



Maps that map the mind: Abstraction of Geography by IR Discipline

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Received: July 2020 – Accepted: January 2021

Abstract

This study investigates the role of political maps in the didactics of the International Relations (IR) discipline within the higher education institutions of Turkey. Examining the syllabuses and textbooks of the *Introduction to International Relations* course in three distinctive universities – Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University (METU) and Hacettepe University, I argue that the discipline of International Relations (IR) supersedes the geography of lived spaces and renders spatial practices onto territorial boundaries. Based on textual analysis, this paper demonstrates how the anachronic conceptualization of the State through political maps homogenizes the world space. Exploring how the historical foundation of IR is constructed in the coursebooks, I critically engage with the territorial representations of *IR space*. The outcome of this intertextual analysis concludes how IR didactics makes it epistemologically difficult for the scholarship to comprehend the scale jumping of varying socio-spatial phenomena such as transnational (forced) migration.

Keywords: Didactics in IR, Maps, Political Cartography, Territorial Trap

1. Introduction

The world of maps welcomes me as I walk into the International Relations (IR) department at the Middle East Technical University (METU). With a bit of nostalgia from my undergraduate years, I look over these maps. I realize how I used to write my research essays based on these maps that were the “space” in which global politics are conceived of (Figure 1). Remembering how they were taken for

granted in course textbooks, lecture presentations, and research writings, I am troubled by how such maps are treated as *the* absolute space in which the IR scholarship operates.

However, are the maps really value-free texts that are entrenched in the didactics of IR? What roles do they play in the fundamental process of teaching?



Figure 1. Maps of Europe and the Americas, on the walls of the METU IR Department.
Source: Author's photographs.

Or are they socially constructed tools (Woods, 1992; Harley, 1989) representing a geo-coded world (Caquard, 2011, p. 141; Pickles, 2004, p. 5)? Furthermore, has the State, or the state system, always been territorial (Anderson, 1991, pp. 170-178)?

Upon this visit, I note that political maps lead to the abstraction of geography by compressing it into the drawn borders of territorial states. While their taken for grantedness is thought to enable a scientific and objective analysis of global affairs, they actually eliminate spatio-temporality of a given phenomenon. Thus, this paper engages critically with the ontology of political maps in the IR discipline. Constituting the main element of the international political sphere together with territorial states, the ultimate attempt is to deconstruct this territorial representation of the world, what I call IR space. Investigating the abstraction of geography by the IR, I reflect upon the materials used in the process of teaching in the introductory course.

Examining the syllabuses and four coursebooks in three universities – METU, Bilkent University (BU), and Hacettepe University (HU), I reveal the three methodological orientations that drive the discipline into spatial and conceptual fixities through which the concrete forms of geographical thinking is negated. These orientations (spatial fetishism, methodological nationalism, and methodological territorialism) refer to the assumption that all social relations are organized within bounded territorial units through which social space is seen as a timeless and static object at the nation-state scale. While ontologically assuming international relations through territorial state is not only assertive, but also directive (Searle, 1979), the aim is to break free from these orientations, leading scholars to conceive the process of global affairs within fixed boundaries of states.

Arguing against the ontology of the maps, this paper progresses in four parts. In an attempt to deconstruct IR space, I begin by discussing

the evolution of maps in general, and political maps in particular. Then, I introduce the theoretical framework for the *Production of Territory* (Lefebvre, 1991; Brenner and Elden, 2009) to liberate the territory from its embedded abstract form in maps. I note that the territory is produced by three mutually constitutive processes i-) territorial practices such as border constructions, ii-) representations of territory such as maps, and iii-) territories of representation such as bordering practices. Targeting the territorial trap (Agnew, 1994) that accepts territory ontologically as the container of society within the state borders, I thirdly introduce the research materials, and analyze how the IR is constructed. Lastly, problematizing the abstract understanding of geography with regard to human mobility, I discuss alternative conceptions.

2. Environment in which Knowledge Operates

In this section, I set out the process whereby political maps lead to the conception of fixity upon which the IR space is reproduced. In doing so, I elaborate on the dialectic (Harvey, 1996) between the usage of maps and the creation of an international political space-system that is discursively institutionalized by the discipline. Firstly, I review the historical usages of maps, secondly illustrate their actualization/legitimization on the ground, and lastly emphasize their omnipresence in the didactics.

How do the maps lead to the conception of political fixity through which the IR space is reproduced? Maps in general are the tools that help the interpreter to have an abstract imagination about a concrete space. The conceptualization of maps as “graphical representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes, or events in the human world” (Branch, 2014, p. 37) seems to provide a universal understanding. Yet, they are subjective narratives of someone for somebody. Their content and representational styles are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is “biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations” (Harley, 2004,

p. 218). Thus, maps are never value-free images. The imagination of space as a result is reproduced in an altered way.

Maps shape the space and measure the experiences on it (Caquard, 2011, p. 140). The first medieval maps, for instance, used to contain itineraries. They were to direct interpreters towards certain paths “along with the stops one was to make (cities which one was to pass through, spend the night in, pray at, etc.) and distances calculated in hours or in days” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 120). While such illustrations by itineraries were telling people what to do in a specific region like fragments of stories, “the map gradually wins out over these figures; it colonizes space” (p. 120). As a result, the map has come to conceal space’s prehistory.

Inherited from Ptolemy’s *Geographia* (Figure 2), this neutralization of space through Cartesian logic has been defined as the cartographic revolution. Aiming to produce impersonal knowledge, maps have started to desocialize the area they represent (Harley, 2004, p. 303) so that their representation would be objective (Lo Presti, 2016, p. 162, for the exemplification of the matter of objectivity in maps). With this cartographic revolution of the European renaissance, “space was assembled as a unitary, yet abstracted, reality that served as the basis of state formation” (Strandsbjerg, 2010, p. 4).

The effect of the cartographic revolution has in return shaped the ideas about the organization of political authority and the key characteristics of sovereignty. As these new scientific representations “drove a transformation in the structures and practices of rule” (Branch, 2014, p. 9), maps have started to be used as a way of exercising political power. Institutionalized through international treaties in Europe, such as the Treaty of Tordesillas (1493) and Westphalia (1648), the division of land has been patented by “objective” maps used for political purposes (see also Konvitz, 1987 and Petto, 2007 discussing the usage of map as statecraft in France). For decisions over *who* controls *where* are recognized via political maps, they have become the environment of concrete abstraction (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 15), which “concretizes and realizes itself socially, in the social practice” (Lefebvre, 1977, p. 59) of international relations.



Figure 2. Ptolemy's Atlas.

Source: British Library: Sources from history, 1407.

2.1 Emergence of the International Political Space by/on Maps

With the Cartesian revolution, abstract space has gradually become the main environment, if not the only one, in which the legitimation of power is recognized. Political maps have started to be used not only for actors' authoritative practices, but also for *defining* and institutionalizing the environment in which these actors operate (Boria, 2015, p. 148).

