THEORETICAL PROBLEMS OF POLITICS

SPATIAL IMAGINATION IN POLITICS: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF PHANTOM BORDERS AND IMAGINARY TERRITORIES

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Abstract

This article examines the role of 'phantom' and 'imaginary' spaces in shaping sociopolitical and geopolitical landscapes, particularly in Eastern Europe. These phantom borders, often tracing historical frontiers from former empires, continue to influence regional identities, political mobilization, and conflict dynamics. The concept that space defines us as much as we define it is particularly evident, as phantom spaces provide a basis for political action and identity formation. In today's political processes, 'images,' 'representations,' and 'mental constructs' play essential roles in mobilizing social groups and supporting geopolitical ambitions. Phantom borders serve not only as psychological anchors that maintain historical identities but also as tools for political actors to reshape territories and foster cross-border cooperation. With the growth of virtual dimensions of political space, including informational and mental realms, imaginary borders now function as frameworks for political action.

Approaches to studying these borders reveal how they affect identity, acting as 'scars of history' that maintain past identities or serve as arenas for ideological and geopolitical competition. By linking regional loyalties to the state, promoting nationalism, and reinforcing sovereignty, these borders influence political landscapes, from voter preferences to narratives within memorial policies.

In Eastern Europe, the establishment of cross-border regions, such as Euroregions, illustrates how phantom spaces pragmatically contribute to structuring identity and governance. This multidimensional understanding of space, blending tangible and imagined elements, highlights the complexity of modern political space, where virtual and symbolic dimensions intersect with physical borders, creating new layers of political reality.

Keywords: phantom borders, geopolitics, center-periphery systems, political space, region, political process, Eastern European countries, memorial policy.

Introduction

In political and anthropological research, imaginary and 'phantom spaces', as well as 'phantom states' (Byman & King, 2012), are addressed due to their 'activity' in socio-political and geopolitical processes. In the context of geopolitical rethinking, 'phantom spaces' can denote territories that hold a conditional or symbolic status in the public imagination but at the same time retain cultural, historical, or political significance. These spaces typically exist in the form of myths, memories, collective traumas, or idealized concepts and therefore demand 'reconstruction' as part of the process of national memory and identity.

In geopolitical discourse, phantom spaces often become objects of speculation, symbolic returns, and use in political rhetoric, which contributes to the formation of narratives about 'lost' or 'historic' territories that supposedly need to be 'restored' or 'returned.' This process can lead to discussions about historical justice, national identity, and sovereignty. In the context of historical reconstruction, such phantom spaces can serve as material for reconstructing collective memory, where architectural, cultural, or natural landscapes are restored or recreated to reinforce national narratives. For example, the preservation and restoration of symbolic objects representing 'phantom space' become a means of materializing the past, which serves as a tool for contemporary geopolitical goals and a stimulus for reinforcing national memory and ideological heritage. The problem of 'phantom spaces' is addressed by authors in the context of 'phantom geographies' and 'phantom borders.' The terminology itself serves as a heuristic tool in theoretical debates on regional division (Von Hirschhausen von, 2017, p. 106). Phantom borders manifest themselves in the mobilization of local groups, strengthening or changing their identity, so the study of such borders and the territories adjacent to them serves the tasks of conflict prevention and peaceful resolution. In politics and social processes, the role of such phenomena as *'images', 'representations', 'mental constructions'* has significantly increased. These concepts are used when it comes to mobilizing groups, constructing identities, or the phenomena of image geography. In addition, the *'image'* is analyzed as a tool in critical geopolitics. The main concern of this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between territorial identity and borders. The perceived, recognized, legitimate 'image of the territory' functioning in the social space is first of all a *condition of* the population's *loyalty* to the current government; *patriotism* with all its attributes: sacrifice, collectivism, etatism; the *integrity of the national structure*, in the sense of securing the right to sovereignty and the development of the space for the realization of national interest – 'living space' and geopolitical ambitions.

Defining 'inviolability of borders' as one of the fundamental principles of the modern international order, we nevertheless know from the course of political geography that: on the one hand, there is nothing more mobile and disputable in political space than political borders; on the other hand, assessing the existing *limits of* political relations, cultural influences, geopolitical interests, perceived images of spaces, political actors, it can be stated that borders are stronger than the most community and *non-community*.

