

The Geopolitics of Laughter and Forgetting: A World-Systems Interpretation of the Post- Modern Geopolitical Condition¹

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Scholars have noted a recent transition from modern to post-modern geopolitics. Deterritorialisation is the defining feature of the new geopolitical condition. The purpose of this article is to outline a world-systems theory interpretation of the processes of deterritorialisation. World-systems makes three contributions: the core/periphery of the world-economy explains the geographic pattern of deterritorialisation, hegemonic cycles explain the timing of deterritorialisation, and the institutions of the world-economy provide an understanding of the politics that underlie contemporary geopolitical processes. The core/periphery structure of the world-economy provokes two responses, the geopolitics of laughter and forgetting.

Political geographers and other scholars have reached a consensus that the geopolitical condition of the world has changed (Agnew, 1998; Newman, 1999; Ó Tuathail, 1998; 2000). There has been a shift from a modern to a post-modern geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, 2000), with a focus upon the processes of the deterritorialisation of geopolitics (Newman, 1999). The purpose of this article is to interpret deterritorialisation and the new geopolitical condition within a world-systems framework. The intention is not to usurp the theoretical contributions made by scholars adopting other theories. Instead, the modest goal of the article is to add a historical materialist perspective into the creative theoretical mix that is the current analysis of geopolitics. The pedagogic value of a world-systems perspective on post-modern geopolitics lies in its ability to clarify some outstanding questions regarding the geographic pattern and historical timing of deterritorialisation. Though the 'messiness' of geopolitics remains (Ó Tuathail, 1998), such messiness occurs within (but is not determined by) a core/periphery structure and cycles of hegemony. Moreover, new geopolitical structures such as networks and flows of information are reshaping the nature of the

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core/periphery hierarchy and the ability of a particular state to achieve hegemonic status (Taylor, 1993). By considering a world-systems approach the continuing influence of a core/periphery hierarchy on geopolitical processes is acknowledged while also noting how contemporary developments are challenging that structure. Specifically, the geographical extent, historical context and underlying social relations of the post-modern geopolitical condition are explored through a world-systems approach.

Deterritorialisation is the process of declining state sovereignty in the specific realm of its reduced ability to manage the flows of commodities, information and people across state borders (Hudson, 2000). It results in a new form of geopolitics, one that considers flows, ambiguity and a multitude of institutions rather than stasis, certainty and the permanency of the state. These flows and their associated politics have been termed 'flowmations' by Ó Tuathail (2000). Deterritorialisation is the expression of a change from the 'modern geopolitical imagination' with its state-centric picture of the world to one of multiple actors and a confused distinction between the domestic and the alien (Agnew, 1998; Ó Tuathail, 2000: 17). Ó Tuathail argues that the key catalyst for such a shift was the end of the Cold War (Ó Tuathail, 2000: 168). However, the Cold War and its demise were part of broader processes, namely the rise and decline of American hegemony (Arrighi, 1994; Taylor and Flint, 2000). The process of hegemonic competition is one that has defined the geopolitics of the capitalist world-economy since its inception in the mid-1400s (Arrighi, 1994; Taylor, 1999). Modern geopolitics was the geopolitics of the fall of British hegemony and the rise and decline of United States leadership. If one agrees with Ó Tuathail in denoting the end of the Cold War as the beginning of a new geopolitical imagination then deterritorialisation may be placed within the systemic cycles of the capitalist world-economy (Arrighi, 1994).

From a world-systems perspective, flows of capital, goods, people and information have always been a feature of the capitalist world-economy. Processes of economic exchange have always extended across the whole of the world-economy, and have had to negotiate state borders. Flows are better understood as processes extending beyond state borders, which breaks the implicit assumptions linking society to the state (Taylor, 2000). A geohistorical analysis of the world-economy will illustrate that states have not limited the spatial scope of economic processes, but have used the principle of territorial sovereignty to their benefit. Changes in technology and forms of capital accumulation from agricultural systems, through to steam and then oil powered industry to the contemporary informational network society (Castells, 1996; Hugill, 1993; 1999) have not altered the fundamental tension between state sovereignty and systemic economic flows (Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein, 1979). Contemporary changes raise

two questions, are the current flows diminishing state sovereignty in a manner that will usher in the decline of the Westphalian state system (Agnew, 1999; Taylor, 2000), or is it merely a passing feature of hegemonic transition (Arrighi, 1994)? The post-modern aspect of contemporary geopolitics is not the emergence of flows, but the relative strength of states to manage or command persistent global processes.