Hence, the modern form of authority has emerged with the boundaries drawn on the maps to territorially institutionalize the political system. Diverging from the medieval form of authority, territorial authority was firstly transformed from varying centers to a homogenous space defined by discrete boundaries. Secondly, this homogenous space has eliminated non-territorial forms of authority as a result of its legitimations by bilateral treaties between political entities. Lastly,

practices have started to be executed on exclusive territorial forms (Branch, 2014, p. 77).

Starting in Europe in the early 15th century and facilitated through major diplomatic events such as the Peace of Westphalia and Congress of Vienna, the territorial form of authority has gradually reached global scale as the legitimate way of governing. As non-territorial forms progressively shrunk and dissolved with bilateral treaties, the political imaginary has also turned out to be territorial. The United Nations (UN) as the ultimate signifier of legitimate statehood now constitutes the basis for territorial order against the growth of the global realm towards a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

The institutionalization of the UN map (Figure 3), however, creates a "grid" world that negates the process between the cartographic revolution and the transformation of authority in territorial form.

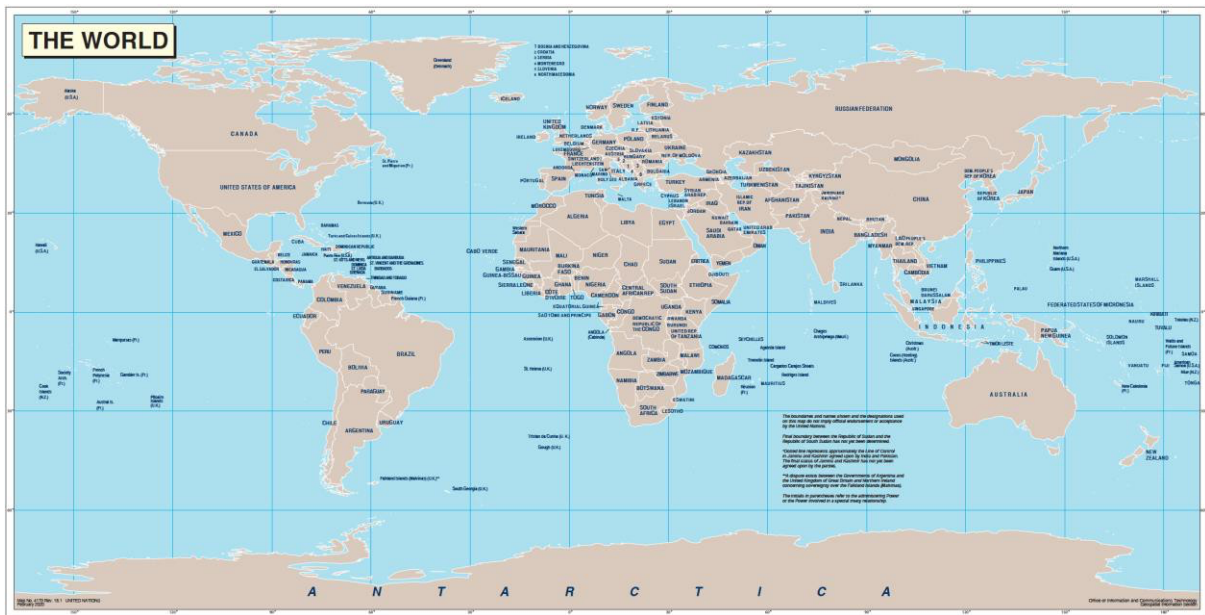


Figure 3. The World Today, the map of the United Nations.

As our epistemologies and theories are shaped by this territorial notion, it becomes anomalistic to incorporate non-territorial causal drivers, processes, and outcomes (Caquard, 2011, p. 141; Smith and Katz, 1993, pp. 68-69). In other words, political maps and territorial conceptualizations have become the basis for “how knowledge about political and social outcomes is generated” (Caquard, 2011, pp. 170-171).

Illustrating how Cartesian logic has shaped our theorization (Figure 4), it is highlighted that the boundaries drawn on political maps lead to the internalization of this abstraction in thought, perception and didactics. For example, depending on the territorial location of a threat having mobile characteristics, like COVID-19, people’s attitude is territorially conditioned. Called as “border bias”, this notion reflects that territories drawn in the maps provide a feeling of security since “people use state-based categorization” (Mishra and Mishra, 2010, p. 1583).

Henceforth, to capture this process evinced in mind and practice, it is crucial to explore the development of state-based categorizations such as land, terrain, and territory. In the second part of this section, I aim to take the debate from the

effects of maps constituting the IR space to the concept of territory as a political technology.

2.2 From Mapping of the Space to the Creation of the Territory

The natural image of the world is distorted through political maps that divide the surface into territorial states (Figure 5). This “scientific” view is often represented through satellite images empowered by Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Though such representations of the Earth differ in their scope, the territorial state is ontologically taken for granted, as if it is a natural phenomenon. However, this notion of territoriality fixes the ideas about political authorities into a static political entity that has emerged through the cartographic revolution.

Realizing this distortion, it is argued that the world we experience is geo-coded as “boundary objects have been inscribed, literally written on the surface of the earth and coded by layer upon layer of lines drawn on paper” (Pickles, 2004, p. 5). Mapped space has, thus, earned its political meaning, with the authoritative exercises of sovereign power on it.