At the end of the 1970s, Columbia University professor Edward Said in his work 'Orientalism' used the notions of '*imaginary borders' and 'imaginary geography',* referring to a specific social perception of space formed through images, meanings, texts, and discourses (Said, 1979).

The very notion of 'phantom' borders is inseparable from the 'phantom spaces' they define. Interestingly, while exploring the origins of phantom borders in Eastern Europe, the authors of the collective work 'Phantom Borders: Spaces and Players in Historical Time. A New Reading', published in 2015 under the editorship of Beatrice von Hirschhausen, note that despite the cross-border interconnection of people and places, former territorial borders (the borders of the Habsburg, Prussian, Russian, and Ottoman empires) continue to shape the societies of Eastern and Southeastern Europe to this day (Von Hirschhausen, 2017, p. 107). In general, phantom spaces are primarily a phenomenon of cross-border systems. All former imperial frontiers are dynamic phenomena, and their state affiliation depends on a particular geopolitical order. A stable connection between actual cultural borders and phantom spaces is demonstrated by the spaces of Eastern Europe, which are situationally manifested in socio-political behavior and choices.

Mental boundaries rarely become the object of analysis in political science, although they are presented as an element of socio-political development in the works of authors who have created extensive analyses of political processes on the principle of identifying the so-called 'long series of development': for example, Immanuel Wallerstein (1995), Stein Rokkan (1975).

The main approaches in the study of phantom boundaries were outlined by Vladimir Kolosov (2018). The author distinguishes: 1) *historical-morphological approach* – focused on the study of the origin of the border, changes in its configuration and correlation with other borders (natural, ethnocultural, and administrative); 2) *structural-functional* approach – involves the study of changes in the functions and regime of the border, their strengthening and weakening in different historical periods. According to the theory of social cleavages – 'cleavages' of Stein Rokkan and Seymour Lipset, the territories outside the imaginary borders are elements of the center-periphery systems (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967); 3) *geopolitical approach (critical geopolitics)* – oriented towards the study of the possibilities of phantom, mental boundaries to influence the processes of constructing political spaces (Maslov, 2014). The practice of analyzing physical space, as a result of social construction was proposed in the works of John Agnew (1992), Simon Delby (1996), and Gerard O'Toal (1998). The efficacy of this approach is confirmed by the current state of the political space as manifested in competing cartographies.

Methodology

It is important that this process was made possible through the use of different approaches: normative, structural, and mental-semiotic. Analyzing the ways of manifestation and fixation of political space reveals its multidimensional forms and contradictory features, which are manifested as key manifestations in the cartographic scheme. On the one hand, on the political map, *borders* are the manifestation of policies to ensure the security of states; on the other hand, the *flows of* financial and industrial activity destroy the state monopoly on borders and social resources; at the same time, contemporary political space consists of a multitude of *coexisting social realities*, virtual, visualized spaces that have lost or have not yet realized their political subjectivity.

Modern forms of political space delimitation depend on various changes in the characterization of the main positions: 1) there is a transformation in the structure of active *political actors* (small and local groups with multiple identities are becoming capable, active transnational network social systems are being formed, national cross-border systems are being modeled); 2) the *conditions of mobilization of social groups* are **changing** (structures of social space outside/beyond the state and its institutions are being formalized), and 2) there is a **change in the** structure of the political space. This process involves the use of phantom, imaginary borders in the process of argumentation of motives for political decisions, in the construction of the memorial process and national history ('revival', 'remembering,' 'unification,' 'return'); in the formation of the space for effective economy (in the form of projects 'open/transparent borders,' 'economic zones' and 'cross-border corridors,' etc.).

Thus, the process of polymorphisation of modern socio-political space, which includes phantom and imaginary spaces, becomes objective.

The definition of value, significance, and functionality of different spaces is formed based on alternative paradigms: any past is negative, as the future is progressive, or any future is the loss of original values, their transformation, and distortion. In turn, the spiritualization of space (*temporal*, social, or territorial), drawing an analogy with the human body leads to an emotional evaluation of the processes of secession, separation, autonomization, regionalization as *'amputation'*, dysfunctionality or, as restoration of integrity – expansion of functionality.