The implications of this argument require us to rethink the meaning of contemporary deterritorialisation. Placing the contemporary geopolitical changes within a broader historical framework forces recognition that we are in a transition from *one* particular hegemony to another. Hence, there have been other such transitions with similar traits, namely an increase in the importance of finance in the world-economy and a challenge to the assumed power of political spaces (Arrighi, 1994). In addition, previous periods of hegemonic transition have witnessed cultural conflicts over knowledge and meaning similar to the ones we are experiencing now (Bergesen, 2000; Sherman, 1999). This is not to say that the changes taking place now are the simple and predictable product of historical determinism. Instead, the agency that makes the contemporary geopolitical situation so exciting may be situated within a historical materialist context that suggests the limits and potentials for geopolitical activity.

The world-systems conception of hegemony was chosen as a framework for this discussion because it offers greater theoretical breadth than alternative approaches. First, its political-economic stance allows for a causal connection between economic processes and political change through the paired Kondratieff model, whereby changes in economic and social relations drive the rise and fall of hegemonic powers (Taylor and Flint, 2000: 73). Modelski's (1987) alternative model of world leadership is unable to produce a convincing explanation for what causes the cyclical pattern of world powers (Taylor and Flint, 2000). Moreover, world-systems theory sees the basis for hegemonic cycles resting in changing social relations, rather than technological change. Though technology plays a role in geopolitical change (Hugill, 1993), it is the underlying changes in social relations, related to particular technologies, that provide the material base for hegemonic power and the model of a modern society that other countries wish to emulate (Taylor, 1999). It was not the automobile or assembly-line *per se* that produced US hegemony, but the social relations of Fordism. The contemporary example of the Internet shows that it is not the computers and web-pages that are of primary importance, but the new forms of business, work practices and group identity that they facilitate (Castells, 1996). World-systems theory avoids such technological determinism by emphasising continuity and change in social relations.

More specifically, world-systems theory offers three contributions. First,

it provides a geoeconomic framework to understand the geographic differentiation in the process of deterritorialisation noted by Ó Tuathail (2000). Second, world-systems theory offers a temporal dynamic to interrogate the questions of why the changes are occurring now and whether they are secular or the reflection of cyclical patterns. Third, the key institutions of the capitalist world-economy provide a framework to reorient the analysis of deterritorialisation away from its geographical manifestations and towards the underlying social processes. This approach extends the work of Agnew (1999) by showing the geographical limitations, temporal context, and social construction of the emerging world political map.

In sum, the adoption of world-systems theory uses the contributions of those who have discussed deterritorialisation (or post-modern geopolitics) (Newman, 1999) and interprets them within a historical materialist framework. The world-systems framework requires a consideration of the holistic nature of geopolitical change in particular temporal and spatial contexts, and offers an understanding of the social relations that produce geographic change. The implication is that the geographic and temporal scope of the current dramatic transformations may be assessed to see whether they are ushering in systemic change, as Agnew (1999) and Taylor (2000) declare, or are a recurring ephemeral feature of hegemonic transition.

A Geography of Deterritorialisation: Geopolitics of Laughter and Forgetting

The first part of the article will use the concepts of core and periphery processes to understand the geographic scope of deterritorialisation. '(T)he idea of transnational flows rather than territorial fixities, is ... particular to the experiences of a relatively small community of advanced capitalist states rather than to all states and peoples in the world system' (Ó Tuathail, 2000: 177). In other words, the fluidity of transactions that dominate the perceptions of the contemporary global economy reflects the experiences of just a few. In another article, Ó Tuathail (1998) notes that the transition from a modern to a post-modern geopolitics is typified by the dominant states in world politics. The world-systems definition of core and periphery processes helps us to understand why certain states are dominant and why the scope of deterritorialisation is so limited. Thus, world-systems theory provides a historical materialist basis for the consequent cultural politics. Using this framework, two broad geopolitical conditions may be discerned; a geopolitics of laughter in the core and a geopolitics of forgetting in the periphery.