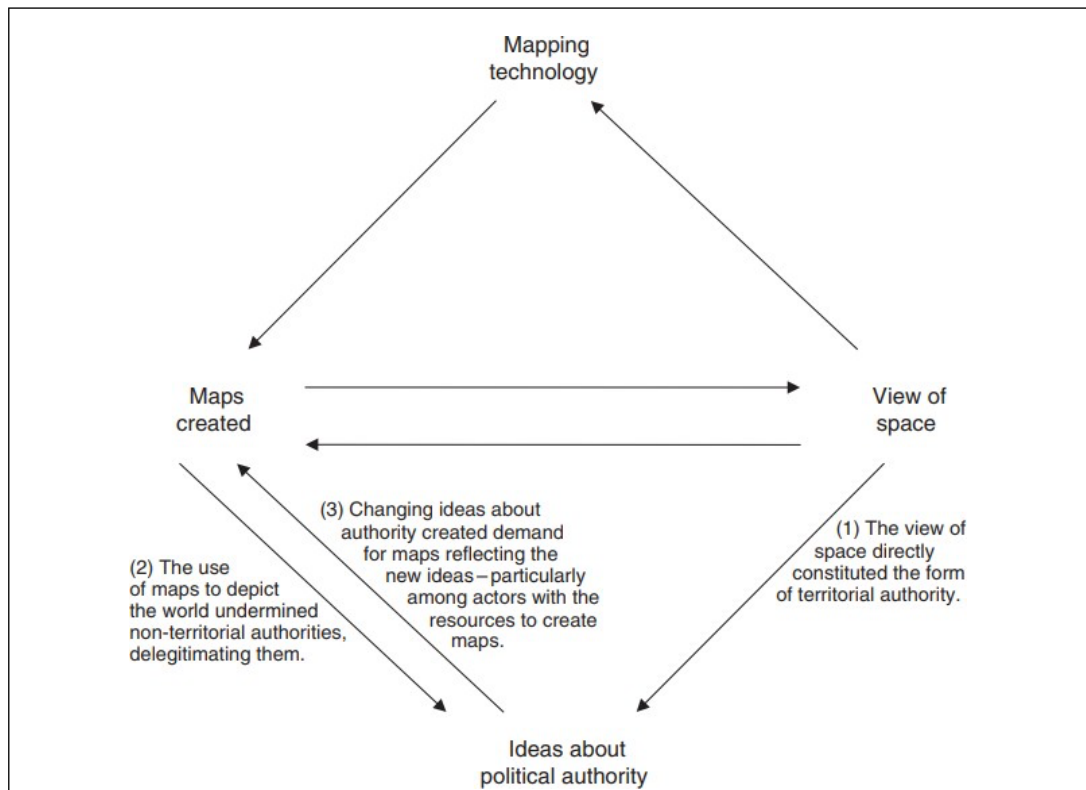


Figure 4. Illustration of mapped mind.

Source: Branch, 2014.

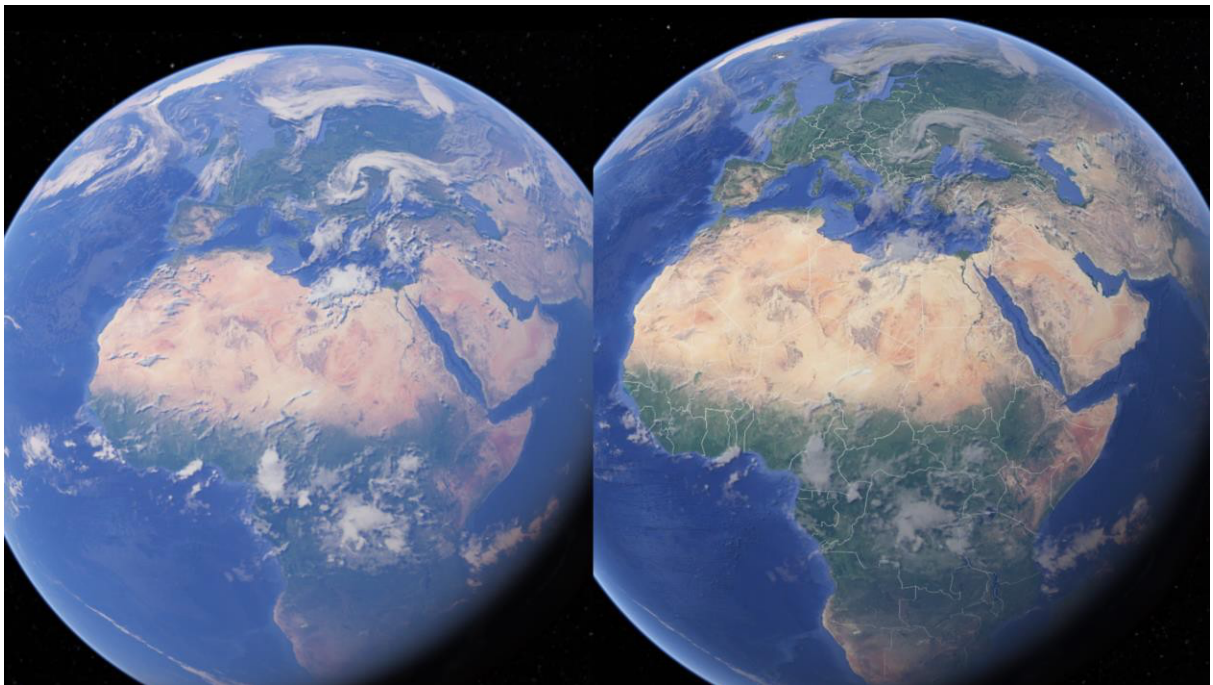


Figure 5. Appearance of state territories when zoomed in on (on the right).

Source: Google Earth, 2020.

Territory as a concept occupies a vast area of research interest, especially in the globalization and border studies. Engaging critically with the concept, scholars have argued that the territory of modern states becomes possible by way of abstracting the space of maps and mathematics as a grid imposed over the top (Elden, 2005, p. 16). As the security of the most crucial condition for civic and political life is thought to be possible only within a tightly defined spatial unit endowed with sovereignty, the geographical division of the world as mutually exclusive territorial states has defined the clusters of IR studies (Agnew, 1994, pp. 53-54). The relations between territorial states are thus seen in contradistinction to “domestic” in-state processes. As a result, the scholarship draws a boundary in mind that fixes state and society within a defined boundary, leaving anything outside to the *Others*.

In its specific qualities, territory refers to the measurement and control of the land. The control of land means the control of the people, who are attached to a constructed specific “nation” (Biggs, 1999; Hindess, 2000, p. 1494; Ford, 1999; Anderson, 1991). Indeed, territory signifies the process when “monarchs more shrewdly call themselves Kings of France, of Spain, of England, etc. instead of King of French. By thus holding the land, they are quite sure of holding the inhabitants” (Elden, 2013, p. 329; Elden, 2010, pp. 806-809). Hence, the concept of territory refers to the technology allowing the State to spatially control the subjects. Eventually, the State is seen as territorial units that indeed “represent a solidification of the bond between geographical space and society” (Smith, 2008, p. 109).

While the attempt to re-conceptualize territory has been exhausted, it is crucial to demonstrate how this concept unfolds in the didactics of IR. Therefore, to illustrate the deconstruction process conducted in this chapter, I next delve into the theoretical framework provided by Lefebvre, and expanded by Brenner and Elden, to explore territory’s mutually constitutive relation with the IR.

3. Theoretical Framework – Production of Territory

Knowledge is not independently produced. It is an interactive process that produces knowledge through which individuals shape and are shaped within its specific field. Navigating from this statement, this section introduces a framework in order to examine how the conception of the international political space is established in the introductory course of the IR.

Lefebvre famously asserted (social) space is (socially) produced (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26, p. 190), meaning that “every society (and therefore every mode of production with all its subvariants...) produces a space, its own space” (Elden, 2004, p. 43; Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 31-32). But what does he mean by production in this tautology? Contrary to Cartesian understanding, Lefebvre does not differentiate material production from mental production of ideas (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 5-7). Our mental interaction with the material world interactively produces/shapes the world we encounter.

In the first chapter of *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre indicates that “his aim is to develop a theory that would grasp the unity between three ‘fields’ of space: physical, mental, and social” (Stanek, 2008, p. 63). Yet, as early as 1939, he had also described geometric space as abstractive (Elden, 2004, p. 187). In his investigation of Descartes’ mathematization of nature, Lefebvre observes a *contradiction*: the experience of space is disregarded in the abstraction of mapping, though material space is a reality (p. 187).