Phantom spaces manifest themselves in two formats: 1) as 'scars of history' – cultural and political spaces that have lost institutionalization, but at the same time demonstrate actual identities that influence the structuring of space*;* 2) as constructed 'imaginary spaces' within border and cross-border spaces. In the first case – phantom borders act as a psychological shock absorber, allowing the old regional and national identity to work until the new one acquires social functionality. In the second case – phantom borders act as a technological tool in the situation of political restructuring of space, as evidenced by the projects of constructing network diasporas in border areas, which are implemented by all Eastern European countries. Let us elaborate on the characteristics of each of the forms.

A Variant in which the Imaginary Space Demonstrates a Lost/Non-Existent Configuration

In this case, the contours of the territory act as a brand or symbol of the country, becoming an element of identity, and forming feelings of stability and pride. However, it is known that *social representations* of territory often do not coincide with legitimate political boundaries and encompass spaces that may have been lost as a result of political transformations. The imagined space of territory in these cases exhibits a non-existent configuration. Do the 'European World', 'Turkic World', 'Russian World', 'Polonia' or 'united Balkans' exist within clear boundaries, or are these spaces shaped by political technologies? In all these cases, how *the region is imagined* has no clear explanation, although historical narratives insist that 'the boundaries of the region they have chosen are 'natural' and not the product of their own or politicians' borrowed spatial imagination.'

Such images can: 1) reflect nostalgic sentiments or act as a means of supporting geopolitical ideas of 'return of lost' or 'occupied' territories. The display of old borders on the national map – as a manifestation of 'cartographic concern' or even a form of 'semantic aggression' – is, in fact, a statement about the desirability of revenge (Billé, 2013); 2) be reflected in the cultural landscape (preservation of previous social practices that predetermine modern forms of social activity; use of culturally specific economic forms, local forms of historical memory, specific ritual forms, etc.). Imaginary boundaries influence the everyday life of residents, they manifest themselves in the choice of language of communication, the choice of a child's name, the celebration of religious holidays, and the honoring of memorable and historical dates. Old boundaries are transformed into imaginary ones and get a new life in the form of symbolic manifestations (Demski, 2015); 3) are manifested in socio-political and electoral behavior or other forms of socio-political

preferences and activity.

Such centuries-old splits in the form of polysemantic systems are described in detailed models of historical and ethnographic character and become the subject of analyses in works on social and political anthropology. Previous social practices and experiences act as indicators of actual spatial features. This thesis is used in the theory of 'social action' by Robert Putnam (1994), Todd Miller (2014).

The processes of space structuring demonstrate the practice of using phantom images of *divided spaces* to create new forms of institutionalization. The subjects of regional cross-border practices are both sub-national regions legitimized by the administrative-territorial division of the country and regions formed as a result of cross-border cooperation and integration of divided spaces.

For example, the first Euroregions were the spaces of 'Nestos-Mesta' and 'Struma-Streamon.' Created in the late 90s (1997) on the Greek-Bulgarian border, they were oriented to promote economic development, and *to restore the integration of related spaces (!)* by bringing together local groups, public, and non-governmental organizations within historical Macedonia.

It is known that organizations of modern Euroregions often aim at cross-border systems in competitive/buffer spaces, taking into account their civilizational or historical-political affinity. Here, historical and cultural specificity acts as a stabilizing factor for the new territorial system. This is evidenced by cross-border systems formed within stable competitive spaces of buffer type, such as: 'Silesia' (territories of Poland and the Czech Republic), 'Western Pannonia' (territories of Austria and Hungary), 'Lower Danube' (territories of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine), 'Carpathians' (territories of Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine), 'Adriatic' (territories of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro and Slovenia), 'Pomerania' (territories of Denmark, Germany, Poland, Sweden), 'TriRenes' (territories of Germany, France, Switzerland) 'Dobrawa' (territories of Poland and the Czech Republic), 'Tirol – Trentino – Alto – Adige' (territories of Austria and Italy), and several others.

