

SPACE AND SPATIALITY: PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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ABSTRACT

The term space and spatiality are increasingly being used in social science research. The most formidable way of analysing the relationship between human beings and space, however, is through the understanding of the process of reconstruction and reproduction of the latter. There is definite links among all de- and re-territorialised production and human-resource complexes of the present time with the innumerable struggles being organised at different scales against the process of 'creative destruction' promoted and executed by neoliberal state and global capitalism.

Introduction

In current time, an increasing number of researches in social science are found to use 'space' and 'spatiality' as key theoretical constructs to articulate the link between social and political theories, between State and people and issues of their everyday life. The understanding of 'space' as a material, social and political construct, for the same reason, has become significant in current discourses focusing inter alia on neo-imperialist strategies and control of world regions and resources. Several researches are found to have taken up issues on uneven development, globalisation and geopolitics to explain the problematic of state, space and territoriality. The need for a socio-spatial approach in understanding the present-day social and political processes hence is not only important for the analysis of the changing forms of nation-states and global capital, but also for reflecting on the ways people are organising their lives, livelihoods and struggles against given power structures.

Understanding the spatial ontology of socio-political processes (Soja, 1989) is, however, a complex issue. After having written on space and spatiality for years, Harvey (2006b) states that 'space', included in the updated version of William's (1985) keywords, should simultaneously have an identity of 'one of the most complicated words' with variegated use (Banerjee-Guha, 1997; Brenner, 1999; Harvey, 2006a), positioned in diverse regional conjectures.

Although illusions of time and time-related analysis had dominated social science disciplines for long, in the second half of the twentieth century, in debates relating to complex issues of capitalism, racism, ethnicity, gender, inequality or social justice, significance of space and spatiality started showing up. During the same time, old ideas of 'space' as fixed and undialectical and time as dynamic and fecund faced serious challenge (Foucault, 1980). Society and space started getting juxtaposed to each other with an imperative

to embed space in critical social theory. It culminated into a critical understanding of space with a bearing on its dynamics of production and reproduction that ushered in almost a philosophical revolution foretelling the ontology of spatiality and space-society integration (Banerjee-Guha, 2011a).

Space can be seen as absolute, relative or relational or all together, depending on the ongoing socio-economic, political process. There is no ontological answer to the question on the nature of space (Harvey, 2006b); the answer essentially lies in human practice. The most formidable way of analysing the relationship between human beings and space, however, is through the understanding of the process of reconstruction and reproduction of the latter. Take the example of making of Special Economic Zones in India in current times. Several absolute spaces of agriculture or forest lands that had long remained objects of imagination and material practices of communities, have suddenly got exposed to a process of contrasting imagination constructed by the State through projects of neoliberal capitalist territorialisation. A fusion is found to have occurred between the quest of capital for individual advantages and the state imperative towards augmentation of power of its territory vis-à-vis other territories in the emerging neoliberal framework of 'competition' that has gone to use the inherent instability of regional structures leading to space-specific devalorisation of selected spaces and their subsequent reconstruction. Buttressed by institutional rationality, the capitalist and statist logics in the above cases of space reconstruction are found to have over-extended themselves to subjugate the indigenous discourses that

had emerged from the organic practices from below. The inherent contradictions that generate therefrom are getting expressed through 'epistemic violence' leading to discontinuity (Ahmed, 2009) of the absolute space and the local community. The primary / absolute space of private or communal property in such situations, located in different regional settings and bounded by various territorial designations, functions as absolute (representing regionality and differential property relations), relative and relational (representing a more continuous surface suited to the operation of capital) - all three together, in dialectical tension and in interplay between each other (Banerjee-Guha, 2009). It suggests that social processes are constructed according to the spatiality of factors, involving complexities of politics and history that permeate aspects of everyday life, moulding the contours and topologies of dynamic spaces that again (re)produce subjective imaginations about spatiality through interactions as well as encounters (Jazeel and Brun, 2009). The diversified aspects of 'the spatial', in tandem, become extremely important in the construction, functioning and reproduction of society, polity and economy, engulfing the daily life practices of individuals located at diverse situations. Spatialising politics (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995) and political economy thus becomes intensely material, unfolding the relationships between spatialities, peoples, institutions and the lived praxis that involve not only one territory, but a highly differentiated and varied geography with many spatialities through which nation-states are contested and controlled. The relative spaces of brutality and torture opened up by the US since the second half of the 20th century in several regions especially Iraq in