The process of abstraction, Lefebvre states, is “an unconscious poesis that misunderstands its own conditions, [which] is also misunderstood by thought” (2003, p. 182). This means that representation of spatial practices reproduces a space that is a mental and material construct, like the IR space. Further, he contends that this abstract space impacts “not only in political practices and institutional arrangements, but also in political imaginaries” (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p. 359).

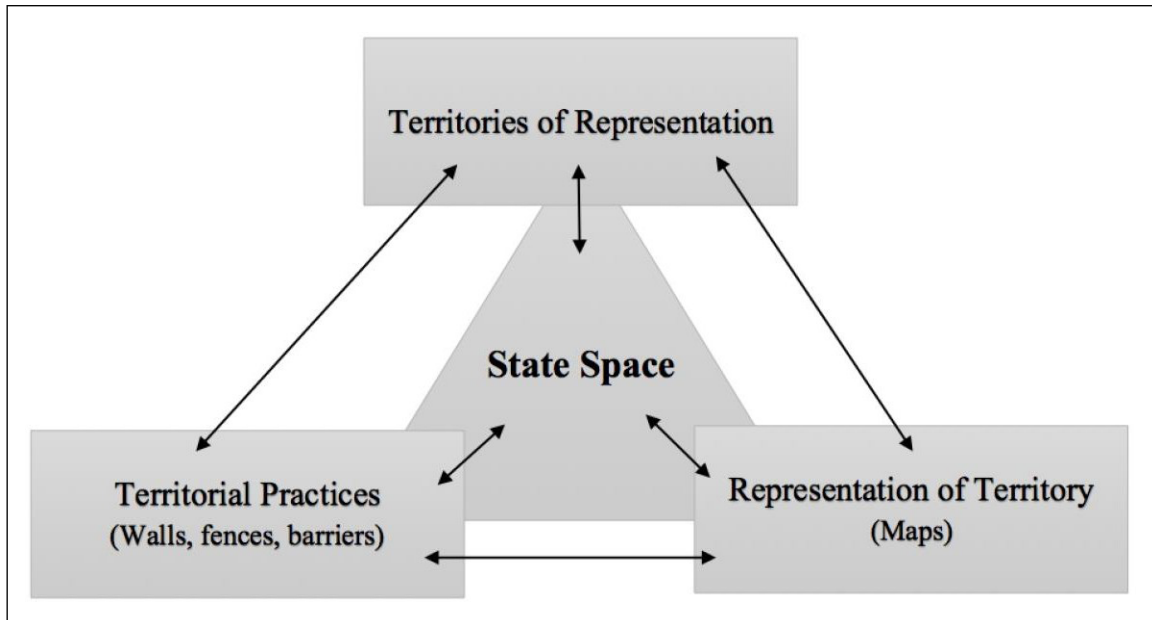


Figure 6. Illustration of the three Moments in the production of State Space.
Source: Brenner and Elden, 2009.

Termining it as the *spatialization of political theory*, Lefebvre criticizes how despatialized social science would even be epistemologically possible (Lefebvre, 1977, pp. 164-165). With the same notion, he also challenges the ontological acceptance of this spatialization that he anticipated as the territorial trap. Indicating “the State and territory interact in such a way that they can be said to be mutually constitutive” (1977, p. 278) Lefebvre warns about conceptual fixities in conceptual frameworks, instead of the processes of continual productions. Thus, contrary to the IR discipline’s fixation with territorial state as ahistorical concept, Lefebvre provides a tripartite schema for the production of territory, as an epistemological stance against the territorial traps of spatialized political theories (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p. 366).

Although Lefebvre theorized his conceptualization of space in the context of urban societies, his trialectics can also be read as a theory for/of territory (Brenner and Elden, 2009). Pursuing the historical process of space production, Lefebvre indicates that territory is the marker of state authority (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 214, p. 224). He further mentions that the production of territory is the political form of the modern state that is globalized by the establishment of the UN worldwide (Brenner

and Elden, 2009, p. 370). Therefore, his framework interlinking economic, bureaucratic and military forms is not only applicable to the urban scale, but also to a worldwide scale, the scale of international political space.

In this regard, the employment of Lefebvre’s trialectics (representation of space, spatial practice and spaces of representation) enables this research to adopt a framework for understanding the abstraction of geography by the IR. The three mutually constitutive concepts refer to three interlinked processes for the urban contextualities. Representation of space refers to “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39), such as maps, models and plans. Spatial practice relatedly refers to the material acts in urban reality (p. 38). Spaces of representation refer to “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (p. 39). Initiating the trialectics into the IR space, his conceptualizations are linked to territorial practices, representation of territory and territories of representation (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p. 366).

Therein, representations of territory include maps and charts as the abstract ways of representing territory through cartography. In

their abstraction, territorial practices such as the construction of walls are shaped and are being shaped by the lines drawn on the maps. This actualization of the abstract space through walls and fences materializes the territory that “maintains large-scale infrastructure enabling flows of people, goods, energy and information” (Brenner and Elden, 2009, p. 366). The notion of insider/outsider is created through abstract space materialized on the concrete space. These two aspects of territory eventually shape lived experiences through which everyday practices are exercised, as the third concept explains (see Handel, 2009, analyzing the Occupied Palestinian Territories). As illustrated in Figure 6 above, “territory takes on a meaning through the everyday practices and lived experiences that take place within and beyond it” (p. 366).

For the IR scholarship operates excessively on the representation of territory, what is understood by international political space is actually an abstract space. As being fixed onto the political maps, the discipline detaches the territorial practices and territories of representations from the production process of the territory. Hence, these ontologies of the discipline conditions students to take maps and the territorial state as ahistorically given. Under such a discursive imposition, knowledge production in the discipline drifts away from the other two concepts of the State Space. Eventually, this steers the didactical process towards three problematical orientations: spatial fetishism, methodological territorialism, and methodological nationalism.

4. Research Method

Tracing how maps shape the didactics in IR, I explore these three methodological errors in four textbooks from the introductory course. These books are namely; i-) Jackson and Sørensen’s *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (2013) and ii-) Baylis, Smith and Owens’ *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (2014) taught in Hacettepe University, iii-) Grieco, Ikenberry and Mastanduno’s *Introduction to International Relations: Enduring Questions and Contemporary Perspectives* (2015)

taught in Bilkent University, and iv-) Mingst and Arreguín-Toft’s *Essentials of International Relations* (2017) taught in METU. Although the editions of the textbooks might differ on a semesterly basis, their main ontological and epistemological orientations are kept constant.

With an Anglo-Saxon tradition of teaching, these three courses follow the same weekly progress throughout the semester. They begin by introducing the “International System” which is described as not only consisting of the State, but mostly dominated by it. As the first two weeks are spent on the theme *the world we live in*, the students are introduced to the levels of analysis (individual level, state level and system level) for conducting research. The following weeks are devoted to IR theories and the actors in the IR space. However, I draw particularly on the first three weeks when the international system and history of the IR are taught, as they are textually filled with political maps. As these three weeks establish the fundamental notion of the discipline, I examine the usage of maps, and illustrate how spatial fetishism, methodological territorialism and methodological nationalism are built for the representation of territory.