The media bombards us with contradictory images. Commercials project a picture of a dynamic and fluid world of efficient and compassionate

business. An 'e-world' where prosperous and happy men and women of diverse ethnic backgrounds are participating as fulfilled cogs in the well-oiled machine of global business. A computer literate world where access to consumer goods and business clients is just a couple of clicks away and the only conflict impinging upon the scene is between competing demands over time and across space – conflicts that the latest technological advancements will surely solve. But as programming intervenes between the representations of the advertising agencies another set of images emerges. Fear is interjected into our lives. Fear of crime, disease and invasion, with the poor and the foreign portrayed as the vectors of these pathogens. Fear of the 'immigrant' who may sell our nuclear secrets to China or come carrying a bag of explosives. Fear of a missile fired off by a 'rogue nation' (Klare, 1995). Fear of job loss or fear of threats to established world views – in other words fear of those resisting the spread of the world portrayed in the commercials.

These subjective images build upon a reality that is denied by the commercial world – increasing polarisation of wealth and life opportunities. Polarisation of wealth is a phenomenon experienced across the spectrum of geographical scales, from the city, through the nation-state to the global economy. The discrepancies in economic well-being and life opportunities across the world have been contrasted with the perceived wealth generation of globalisation. The alternative reality of global apartheid has been a constant and necessary feature of the capitalist world-economy (Köhler, 1995). The two sets of images that we face are representations of the two polar extremes – a prosperous core and a marginalised and disaffected periphery.

First, it is important to define core and periphery in a way that does not prioritise territory. Core and periphery refer to processes of the capitalist world-economy with core processes referring to economic activities adding a large amount of value to a product, paying high wages and, thus, allowing for high levels of consumption (Taylor and Flint, 2000: 20). Peripheral processes refer to the opposite situation – low wages, low consumption and low value added to the product (Ibid.: 20). Thinking of the core and periphery as processes rather than swaths of territory prevents a spatial fetishism and also accommodates a more complex picture of geopolitical conflicts based upon economic inequities. Thinking of core and periphery in this way also illustrates that their relationship to geopolitics depends upon the particular mix of processes and the way this mix interacts with the particular historical context of a state or region. This article emphasises broad patterns based on core and peripheral processes in order to introduce world-systems theory into the analysis of post-modern geopolitics. More detailed case studies would be required to show how they interact with particular geographical contexts.

Thinking of the core and periphery as sets of processes allows for a view of the geopolitics of flowmations rather than relatively static state-centric conflicts, whereby territory and sovereignty are problematised under the weight of flows, networks and webs (Ó Tuathail, 1998). The images offered to us by the commercials are a view of the daily experiences of those employed within the orbit of core processes – a global environment of quick transactions and rapid flows of information, goods and people. The globalisation of these flows has created an environment of interaction between different cultures and practices. A situation in which the global elite must be able to interact with and adjust to different business and societal practices across the globe. To facilitate such business, cultural practices become more hybrid to accommodate innovative and improvisational business imperatives. Rigid cultural identities are incompatible with the dynamic flows that are the result of contemporary core processes that manifest themselves as deterritorialisation.

Hence, we arrive at the geopolitics of laughter – a geopolitics whereby we cannot take ourselves too seriously as we may soon have to throw out established practices and viewpoints to adapt to a new situation. Why be so committed to liberal values of human rights if it will prevent interaction with the Chinese market? In the United States, is the English language so precious in light of the phenomenal potential for Hispanic consumers? The result is a reflexive formation of identity that allows for multiple and rapidly changing identities (Beck, 1998). At the scale of the nation-state, government institutions promote diversity and tolerance. For individuals, dominant institutions no longer define one's identity, instead individuals may define their own identities (Beck, 1998).

However, there is another aspect to the ability to laugh at oneself: a self-assurance provides the confidence for self-depreciating humour. The self-assurance is built upon the knowledge that those within the sphere of core processes are at the vanguard of wealth production in the capitalist world-economy; self-assurance that is built upon the knowledge that the key core economic functions rely upon a market of other core industries rather than interaction with peripheral functions.

Ulrich Beck (1998: 30) foresees the need for a geopolitics of laughing at ourselves. But he sees this as a prescriptive geopolitics intended to ease tensions between the haves and the have-nots. Focusing upon the tribulations of German unification, Beck sees a clash between a new reflexive modernity and the Stalinist vision. To accommodate these two competing visions, Beck prescribes laughing at oneself to prevent a rigid acceptance of either of these modernities.