recent time are beset with the imagination of a new empire and its desire to subjugate the historical spatiality of several absolute spaces (Chomsky, 2007) for the purpose of controlling world's crucial resources and strategic regions. Pentagon's announcement in 2010 of converting Afghanistan into a prosperous global mining region with Afghanistan's lithium reserve worth \$ 1 trillion, is again a covert expression of the geo-political ambition of a hegemonic power to control an absolute space having a rare resource. Similarly, global capital's increasing use of cheap labour in discrete locations of several countries, outsourcing services and production in locations far and near, is again a reflection of capitalist accumulation strategy of using elements (labour power) of comparatively poorer absolute spaces for reaping profit, converting them in the process in relative space of global manufacturing. Back home, the fast track global mining in mineral-rich backward regions in different parts of the country - displacing and dispossessing locals, goes to reflect the imagination of neo-liberal state and capital on controlling absolute spaces of local communities through various forms of power and governance. The spaces of absolute poverty in such cases remain unchanged but simultaneously they become relative spaces of exploitation; they remain calculable, measurable, exploitable on the basis of their identity of underdevelopment, but also stand to be negotiated, depending upon the spatiality of struggles of the exploited groups.

Tension and conflict (Lefebvre, 1974) associated with the above processes may give rise to social movements aiming at liberating spaces (Harvey, 2006b) from domination. From Dantewada to Chhattisgarh, Orissa,

Jharkhand, Lalgarh, right up to Jammu and Kashmir and the North-east and in many other places in India and outside, definite patterns of praxis of resistance are becoming an integral part of the socio-spatial dialectic of all these regions. Since place is the arena where social structure and social relations interact, the above praxis evolve as meta-narratives of resistance of diverse absolute spaces that go to materialise as relational spaces of confrontation and challenge against numerous forms of power. Underlying spatialities one thus finds the material framework of social relations and discursive methodologies of the commons taking shape according to the emerging processes.

Production and Reproduction of Space

Although Marx did not explicate the use-value of space in a systematic manner, he did discuss the differential labour power varying over space and time. The last 100 years of capitalist development have essentially involved the production and reproduction of space at an unprecedented scale that have got reflected in the drastic redrawing of economic and political boundaries, based on newer global political economic relations and divergent use of labour. Grandiose phrases like the 'shrinking of the world' or 'global village' thus need to be understood in the light of the specific necessity of a mode of production based on the relation between capital and labour expressing a time-space compression (Harvey, 1982). The latter, a globalisation project of all times, primarily concerns the goal of equalisation of profit with unhindered movement of goods, services, technology and selective labour-power for the need of a constantly expanding market that essentially represents

a leveling of the globe, exacting equality in the conditions of the exploitation of labour (Marx, 1967, edn.) in every sphere of production. It projects a one-dimensional geography of sameness in which essentially all facets of human experiences are degraded and equalised downward (Smith, 1986), hiding the fact that the premise of this equalisation rests on a strategy of dividing relative space into many absolute spaces of differential development (Banerjee-Guha, 2009), all tuned to the requirement of capital. Hence, poor, backward regions and modern territorial production complexes become equally important components of a global framework. Brenner (1999) argues that the current round of globalisation has significantly reconfigured the inherited model of territorially self-enclosed societies and brought in new modes of analysis that do not naturalise the territoriality of state, but focus on a variety of heterodox and interdisciplinary methodologies, challenging the rigidity of the nation-state and its social imaginations. It is important to mention, however, that in spite of large-scale transcendence of state-centric configuration by the new capitalist territorial organisations in recent times, at both sub- and supra-national geographical scales, it has not in any ways entailed irrelevance of the state as a major focus of social power; rather it has generated a rethinking of the transformed role of the state from a provider to a condescending player of diversified global operations.