Indeed, a map is a discourse as it “usually contains a dominating representation of reality and one or more alternative representations” (Neumann, 2008, p. 70). Like a sample of written language/text, they produce and are reproduced by their discourses (Hodges, Kuper and Reeves, 2008). For “discourse is a social practice that constitutes the social world and is also constituted by other social practices” (Mutlu and Salter, 2013, p. 113), maps become a social practice that constitutes the social world for the scholars operating in the IR space.

Therefore, with an intertextual posture to take “a self-conscious step away from the dominant modes of formalistic and ahistorical trends in international relations theory” (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989, p. 7), I demonstrate how the “continuity” of spatial fetishism on maps is sustained by the concept of territory within the course textbooks. Deviating from the Foucauldian notion of discourse as “the power which is to be seized” (Foucault, 1981, p. 53), I follow a textual analysis with the aim of descriptively illustrating the role of maps in

shaping the epistemology of the scholarship. Instead of equating the discursive role of maps with *power*, *action* and *cognition* (van Dijk, 1993), I aim to reflect upon the “social-scientific environment” of the IR. While I emphasize the structural design of the didactics, I focus on the “connotative meaning and the circulation of symbols” (Bauer, Biquelet and Suerdem, 2014, p. 15), by critically engaging with anachronism in the didactics.

5. Didactics in IR

Studies regarding didactics in geography focus particularly on the discursive role of maps and indicate “the geographic map is simply a talking image: we cannot only get mere data from it, but also [...] many more” (Caruso, 2013, p. 111). Emphasizing the importance of geographic knowledge, it is argued that “succeeding in making young pupils understand geographic knowledge is part of our daily life, our movements and even of our decisions and desires” (p. 111). However, the shift from geographical representations towards more abstract and territorially oriented methodologies is also stressed that recognizing the cultural, social, environmental, political and economic diversity of territories are often negated (Dematteis and Giorda, 2013, p. 18). Contrary to the IR space, didactics emphasizes the trialectic relationship of the territory, or that representation of territory is perceived by a process that “national territory is produced as the concrete abstraction of the politics of a particular regime” (Khatam and Haas, 2018, p. 442).

Nevertheless, in the IR, the notion of territory is an abstract one, an ahistorical context independent concept. Geography is understood through political maps upon which the discipline is constructed. Therein, aiming to understand how, and to what extent, geography progresses in abstraction, I examine the course materials of the IR introductory course. Introducing the fundamental ontologies, I elaborate on the commonalities of textbooks and syllabuses in discussing the IR space. By demonstrating how the discipline reproduces, and is produced by, the representation of territory, I argue that the

scholarship is embedded in the three orientations – spatial fetishism, methodological territorialism and methodological nationalism.

The three coursebooks follow a traditional path introducing the two main pillars of the discipline – the *State* and *nation*. Basing their historical foundation on the Westphalian Constitution of world politics in 1648, they are linked together with three integrated concepts – territoriality, sovereignty, and authority. There, territoriality is defined to assert that humankind is organized principally through exclusive territorial (political) communities with fixed borders. Then, sovereignty is explained as an entitlement to supreme, qualified, and exclusive political and legal authority within the borders of the state or government. While the concepts of territoriality and sovereignty are equated to define the *State*, autonomy is to define *nation*. Separating the domestic sphere from the world outside (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2014, p. 24), autonomy assigns the notion of control over territory.

The fourth textbook by Baylis, Smith and Owens, as an additional textbook taught at Hacettepe University, takes a critical stance against “the one-dimensionality of orthodox accounts of world politics that give primacy to geopolitics and the struggle for power between states” (p. 24). Although the authors try to keep a distance from these traditional accounts by emphasizing the process of globalization, they still adopt the same ontology that sees the world through territorial states.

In a similar vein, the textbooks from METU and BU directly prioritize the world map with different illustrations on their cover (Figure 7). In that, they also stress the role of globalization and the interconnectedness in the international political space. Representing the world with tied continents and spider webs, instead of territorial states, the main emphasis is again given to globalization. In HU, both the main textbook and the additional/critical one begin with the UN map, the signifier of scientific and objective representation of IR space.