The geopolitics of laughter that I envision is more hollow and self-serving. It is the laughter of the winners who are arrogant about their

position in the world-economy. Their flexibility is a functional necessity that allows them to operate within diverse cultural settings across the globe. It is a process of laughing at oneself to accommodate other core practices rather than providing conciliation between competing world-views. It is an arrogant laugh that will maintain division rather than Beck's self-deprecating laugh that will foster interaction between core and periphery.

Cultural politics is the manifestation of this geopolitics of laughter. It is a politics that on the one hand will facilitate a view of ethnic mixing and tolerance within the sphere of core processes, but will promote otherness and difference between the core and the periphery. Alternative ideologies, such as communitarianism or Islam will be vilified. Systemic interests in the core will continue to project backwardness, inferiority and danger upon those outside of the core. The geography of this politics occurs at micro and macroscales. US geopolitical discourse refers to the management of global flows on the one hand and a language of threats from 'failed states' on the other (Ó Tuathail, 2000: 171). However, the Post-modern Geopolitical Condition is one where the ideas of 'inside' and 'outside' become blurred creating new security discourses.

The realisation that geopolitics is an expression of core and peripheral processes rather than territorial imperatives explains why dichotomous notions of inside and outside are false. Though core processes dominate in states such as the US, Japan and those in Western Europe, peripheral processes also operate within their boundaries. Hence, fear of the peripheral is an internal and external geopolitics. For example, images of a non-white and dangerous underclass will be a growing political factor within Western nation-states. In addition, an aggressive and uncivilised Southern Hemisphere will be portrayed as something that lies outside the reach of core processes, and hence uncontrollable or rogue (Klare, 1995).

The presence of peripheral processes within the wealthier states has been noted in Sassens's (1991) discussion of economic polarisation in global cities as well in the call for a new post-modern urban geography (Dear and Flusty, 1998). Its geopolitical manifestation is evident in tensions within suburbia, the middle-class refuge of the core countries. The suburbs were always about the need to exclude non-whites and lower classes from the middle class lifestyle (Danielson, 1976). However, contemporary changes in the nature of suburbs (Fishman, 1987) have provoked a new round of politics that attempts to retain suburbia as the residential expression of core processes (McKenzie, 1994; Ray *et al.*, 1997).

What of the geopolitical actions of those in the sphere of peripheral processes? Here we encounter the geopolitics of forgetting, or the 'exclusion of the excluders by the excluded' (Castells, 1997: 9). Both Castells and I refer to a diverse range of political movements (the US militia

movement, Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, and the Zapatistas, for example) who reject specific components of the material and cultural implications of core processes. It is a geopolitics of forgetting in two senses. First, it relates to social groups who are either excluded from (or forgotten by) core processes or are concerned about the onslaught of materialism. Second, the elements of the geopolitical acts are forgetting the contemporary modernity by remembering alternative forms of social organisation.

The geopolitics of forgetting promotes an intolerance and fundamentalism that is the opposite of the cultural hybridity created within the orbit of core processes. The reaction is often territorially based too, with extreme nationalism promoting 'ethnic cleansing' to create pure nation-states – a geopolitical attempt to make the Post-modern Geopolitical Condition an extreme version of the declining modernity. Territory becomes a defensive control to prevent intrusions from the capitalist world-economy, or at least try to deal with these intrusions on the groups own terms. Or in other words, movements of 'counter-modernisation' require a 'constructed certitude' to protect themselves from the dynamics of the world-economy (Beck, 1997: 6). 'Failed states' are, more precisely, those that have failed to develop along the lines of developmentalist ideology. The geopolitics of forgetting is a reflection of the failure of developmentalism and the creation of new ideologies that will 'remember' alternative paths to societal success.

At a time of transition and flux it is wrong to characterise the periphery as merely a venue for violent reaction. A time of hegemonic transition is also a time when the hegemonic promises of developmentalism and its ideological partner orientalism are in decline. Alternative voices such as the World Order Models Project are creating alternative visions of the social and economic organisation of the world (Falk, 1994). In addition, the body of work under the title subaltern studies provides a venue for those who have been portrayed through the eyes of European (core) writers. However, the geopolitics of the identity based movements in the periphery is of primary concern (Castells, 1997). Movements are more concerned about the practicalities of creating identities rather than the academics of deconstructing identities because identity is the basis for political mobilisation (Sherman, 1999). In the context of hegemonic transition, once dominant ideologies, such as developmentalism may be challenged. One manifestation of this challenge is the deconstruction of once dominant meta-narratives. Another manifestation is the construction of new political identities and movements.