Formation of a transnationally operated space by global capital within the boundaries of the nation-state in the contemporary era has to be considered in the light of the above. Consequently, globalisation needs to be theorised as a reconfiguration of

superimposed social spaces that operates on multiple geographical scales. Striking an integral accord with regional attributes of various space economies, capital in the current time is interconnecting societies and economies of a large number of nation-states within the network of an anomalously developed interdependence involving not only space-specific production processes, but, more importantly, the dynamics of political economy and social relations. Instead of eliminating absolute space – which anyways is not its agenda – global capital (Banerjee-Guha, 2008) creates and recreates innumerable absolute spaces as a part of a largely produced framework of relative space (Smith, 1984) by building, fragmenting and carving out newer spatial configurations with specific human practice and circumstances (Harvey, 2006b). This leads to ‘annihilation of space by time’ – a drive famously described by Marx (1973 edn.) as capital’s globalising dynamic – abolishing all spatial barriers to capital’s accumulation process, in search of cheaper raw materials, fresh sources of labour power, new markets and new investment opportunities, to essentially create disintegration of space and marginalisation of peoples going by the disparate levels of development in respective regions. The spatiality of the above process is further shaped by the geographies of cultural forms and practices of countries and regions and hence may vary from one spatial framework to the other (Banerjee-Guha, 2002). In this sense, globalisation emerges as both spatial and temporal: spatial - featuring continual expansion or restructuring of capitalist territorial organisation, and temporal - featuring continual acceleration of capital’s socially average turn-over time.

Understanding the significance of space in the post-Fordist era, however, requires a deeper deconstruction and reconstruction of social theories. This is especially because the strategy of post-Fordist flexible accumulation has ushered in a more intense phase of time-space compression having a disorienting impact on the entire gamut of political, economic and social practices. It can be viewed as one 'moment' that continually molds, differentiates, deconstructs and reworks capitalism's geographical landscape although its acceleration, both temporally and spatially, can only be achieved through the production of relatively fixed and immobile configurations of territorial organisations. One must note that the current process of restructuring space, a double-edged one that on the one hand allows free movement of capital, goods and commodities, and limited movement of labour (power) on the other, entails a dialectical interplay between the endemic drive towards space-time compression (the moment of deterritorialisation) and the continual production of relatively fixed, stabilised configurations of territorial organisation on multiple geographical scales (the moment of reterritorialisation). Profit rates in this way are equalised internationally by competition while wages are not. As workers of different countries are not equally mobile, they are not in competition with each other that leads to variations in national level wages between one country and the other. *In situ* these workers (remaining in the moment of reterritorialisation) are, however, incorporated in the network of capital's international economic operation underpinning the construction of contemporary capitalist spatiality. In the present time, the Chinese State's making

use of its own uneven development through the exploitation of its incredibly low-wage labour as a competitive edge over other countries and becoming a vociferous partner in facilitating the expansion of global capital is a pertinent example.

Emergent Spaces of Communication Flow

Following the above line of analysis, the new communication system warrants attention. It has radically transformed space and time and the fundamental dimensions of human life. Localities have become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographic meaning to be reintegrated into functional networks inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the spaces of places. The emergent space of flow and timeless time that capitalism produces marginalising biological time and division between hours of work and leisure, has become the material foundation of a new work culture that supersedes the diversity of historically transmitted systems and goes to establish 'make-believe' as belief (Castells, 1989). It suggests that the deployment of the functional logic of power-holding organisations do not depend on the characteristics of any specific locale. Following the above, the new industrial space and the service economy organise their operations around the dynamics of communication flows connecting their multiple functions between disparate spaces assigned with specific tasks. The overall process is reintegrated through the emerging communication system. The new professional-managerial class colonises exclusive spatial segments that connect with one another locally, regionally, nationally and also internationally. In the process, the segments get isolated from the fragments of local societies and

subsequently get destroyed through the process of the above reorganisation altering working and leisure time significantly. The new capitalist seamless time and the new international economy create a variable geometry (Castells, 1996) of production and consumption, labour and capital that denies the specific productive meaning of any place outside its network.