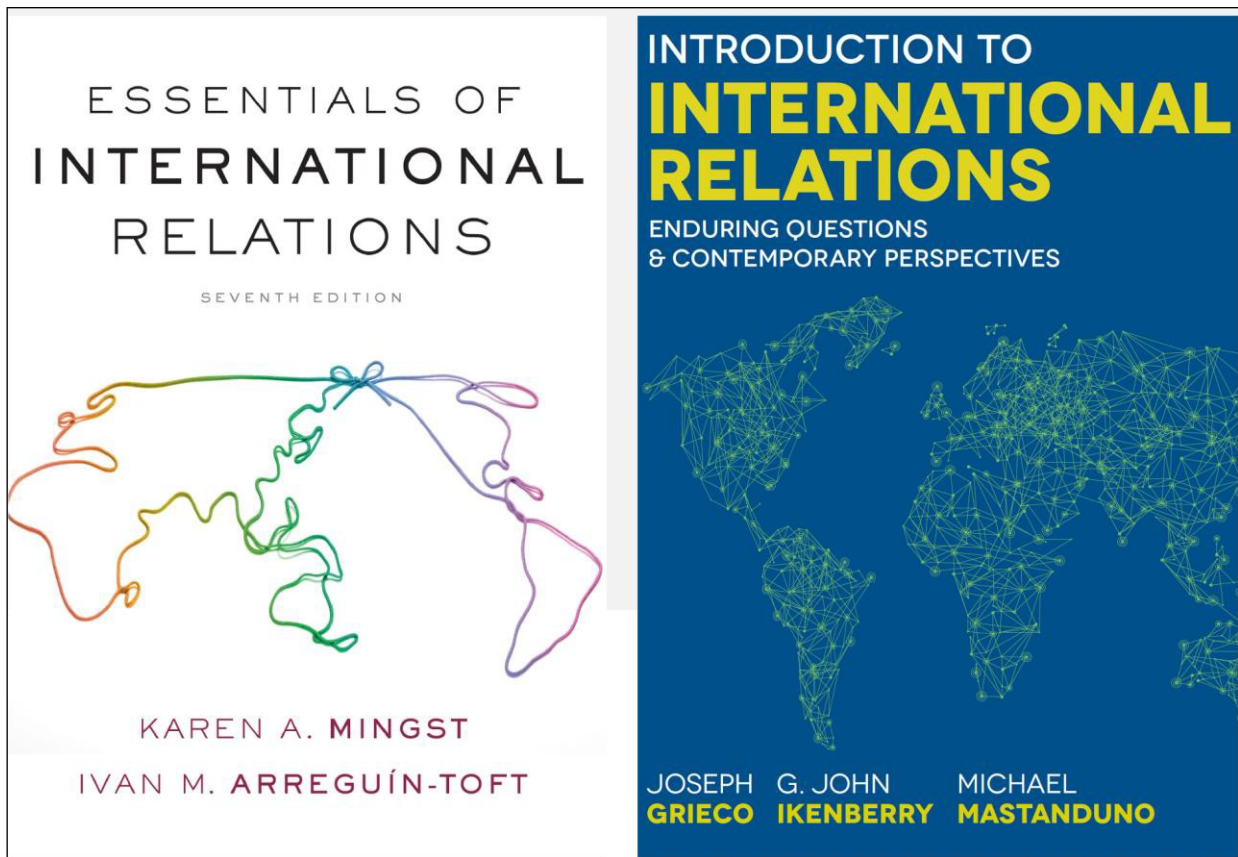


Figure 7. Cover of the textbooks from METU (on the left) and Bilkent University (on the right).
Source: Mingst and Arreguín-Toft, 2017; Grieco et al., 2015.

While further pages do not display additional maps, they excessively use photography in order to highlight global problems such as terrorism, hunger and forced migration.

Thus, the only distinction found among the three universities is the placement of maps, whether they are used on the cover page, intext or right before/after the preface. While the two books from METU and BU use maps both in the cover and intexts, the others use them only either right before or after the preface at HU. Furthermore, the intext usages of the political maps are mostly placed in the two chapters in which the international system and the history of IR is introduced.

In general, there is no divergence regarding the teaching methods, content organization, conceptual hierarchies, and overall teaching design. Though the concept of territory is attempted to be overcome with an emphasis on globalization, the course materials unitedly

reproduce the ontology of maps. Basing the foundation of sovereignty and authority on the four hundred years-long Westphalian system, the general pattern of teaching is kept constant. Hence, the IR is fixed to operate on abstract geography from which its didactics cannot escape. As a result, this embeds the scholarship into three methodological orientations.

6. Spatial Fetishism, Methodological Territorialism and Methodological Nationalism in IR

In its fixation with political maps, the discipline mainly operates under the three methodological orientations to facilitate, reproduce and discursively institutionalize the representation of territory. As defined by Brenner, spatial fetishism refers to the “conception of social space as timeless and static, and thus as immune to the possibility of

historical change” (Brenner, 2004, p. 38). For territorial state is represented as an ahistorical entity with political maps, the UN map in particular, the discipline is oriented by spatial fetishism in the introductory courses. As will be shown, the second chapters of the course books are devoted to the history of IR, but the concept of territory and political maps are stretched throughout history. Imposing the notion of an objective representation of world, the state space tripartite is negated in the teaching process.

Relatedly, the excessive usage of the political maps further pictures the global politics within “well-defined borders”. Determining the “nation” through spatially fixed boundaries, the IR scholarship infers that global affairs have always been unfolding within fixed entities. Such a conception is molded by methodological territorialism and methodological nationalism. Indeed, methodological territorialism refers to the “assumption that all social relations are organized within self-enclosed, discretely bounded territorial containers” (Brenner, 2004, p. 38). Relationally, methodological nationalism is defined as the “assumption that all social relations are organized at national scale or are becoming nationalized” (p. 38). While the course syllabuses and the four textbooks are commonly emphasizing the role of sovereignty and territory, the discipline is taught under methodological territorialism and nationalism, though globalization is conceptually exhausted.

7. Didactics of IR at Hacettepe University (HU)

The three introductory courses taught at METU, Bilkent and Hacettepe adopt the same conceptualization of State. Having two key features – a piece of territory with well-defined borders and political authorities with sovereign power (Jackson and Sorensen, 2013; Grieco et al., 2015; Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, 2017), such a conceptualization is epistemologically misleading. Starting with the didactics at Hacettepe, the first chapter introducing the international system indicates that the “state system is a distinctive way of organizing political life on earth and has deep historical roots” (Jackson and Sørensen, 2013, p. 5).

Stretching the definition of state system even back to ancient Greece, state territory is represented as timeless and static.

Yet, taking its legitimate ground from the peace treaties in Europe, the historical foundation of the discipline is centered on what is periodized historically as early modern era (16th and 17th century). Determined through political maps, international relations are defined as “relations between such independent states” ever since the 18th century (p. 5). Moving onto the 19th and 20th centuries, the same conceptualization of state and state system with the omnipresent Eurocentric view (Bilgin, 2017, p. 16), are stretched “to entire territory of the earth” (Jackson and Sørensen, 2013, p. 6).

This timeless and static definition is further operationalized under the sub-section “Brief Historical Sketch of the State System”. While the modern concept of the State differs from the *pre-historical* one, the first narrative is given from 5,000 years ago when “people began to settle down on the land and form themselves into separate territory based political communities” (p. 17). Such an assertion, however, confines the world geography with the perception of the territorial abstract spaces.

Raising a response to this ahistorical account, Jackson and Sørensen then acknowledge that “the story of Westphalia is a historical myth created by IR scholars who wanted to create a foundational basis in history for their realist or international society theories” (p. 18). However, without marking a clear argumentation on the spatio-temporality of such spatial fetish, their next chapter focuses on “Contemporary World of States”. Having separated the internal aspects from that of the external ones, their analysis of the State is steered towards a bounded territorial fixity at world-wide scale. Hence, the levels of analysis are examined with regard to whether a subject matter is within the state, or among the states.

After conceptually defining the State and state system, the next chapters of the course book continue with the introduction of IR Theories whereby students develop a sense of understanding of global affairs. Built upon these conceptualizations, the theories further concretize the abstract space in the IR didactics. In that regard, an additional book is provided at

HU to provide a critical view of this concretized abstraction in mind.

Beginning with an explanation of the title of the book *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2014), the authors indicate their awareness of world politics beyond nation-states. While initially presenting the dominant theories of IR, they elaborate on how the process of globalization reveals the discipline's theoretical inability. Stressing excessively on orthodox definitions such as internationalization and regionalization, the authors engage with the separation for the internal and external view of the State. In contrast with the epistemological focus on state boundaries and territory, they highlight that “globalization refers to a process in which the very distinction between the domestic and the external breaks down” (p. 20). Arguing that “globalization calls this state-centric conception of world politics into question” (p. 23), the scholarship is encouraged to adopt a new perception for global dynamics.

By arguing “globalization challenges the one-dimensionality of orthodox accounts of world politics that give primacy to geopolitics and the struggle for power between states”, the authors assert how the “Westphalian Constitution of World Order” is challenged (p. 24). However, the same fetish on spatial fixity and territorial trap is still reproduced. Although an attempt is made to reflect upon the scalar differences of globalized world politics (p. 25), the authors come back to the same territorial logic with “new types of boundary problems” (p. 28). Despite mentioning “under conditions of globalization, a new geography of political organization and political power (from trans-governmental networks to regional and global bodies) is emerging that transcends territories and borders” (p. 28), no further discussion is provided for *how* this new geography of political organization and power emerges. Therefore, while the epistemological and ontological undertakings of the discipline remain untouched even in this critical attempt, “the Westphalian ideal of sovereign statehood” is preserved, as “globalization is only transforming it, not burying” (p. 29).