It is important to consider that such cross-border spaces leverage 'latent (phantom-imagined) regional identities' to intensify the process of creating 'partnership networks' by utilizing existing local social ties. The term 'latent (phantom-imagined) regional identities' refers to underlying or dormant regional identities that may not be immediately visible or actively expressed but still hold a subtle influence within a community or cross-border area. These identities are often based on shared historical, cultural, or social elements that linger despite changes in political borders or formal administrative divisions. The 'phantom' aspect suggests that these identities may be more imagined or symbolic rather than overtly recognized, yet they still contribute to a sense of regional belonging and can be activated to support cross-border cooperation or community-building initiatives.

In the context of cross-border spaces, these latent identities can play a crucial role in fostering 'partnership networks' by drawing on the shared cultural memory and social ties that bridge formal boundaries. This makes them a valuable asset for initiatives aiming to strengthen collaboration and utilize the existing local ties across regions.

The Euroregional movement has become so strong that, for example, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary have formed, respectively, 13, 15, and 16 Euroregions on their borders, which cover all contact border areas. The same process of forming Euroregions on the border spaces since 1958 can be traced to the German borders.

Indeed, the phantoms of past frontiers are manifested in political culture and social relations, and the inhabitants of such spaces are characterized by a strong ethnic identity, which allows them to maintain a positive self-image in the face of unstable national-political identities. Their shared everyday life and social practices create conditions for the group's local identity. Local spaces are constituted by social functions, political mobilization, and institutions. Examples of the connection between local regional identity and ethno-cultural component are the history of the 'colonists' of Bessarabia, the Sekei in Transylvania, the German colonists in Austria (Danube Swabians), and others.

On the other hand, the polymorphism of spaces, which for empires play the role of *living space* or *'crescents,'* is caused by the formation of adaptation mechanisms of local groups, which create for themselves a hybrid identity within the framework of cultural and neighboring communities. Each time a group is drawn into the orbit of new political structures, there is a *'serialization' of social institutions and cultures.* Localities acquiring new characteristics are included in a new system of coordinates, and adapt the normative order to new conditions.

The process of space restructuring always leads to conflicts, having to do with the distribution of power and resources and defining a *reference group* for the implementation of public policy. This idea is confirmed

by the fact that in stable buffer border regions, which acted as fronts of great empires, the status of the reference group (*titular* group) is always situational and depends on the current political center. Thus, for example, in Bukovina the status of titular people in different periods belonged alternately to Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, and Ukrainians; in Transcarpathia – to Hungarians, Russians, and Ukrainians; in Transylvania – to Hungarians, Austrians, Romanians; in Bessarabia – to Greeks, Turks, Russians, Romanians, Ukrainians. Therefore, such territories often become the *arena of memorial wars*, the place where different *images of space* clash.

The past acts as an argument for social behavior and political decision-making, hence, in most cases, actors operating in the sociopolitical space appeal to historical arguments to legitimize contemporary political practice. Thus, in Bessarabia, Turkey appeals to the history of Turkic peoples and supports the thesis of 'Khan's Ukraine,' while Romania refers to the history of the Dacians and calls these lands 'occupied'; in Silesia, Poland appeals to the Slavic history of the region and calls them 'returned lands,' while Germany officially called these territories 'the eastern regions of Germany under foreign administration' until 1990.

The variability of the identification process in the borderland is conditioned, on the one hand, by political and social practices that create the reality of the border system and, on the other hand, by the means of interpretation of events and phenomena that manifest themselves in spatial myths, images, and representations. David Newman noted that there is a dialectical relationship between borders and identity, which is not lost with the loss of institutionalized borders (Newman, 2006).

Phantom and imaginary borders are borders that have been institutionally eliminated but continue to structure space, they are manifestations of actual identities.

A Variant in which the Imagined Space Represents the Constructed Regional System

Let us analyze the ability of phantom and imaginary borders to function as a technological tool during the political restructuring of space.

Firstly, the political meaning of regional identity may not have deep historical roots and may be the result of the purposeful activity of elites who create *conditions* for the action of public institutions, and movements, build a regional structure, and create conditions for the cleavage of space. We are talking about commemorative practices that change the value and meaning of the historical narrative, socio-cultural patronage, infrastructural projects that determine the intensity of connections within the spatial system, and socio-political institutionalization. For example, there are known projects of political formations, situationally emerging in such spaces: Dobrujan Principality (IV century); Shipin Land (XIII-XV centuries); Republic of Banat (early twentieth century); Independent Government of Western Thrace – Gumurjinska Respublika (early twentieth century); Bessarabian Republic (twentieth century).