Ambivalence to the capitalist world-economy does not restrict the geopolitics of forgetting to peripheral processes. The rise of religious fundamentalism in the US and the impact of Aum Shinrikyo in Japan highlight how some seek shelter from the geopolitics of laughter in more

secure, certain and sober institutions. However, the geopolitics of reorienting 'failed states' is primarily a product of their inability to alter reliance on peripheral processes to a greater involvement with core processes. For some states, the geopolitical answer is to forget the notions of developmentalism and create a geopolitics of forgetting that combines spiritual or emotional attachments to the defence of territory.

Ó Tuathail (2000: 170) notes that there is an ambivalence towards globalisation in what he calls first and second tier states that are undergoing economic transition. From a world-systems perspective, these are semi-peripheral states, those containing a fairly equal balance of core and peripheral processes. The ambivalence is not surprising as some sections of society are in the orbit of core processes and will seek participation on global flows. Other sections of society are in the orbit of peripheral processes and will, therefore, seek refuge from the capitalist world-economy. Domestic politics in semi-peripheral states is likely to be divisive and uncompromising as these two geoeconomic imperatives compete.

Rather than Beck's (1998) vision of a geopolitics of laughing at ourselves to facilitate a fusion of alternative modernities, the geopolitics of the core demands reflexivity to allow for the operation of the core of the world-economy. The rest of the world is creating alternative modernities by forgetting the dictates of the core. The structure of the capitalist world-economy provides a framework for understanding the geographical pattern of flowmations and territoriality. The current trends of globalisation and informationalisation are the most recent expressions of the core processes of the capitalist world-economy. In the orbit of core processes a cultural politics of hybridisation as a functional necessity and fear as a security discourse is developing. In the orbit of peripheral processes a more defensive and, when strategically useful, territorial politics is created by those who are rejecting the tenets of modernity which manifests itself under the broad heading of developmentalism.

Deterritorialisation and Hegemonic Cycles

But why are these tensions occurring now? Ó Tuathail's (2000) discussion of the Post-modern Geopolitical Condition notes the arbitrariness of using the calendar to denote geopolitical changes. However, Ó Tuathail does not offer an alternative metric. World-systems theory provides a temporal metric for analysing geopolitical change through an examination of hegemonic cycles. Hegemony is the dominance of one state in the world-economy through superiority in the economic spheres of production, trade and finance (Wallerstein, 1984a). In addition to this economic base, hegemony is also the product of cultural and institutional innovations that

facilitate the hegemony's expression of power (Arrighi, 1994; Taylor, 1999). The geopolitical processes identified by Ó Tuathail (2000) can be interpreted as manifestations of the final moments of the US hegemonic cycle and the global changes that this entails.

First, other cycles of hegemony have featured a period in which financial transactions have dominated the capitalist world-economy (Arrighi, 1994). After global commodity markets have been saturated, profits are made via speculation and global financial transfers using surplus capital. This is not the expression of the health of the capitalist world-economy but the sign that a particular political organisation of the world-economy has run its course and a new one needs to be created to rescue the world-economy from crisis (Arrighi and Silver, 1999). The deterritorial nature of financial flows in the world-economy is an expression of this period of financialisation. The 'technoterritorial complexes' (Ó Tuathail, 2000: 169) of the contemporary period are, therefore, an expression of the end of a particular hegemonic cycle.

For example, the eclipse of 'space-of-places' of government (Arrighi, 1994) and their challenge by 'spaces-of-flows' has resulted in a growth of international crime and smuggling (Derlugian, 1996). In addition, actual and desired migratory flows across the globe are challenging the ability of states to provide social services and also disrupting group identities (Marden, 1997; Pelizzon and Casparis, 1996). One of the results of these processes is a conflict over the nature of 'security' (Campbell, 1998) and a questioning of the survival of the Westphalian system (Ohmae, 1995). However, interpreting these changes within systemic cycles reduces the transformational implications of the post-modern geopolitical condition. Rather than being the manifestations of a change from the modern/industrial age to a post-modern/informational age, the various manifestations of deterritorialisation are a feature of a hegemonic transition. Past transitions have concluded with the reassertion of 'spaces-of-places' or the territorialisation of politics (Arrighi, 1994).