Describing the environment in which knowledge operates, Jackson and Sørensen sum up the State and state system as “[they] are territory-based social organizations which exist primarily to establish, maintain, and defend basic social conditions and values, including, particularly, security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare” (2013, p. 9). Indeed, such a summary refers that all social relations are organized within self-enclosed and bounded territorial containers at national scale. For state is introduced as the main and dominant level of analysis, the IR space is portrayed as the only possible environment in which social relations can be thought.

Therefore, the issue of “boundary problem” (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2014, p. 28) actually reproduces the same conceptual fixities. While the textbook attempts to overcome the Westphalian conception of sovereignty as an indivisible and territorially exclusive form of public power, the post-Westphalian world order they define only re-addresses the three core concepts – territoriality, sovereignty and autonomy. Without formulating *how*, the concepts of territory and territoriality are reframed under the three methodological errors. As argued to be challenged by globalization, “capacity for self-governance and state autonomy is comprised” (p. 28). Nevertheless, the concepts of sovereignty and autonomy are merely re-mentioned since the power and authority are measured between the national, regional and global scales.

Under this epistemology, “states have been viewed as politically sovereign and economically self-propelled entities, with national state territoriality understood as the basic reference point in terms of which all subnational and supranational political-economic processes are to be classified” (Brenner, 2004, p. 39). Therein, the knowledge produced by the methodological territorialism and methodological nationalism negates the scale issue. Thus, even the critical attempt, which tries to overcome the state-centric epistemology pervading the modern social sciences (p. 39), is embedded to fall into the “territorial trap of the territorial trap” (Shah, 2012). For these methodological orientations are further concretized by the use of political maps,

and didactics cannot prove a way out since the geography is turned into a total abstraction.

8. Didactics of IR at Bilkent University (BU)

In line with HU, the introductory course at BU begins with the same patterns of teaching. Starting with what is understood by international system, the same dominant concepts of the State, nation and sovereignty are introduced. Adopting the same critical account for globalization, “Building Blocks for the Study of International Relations” are examined as a sub-section. Demonstrating the units of analysis, the course introduces a methodological base in research. Instead of focusing directly on scalar issues by mentioning the levels of analysis, the units of analysis are defined – individual actors, states, and non-state actors.

In explaining each unit, the State is defined as having “two key features: a piece of territory with reasonably well-defined borders, and political authorities who enjoy sovereignty, that is, they have an effective and recognized capacity to govern residents within the territory” (Grieco et al., 2015, p. 7). Progressing towards the historical foundations of the discipline, such a definition dictates a spatial fixity for individual and non-state actors to operate in. Furthermore, though the political world is now re-defined with globalization, the phrase of “well-defined borders” runs against both the overall discussion and cover page of the book (Figure 7).

The reason for this conflict is caused by the fetish on spatiality in which any kind of political organization is thought to be compressed. Indeed, following the initial two weeks, the course continues with the historical accounts. Entitled “the Emergence of a Global System of States”, relations among political organizations are introduced. Adopted also by the textbook taught at METU, diplomatic history is divided into four phases. Representing the emergence of our modern system of states, the first phase briefly touches upon the developments throughout the initial four hundred years period (1500-1900). The second phase covers from 1900 to 1945 as the period of diminution for the

European influence. Continuing with the Cold War period in the third phase, the book connectively engages with the post-war period in covering today’s contemporary global system.

Although the different political organizations and world systems have been emphasized in these categorizations of diplomatic history, the mere account of the abstract space is kept ongoing with the usage of maps for the representation of territory (Figure 8). As even stretched back to 2,500 years ago in Ancient Greece, the discipline disrupts the spatio-temporality of a given historical account. Demonstrating the spaces of political authorities with vague territorial lines, the international politics has been imagined by territorial representations. Thus, the two key features – a territory with well-defined borders and political authorities – are traveled throughout history via the political maps. This anachronistic usage of territory leads to the separation of the territorial practices and territories of representations from the production process of the territory, by picturing political maps as objective materials.

9. Didactics of IR at METU

Following HU and BU, the same concepts and weekly progress are also adopted at METU. The prescribed textbook – *Essentials of International Relations* (Mingst and Arreguín-Toft, 2017) starts with the dominant theories of IR – realism, liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism. Highlighting the existence of various actors, other than the State, the book continues with an overall definition of what is meant by international relations, as “a subfield of political science” (p. 4). Similar to didactics at BU, the concept of sovereignty is concretized by periodizing the diplomatic history of Europe into the periodical slices, 16th and 17th for the Westphalian Order, and 19th century for the Congress of Vienna.

However, when moving onto the second chapter, where the historical foundations of the discipline are explained extensively, the political maps are excessively used.