It is important to note that all forms of quasi-state autonomist projects are based on phantom forms of spatial identity, which, as social constructs, include a geopolitical component that determines the territory's position within the international system of relations. Examples include the spaces formed from the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union, as well as the ongoing processes of territorial fragmentation in modern Ukraine.

Secondly, phantom borders often reflect parts of historical frontiers that are integral to the formation of the state territories of Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Lithuania. In these cases, the memory of a 'golden age' and the historical role of the nation being constructed have significant importance, leading to a process of 'collective appropriation of antiquity.' According to Viktor Schnirelman, the more glorious and majestic the past appears, the easier it is to rally people around their cultural heritage, unite various groups, and establish a common national identity (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 7).

Thus, the pan-Turkic ideology includes the colonized (developed) territories of the Black Sea region and Bessarabia in the 'Turkic arc'. Poland associates parts of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania with the 'eastern Kresy' (Rykaia, 2013). The concept of 'Kresy' in Polish historiography refers primarily to unintegrated borderlands that remain outside the control of the state or are the subject of rivalry between internal and external forces. As defined by Marek Koter, such areas 'are marked by a lack of regular state services, domination of military forms of political life, unsafety and instability, and quite often with banditry. The network of communities resembles more a set of atomised defensive posts than a normal dispersed settlement. Although there are some enclaves of state power within such land, nevertheless the control they exercise over colonised areas is hardly effective' (Koter, 2001, p. 134).

In the German Empire in the early Middle Ages, the concept of 'marches' appeared to designate the frontiers to be developed. After colonization by German settlers, some marches turned into autonomous

states (the Meissen Marshes became Saxony, and the Northern and New Marshes became Brandenburg)'. For Russia such spaces were the Black Sea coast, Siberia, Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia; for Sweden – Lapland and Finland; for Austria – territories of Slavic countries (Czechia, Silesia, and the Balkans; for Hungary – Slovakia, Transcarpathia, Transylvania, and Croatia.

Thirdly, contemporary processes of geopolitical construction within the cross-border spaces of Eastern Europe have become part of the foreign policies of modern states. The social order in the borderlands of competing states has become the object of application of socio-cultural, memorial, and demographic policies that aim to expand the system of political action.

Such processes show that the space of political action has lost its unambiguous territorial dimension: it has become virtualized, the moved into the informational and mental sphere, where images of territory and phantom spaces become a feature of political action; in addition, space has become the result of political management, political constructivism. Thus, integration policies oriented towards the incorporation of cross-border peripheries come from the position of *constructivism*. This process implies a change in the conceptual explanation of the notions of national sovereignty and national interest.

The strategies of states are based on the concept of 'expansion', realised through the creation of conditions of political influence on the population of regions or provide for the transformation of national doctrines (as in Bulgaria (Natsyonalna stratehyia, 2014), Romania (Strategiei naționale, 2017), Poland (Priorytety polskiej, 2012), Hungary (Policy for Hungarian, 2013), Slovakia (Koncepcia štátnej politiky, 2015), which aim to cover the spaces of state and national interest. The implementation of updated national doctrines everywhere implied the construction of the 'image of the territory' as a new reality in diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

The first, *diachronic*, involves working with memory *(commemorative practices and memorial strategies of political actors).* There is a search for historical arguments for political actions in the present. The *memorial industry* determines the logic of identification processes in local border groups, given that cultural and social identities are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The second, *synchronous* dimension – involves the formation of *conditions* for the population's loyalty to the center/authority through social programs: in education *(creating an environment of loyal intellectuals, fostering patriotism); in the* social and domestic sphere *(investments in infrastructure projects that should provide a link to the potential center);* in the information sphere *(semiotic wars, secondary coding of cultural symbols, commemorations);* in the sphere of political relations *(bipartisanship and multiple citizenships as a result of the overlapping spaces).*

Emerging new social connections serve as a way to materialize the region. The state 'enters' or 'returns' to regional structures as a beneficiary and active participant. Various investment approaches enable the formation of social ties and position the state as a long-term economic player, and social and cultural patron, actively 'constructing' the region in line with its geopolitical interests.