On the other hand, the second aspect of hegemony suggests that the current transformations of the post-modern geopolitical condition are more fundamental. Hegemonies define particular modernities or social organisations of the capitalist world-economy (Taylor, 1999). Key features of US hegemony were the multinational company and the promise of a utopian mass consumer society.² The promise of US modernity, the American suburban consumer paradise, was unattainable for the vast majority of people in the capitalist world-economy. The functional need for a core-periphery hierarchy and the stress that such levels of consumption would place on the global ecosystem prevented the global diffusion of US modernity (Taylor, 1993). Hence, the promise of developmentalism was a

false one, and so produced the geopolitics of forgetting. The multinational company, as an instrument of American hegemony, fundamentally altered the organisation of the capitalist world-economy by undermining the power of individual states (Agnew, 1998; Taylor, 1993). The flowmations that define the post-modern geopolitical condition are an expression of the new spatial regime that multinational companies ushered in.

The cyclical period of financialisation has intensified a more fundamental shift in the nature of the capitalist world-economy. As American hegemony declines then so does the legitimacy of its most powerful ideology, developmentalism, producing an intellectual context into which the 'many voices' of postmodernism may enter. Related to this discursive development is the change in the geopolitical spaces of the capitalist world-economy, as flows come to dominate spaces. Though flowmations are a feature of hegemonic transitions and may, therefore, be replaced by a reterritorialisation of politics, the nature and form of that reterritorialisation is up for grabs.

Deterritorialisation and the Institutions of the Capitalist World-Economy

But what are these flows and changes that define the post-modern geopolitical condition? In other words, how can we make sense of the political and social changes that drive the change in the 'geo' from spaces to flows? The third contribution that world-systems theory can make to the analysis of contemporary geopolitics is a framework to explain the social processes that underlie deterritorialisation. Globalisation, or the economic fluidity of the current hegemonic transition, has produced an 'erosion of politics' (Kothari, 1997: 229). Kothari's conception of politics is a process of dialogue and compromise that integrates indigenous concerns with technologically driven universal demands. As politics is undermined, the outcome is the exclusion of millions of people, especially the poor in rural and technologically backward regions. What is significant in this analysis is the unstated assumption that politics equals the nation-state, and a decline in state sovereignty results in the end of politics. Modern geopolitics has constrained visions of what politics entails, emphasising intra- and inter-state politics (Agnew, 1998). World-systems theory offers a framework that does not prioritise the state as the venue for politics.

Wallerstein (1984b) identifies four key institutions in the capitalist world-economy; states, 'peoples', classes and households. 'Peoples' are imagined communities created along racial, national and ethnic lines (Balibar, 1990). Modern geopolitics reflected the dominance of one of these institutions, the state. The state was characterised as a 'power container'

because it compartmentalised the politics of classes and peoples (Taylor, 1994). The most efficacious scale for class and identity politics was deemed to be the state rather than alternative scales (Taylor, 1991). For example, state socialism and nationalism became the dominant mobilising calls for class identity and identity politics. Feminism struggled to become part of the political mainstream as it was 'relegated' to the household, a scale of private relationships rather than public discourse.

The territorialisation of modern geopolitics was the political prioritisation of one of the four key institutions, the state. On the other hand, deterritorialisation is the geographical manifestation of new political opportunities. Hegemonic transitions refocus attention upon the 'space-of-flows' of business transactions rather the 'space-of-places' of government (Arrighi, 1994: 23). The flows of economic organisations undermine the state's pivotal role in politics. Class and identity politics can re-evaluate the efficacy of the state as a scale of organisation, and hence the search for new scales of activity and a consequent reterritorialisation of politics. Also, households are redefining the scope of their political activity through problematising the dichotomy of public and private space (Smith *et al.*, 1988).

For example, the promises of state socialism within a capitalist world-economy have been replaced by visions of global organisation transcending state boundaries (Harvey, 2000). Classes redefine themselves in order to maintain status quo in their neighbourhoods (Purcell, 1997) or, in other cases, by seeking transnational organisations (Herod, 1997). Identity is a mixture of economic global responsibilities, national legacies and ethnic ties (Anderson, 2000; Appadurai, 1996). Moreover, new identities that are linked to contemporary interests rather than traditional groups seek dominance (Brunn, 1999). States readjust to these changes in an attempt to retain or renegotiate their power, but change they must.

