after the crisis of 2008 and explains the Slovenian state's transformation into a consolidation state after 2013, when the consolidation of public finances became the primary objective of the state's policies. He detects the internal and external factors which influenced these processes. The outcomes of these processes can, *inter alia*, be observed in the form of the de-democratisation of the Slovenian state. As Hočevar argues, these processes coincided with the rise of technocratic regimes, the limitations on the possibilities of a referendum and the limiting of any sort of fiscal democracy following adoption of the 'golden rule' in 2013.

In "On Migrants with Migrants: Migrations 5 Years after the European Migration 'Crisis'", Cirila Toplak and Andrej Kurnik explore theoretical and methodological innovations in the area of migration studies, with the mass migrations to the European Union in 2015, especially migrations along the 'Balkan Route', as their chronotope of analysis. The authors illustrate the limits state-centred epistemologies impose on migration studies and explore new theoretical and methodological approaches to 'decoding' the migrant subjectivity. The ethnographic research employed offers a new understanding of diverse processes and subjectivities, while the creative theoretical synthesis, e.g. combining escape route theory, infrapolitics, heterotopias, redefines the position held by border and migration studies.

The thematic issue closes with "Climate Crisis: Time to rethink economic planning by demystifying capitalism and its market(s)", in which Blaž Vrečko Ilc explores the possibility of democratic economic planning. He claims that technological determinism and free-market solutions are insufficient to properly confront the climate crisis. Because planning in the global capitalist system is often undemocratic and oppressive, the article examines alternative politico-economic models and possibilities to democratise planning itself. This means that without radical change in the sphere of production and distribution the problem of ecologically sustainable life on Earth will continue. Vrečko Ilc also discusses historical examples of alternative economic planning, only to highlight their failure and/or success that may inform our imaginings of the democratic planning that is so strongly needed to radically transform our societies and make them sustainable.

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