Such border spaces, under certain conditions, begin to play the role of communication hubs, creating an illusion of concentrated power and political interest for several potential stakeholders.

Analyzing the space as a 'part' of former empires brings attention to visible stratifications (cleavages) embedded by former borders into the regional structure.

Additionally, the process of constructing a 'new reality' implies the enactment of (de)constructive memory policies. Advocates of new memorial strategies propose alternative ways of interpreting both past and present.

The most common method of (de)construction involves memorial conflicts, which manifest themselves in the following forms: 1) conflicts of memorial strategies, creating alternative versions of history in the format of 'copies without an original' (a term by Jean Baudrillard); 2) using elements of augmented reality in the post-truth era (fake news, disinformation); 3) the memorial industry, including memorial legislation (declarations of official assessments of historical and political events); 4) the criminalization of alternative interpretations of historical events (a practice implemented in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine) (Koch, 2018).

The second method is the utilitarian use of historical narratives in politics, law, and ideology. This involves creating a 'projection of the present into the past' and promoting the idea of a 'positive' national image, which, according to Michael Stürmer, advisor to Helmut Kohl, can reshape the evaluation of historical events and provide conditions for legitimizing authority. Indeed, the debate over the permissibility of such methods in policy gave rise to 'political history.'

A positive national image has also been linked to the process of space homogenization, transforming it into a cohesive, loyal society capable of mobilizing around the ruling elite.

The third method involves creating a situation of semiotic confusion – constructing 'new meanings' and 'convenient truths' to serve political interests. Interpretation, emphasis, and reconstruction thereby become mechanisms of commemoration.

The fourth method involves post-imperial geopolitical revanchism projects through 'soft power.' The implementation of this method of memory (de)construction aims to justify active policies toward 'compatriots' and ethnic 'kin.' These include a broad, cross-border interpretation of the concept of 'nation,' expanding the meaning of terms like 'related peoples' and 'compatriots' (the populations of border regions are viewed as "lost" and considered a resource for development).

The multidimensionality of the sociocultural space in Eastern Europe and its capacity to absorb neighboring regional spaces make it intrinsically transboundary. Geopolitical construction using 'constructed,' 'revived,' and 'multiple' identities in buffer border areas has become part of the foreign policies of Eastern European states. The integration strategies of states interacting within this space further reinforce the 'buffer' and peripheral characteristics of these territories.

Conclusions

Thus, phantom borders are a complex phenomenon that impacts social, cultural, and political processes. These borders: 1) *explain the connection* between cultural spaces and contemporary social processes; 2) *serve as a resource* for strengthening or constructing territorial identity; 3) *act as a platform for mobilizing local groups*, reinforcing or altering their identities; 4) are convenient for use as *internal administrative boundaries*; 5) shape the territorial structure of political preferences and electoral behavior, often *becoming targets of the gerrymandering electoral strategy*; 6) *elucidate the interaction* between spatial perception, spatial experience, and modern spatial design. All forms of regional imagination continue to coexist, seeking a new synthesis between the general and the specific.

The significant impact of phantom and imaginary spaces on socio-political and geopolitical processes, especially within Eastern Europe, is obvious. Although these spaces often lack physical representation, they continue to shape political landscapes, embedding historical identity, cultural memory, and regional loyalties. Phantom borders serve both as tools for political actors and as frameworks within which local and national identities can be constructed and mobilized, reinforcing a sense of territorial identity and supporting state sovereignty.

The use of phantom spaces allows for flexible political actions, whether through cultivating loyalty, promoting nationalism, or influencing electoral behavior. These borders act as a mechanism for peaceful conflict resolution and identity strengthening, offering a means of managing socio-political differences between regions.

In addition, the virtualization of political space, where imaginary borders play an active role, emphasizes the complexity of contemporary geopolitical landscapes. The overlay of symbolic, virtual, and physical dimensions in the political space results in a new form of multidimensionality that accommodates both traditional and new forms of political influence. Such an understanding emphasizes the need for a nuanced approach to political geography, one that takes into account not only territorial realities, but also socio-cultural and ideological forces operating in these 'phantom' territories.

Conflict of Interest. None.

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