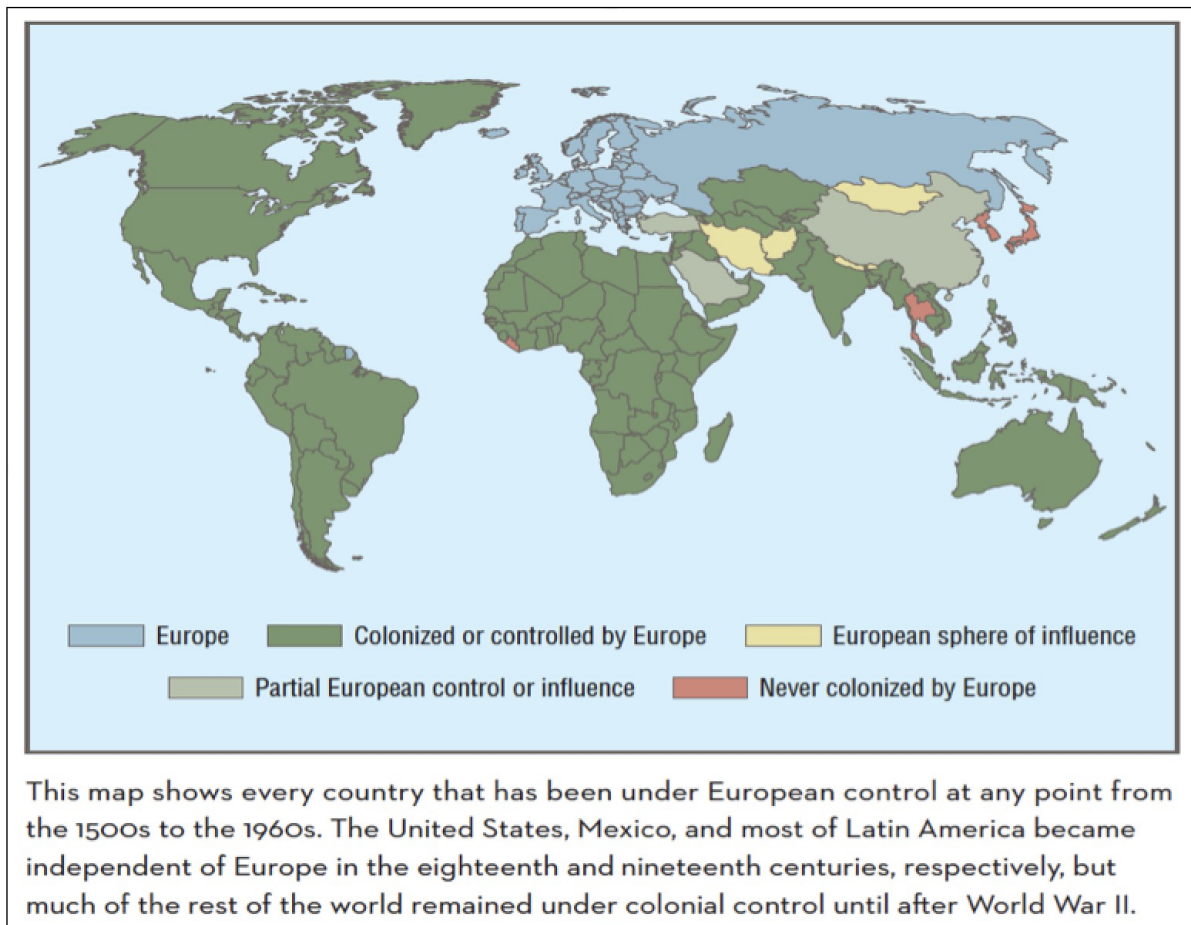


Figure 9. Today's world map to illustrate the process of Colonization from the 1500s to the 1960s.
Source: Mingst and Arreguín-Toft, 2017.

While the concepts of territory, authority and autonomy are taken into anachronistic form, then how would the knowledge be possibly produced outside these three methodological orientations?

Furthermore, how would it be possible to realize the abstraction of geography, while only the three levels of analysis were provided – individual, state and system?

10. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the evolution of maps and their impacts in IR didactics by investigating the course textbooks at three distinctive universities of Turkey. Abstracting both macro and micro-geographies by way of representing the world as consisting of territorial

states, it is argued that the discipline of International Relations (IR) is fixed only into representation of territory, superseding the lived spaces, its complexity and diversity. Facilitating the theoretical framework for the *Production of Territory*, I aimed to demonstrate that the discipline operates in an environment in which knowledge is produced abstractly since the didactics do not engage with the territorial practices and territories of representations.

This fixation on the territorial states risks the geography of politics and politics of geography to assimilation, as territorial practices and territories of representations are subsumed by the political maps. While the state-centric epistemologies and conceptual ontologies are entrenched in the IR education, concrete space is separated from its representation through maps.

Thus, the IR scholarship comes to be dominated by the three orientations that one sees the world only through the abstract representations of territorial maps.

While the representation of territory becomes ahistorical and context independent, the complexities of global phenomena such as forced migration are conceived as an anomaly (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003, p. 585; 2002, p. 311; Brenner, 2004). As the IR scholarship is dominantly taught through political maps and state-centric epistemologies, it becomes difficult to comprehend territorial practices and territories of representations. Consequently, considering the migratory events, the international control of mobility through the regulation of borders and citizenship renders refugees and stateless persons a vital concern for the stability of the modern state system (Salter, 2006, pp. 179-180). Since state-centric epistemologies fix various scales into nation-scale, seeing the world as divided into “legally distinct parcels, divided by great white fences, real or imaginary” (Smith, 2008, p. 116) is constantly reproduced when examining “illegible” mobile events.

In order to overcome the state centric epistemologies, I conclude my investigation by emphasizing Smith’s accounts on scale issue. Smith’s examination of scale and “objectivity” of space in his seminal book, *Uneven Development* (2008), provides an epistemological way to overcome the abstract representation of geography in the IR. Though these conceptualizations are contextualized to explain the capitalist mode of production, his accounts can also be used to concretize the IR space.

Firstly, since the discipline claims to explain the international system and global political affairs, his analysis on scale-making helps overcome the three methodological orientations. Rejecting the hierarchical ordering of global spatialities, he asserts three scales – urban scale, nation-state scale, and global scale (p. 180). In this way, the state-scale can be used as an auxiliary conception, instead of being fetishized, to examine dialectic relations between the global and local. As discussed by the concept of *glocality* (Swyngedouw, 1997), the scale issue is challenged by showing how active moments in spaces can reveal the transgression of capital

flow in different scales. Therein, geographical scale becomes more than a “‘hierarchically ordered system’ placed over preexisting space” (Marston and Smith, 2001, pp. 615-616). Hence, it is inferred that though these scales are made to stay fixed, they are subject to change (p. 181).

As all the textbooks examined in this paper touch upon the globalization and the erosion of territorial state, conceptual hierarchy of the State should be re-appropriated. Instead of taking it as the main level of analysis for different scales, the State should be integrated as an intervening variable for epistemological approach to the global phenomenon, such as forced migration in didactics.

Secondly, criticizing the persistent usage of the Newtonian conception of absolute space, Smith asserts that this abstraction of space negates the social features. Separating social space from physical space, it becomes impossible to conceptualize human material activities in abstraction. Hence, social space emerges as “a differentiated subset of physical space” (p. 98). Through Einsteinian relative space, pre-Newtonian space being physical and social is intersected with post-Einsteinian space which is mathematical (p. 100). However, instead of seeing this interaction as a duality between space and society, main focus should be on their dialectic relations that produce social space. Therefore, space and society can be seen in “interactions” that actually reveal the historicity of the production of space and territory. It is in this way that the concept of territory can be captured in its tripartite totality.

Therefore, bringing Lefebvre’s trialectics to the IR has eventually made it possible to illustrate the ways the discipline establishes its own environment, that I called the IR space. Attempting to provide a further epistemological suggestion for the discipline, I assert that Smith’s elaboration on scale-making and space can possibly enhance the discipline to operate on concrete grounds for its introductory course. Such an import from the urban studies would not only concretize the discipline’s environment, but also help evaluate a mobile phenomenon like (forced) migration without having a sedentarist ideology.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Deniz and İrem for their remarkable contributions.

Appendix: Course Syllabuses

- *IR 206-Introduction to International Relations*, Course Syllabus, METU, International Relations, Ankara, 2020.
- *Syllabus of IR 101 - Introduction to World Politics*, Course Syllabus, Bilkent University, International Relations, Ankara, 2020.
- *Syllabus of INR 201 – International Relations I*, Course Syllabus, Hacettepe University, International Relations, Ankara, 2020. Retrieved from: http://akts.hacettepe.edu.tr/ders_detay.php?ders_ref=DRSTNM_0000000000000000000012166&ders_kod=INR201&z_s_link=1&prg_kod=497&s_ubmenuheader=2.

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