The change is deterritorialisation. However, the point is that the changing geopolitics is a manifestation of the politics of the institutions of the capitalist world-economy. The scale of politics should not be our initial concern, but the politics themselves. Mackinder was aware of this at the beginning of the age of modern geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, 2000). Our geopolitical imaginations at the beginning of post-modern geopolitics should be grounded in the realisation that the geopolitics of de/reterritorialisation is one of a conflict over the scale and scope of historically persistent concerns. These concerns are witnessed in the political struggle over the control and form of the key institutions.

Our analysis must start with social processes rather than scales and territory (Swyngedouw, 1997). An understanding of the four key institutions of the capitalist world-economy provides a framework to investigate politics of the institutions. A three-fold classification of intra-

institutional politics, inter-institutional politics (i.e. states versus states), and between institutions (i.e. states versus 'peoples') illustrates how the historical legacy and contemporary dynamism of institutional politics interact to define contemporary politics (Taylor and Flint, 2000: 349). Instead of the erosion of politics, globalisation leads to an explosion of politics as new forms of co-operation, antagonism and identity are discovered. The institutions of the state have decreased in relevance, but new scales and territorial forms of activity are being created.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to introduce some components of world-systems theory into the current analysis of geopolitical trends. The benefit of a historical materialist perspective rests in the ability to consider the current changes within a long-term perspective that suggests that similar periods of dynamism have occurred. Such a perspective does not deny the agency of contemporary actors. It does, however, illustrate both the transformational possibilities and limitations of their activity. Also, considering the institutions of the capitalist world-economy as the framework for political activity shows that contemporary changes are based upon established political structures. It is the way that political actors are changing the form of these institutions that creates the flows and new spaces that are the signature of the post modern geopolitical condition.

The geopolitics of laughter and forgetting is the product of the structure of the capitalist world-economy at a particular moment in the path of that historical system. The management of global flows, at a period of the financialisation of the capitalist world-economy, plus the long-term impact of US hegemonic practices, has undermined the power of states. The result is a cultural geopolitics that embraces internationalisation, multiculturalism, or the host of alternative titles that try to manage and make sense of global flows. On the other hand, the decline of US hegemony is also a time when its promises of a particular modernity are tarnished. The path to the 'American Dream' is ruptured and hence its promises are neglected in the geopolitics of forgetting. Alternatively, different ideologies and different institutions are being forged that offer new promises. These promises may be either a desire for a territorially secure state (such as that propagated by extreme right-wing groups in the US) or spiritual rather than economic fulfilment such as that offered by Aum Shinrikyo or Falon Gong.

The Post-modern Geopolitical Condition is a fundamentally different geopolitical terrain. However, the changes are mediated by the structures of the capitalist world-economy. Flowmations are a feature of US hegemony and, therefore, may be replaced over time by a return to a more territorial

form of organisation (Block, 1987). The geographical range of core processes explains the scope of deterritorialisation. Hence, an enduring geopolitical feature will be the desire to manage flows while shielding those that prosper from their operation from those that do not. An emphasis upon processes rather than territory creates the geopolitical realisation that a geopolitics of dehumanising and controlling the periphery occurs at all geographic scales. At the urban scale geopolitics of gated suburbs and policing will separate core from periphery (Dear and Flusty, 1998). Discourses of poverty, crime, and citizenship will determine access to state funds and control of internal 'threats'. Globally rallies against fundamentalism and 'failed states' will co-exist with attempts to manage global economic flows. However, the current situation is not business as usual because of the failure of the promises of US modernity. Instead, new modernities are being created that will lead to a battle over hearts and minds, and the creation of institutions that will compete with states.

Such geopolitical flux will occur in a capitalist world-economy that will somehow try to survive while maintaining an inequitable hierarchy of core and periphery. Of course, others adopting the world-systems perspective believe that the current period of hegemonic decline will usher in the demise of the capitalist world-economy and the creation of a new social system (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1996; Wallerstein, 1999). Such bold claims are beyond the scope of this article. Instead, the current changes in geopolitics have been given historical and geographical context: A context that illustrates both the constraints and opportunities of contemporary geopolitics.

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NOTES

1. Apologies to Milan Kundera.
2. Hegemony is best thought of, in theory and in practice, as a process. Hence, the role of the multinational company in American hegemony begins with Ford's innovations at the beginning of the twentieth century that established global dominance in the sphere of production (Hugill, 1993). At the end of the twentieth century the form and role of the multinational company had developed into institutionalised practices that undermined the system of territorial states and, hence, the ability of one state to be hegemonic (Agnew, 1993; Taylor, 1993).