Suppression of places by a network of information flows is one of the major goals of the restructuring process of contemporary globalisation. As mentioned, the ultimate logic of this restructuring rests on the bypassing of historically established mechanisms of social, economic and political control. The emergent space of flows essentially expresses the disarticulation of place-based societies and cultures ultimately making even democracies powerless to the omnipresent power of capital that circulates globally, to information that transmits secretly, to political-military strategies that shape up more on imagination than on knowledge or understanding about nations (Tuathail, 2000). According to Castells (1996), social meaning through this process evaporates from places as well as from society and becomes diluted and diffused in the reconstructed logic of space of flows.

Contemporary Globalisation and the Politics of Space

The contemporary process of neoliberal globalisation thus uses the prevailing spatiality of unevenness and inequality as a premise of an ensuing social order and reshapes it as an end product. It concentrates on an arena of struggle over social production and reproduction, maintains, reconstructs or reinforces the existing spatiality or restructures it according to the

given need of the market. Its transition to flexible accumulation through production disaggregation and fragmentation is essentially accomplished through new organisational forms and new technologies in production and communication. The related strategy, characterised by a 'partial' production process and labeled by Ettlinger (1990) as non-Fordist, is nothing but global capital's non-traditional manipulation of the production functions for the purpose of maximising profit. Bypassing the rigidities of Fordism and accelerating turn-over time, it simultaneously involves large-scale and small batch productions (run at times in pre-capitalist modes) in discrete absolute spaces having cheap resource and labour- for achieving efficiency by externalising economies of scale that functions in complete contrast to large-scale factory-based mass production achieving efficiency by internalising the economy of scale. The success lies in the methodology of expanded social reproduction resting on subcontracting and outsourcing using unskilled labour that cohabits with modern production and communication systems and does not necessarily get replaced by a unilinear production and technology of a post-Fordist system (Banerjee-Guha, 2008). New information technology happens to be an imperative in this system as it helps in the pursuit of varied social and functional goals at a time; what it basically offers is flexibility. The contemporary territorial dispersal of economic activities on a global scale, contributing to the emergence of a changed order of centralised functions, thus goes to reconstruct a new capitalist spatiality that has not only made the production of relative space crucial, but has brought the issue of destruction of social meaning of places to the fore.

The entrenched geopolitical and geoeconomic structures of contemporary capitalism are thus radically reconfigured at once on global, national, regional and urban scales. I have discussed elsewhere (Banerjee-Guha, 2004; 2009) how on the global scale internationalisation of production and the new international division of labour get consolidated through reorganisation of space at global levels. On the national scale, not only territorial borders have become increasingly porous to international capital (Brenner, 1999), the contemporary globalisation process has even decentered the role of the national entity to large extent by creating a wide range of sub-national and supra-national forms of territorial organisations. On the regional scale, establishment of Special Economic Zones in India, disregarding all forms of historicity and socio-cultural identity of places, dispossessing communities from their homes and livelihoods is pertinent example. A new wave of multiscale exploitation is wrought in the process that reflects (Harvey, 2006b; Chomsky, 2007) the control of space by various forms of technological and institutional power that also can give rise to a collective praxis of spatial struggles.

As societies are not made up of passive subjects, the meaninglessness of places are spontaneously resented and resisted, individually and collectively by communities to regain control over their lives and livelihood. While power constitutes newer forms of control through flexibilisation and restructuring, societies endlessly attempt at deconstructing the same and recover the meaning of historicity of their respective spatialities. While writing on capitalism's expansionist strategy,

Lefebvre (1976) argued that socially produced spaces are where the dominant relations of production are reproduced and concretised to progressively get occupied by an advancing capitalism. The above understanding links up in concrete terms all de- and re-territorialised production and human-resource complexes of the present time with the innumerable struggles being organised at different scales against the process of 'creative destruction' promoted and executed by neoliberal state and global capitalism.

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