

How should states be shaped? Contiguity, compactness, and territorial rights

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This article examines the role of spatial shape in the justification, practice, and study of territorial claims, focusing in particular on the concepts of contiguity and compactness. A territory is contiguous if all parts are connected to all other parts, and a territory is compact if all its parts are closely joined or densely packed spatially. Shaping territories to be contiguous and compact is often implicitly taken to be a worthwhile goal, in both empirical and normative assessments of territorial claims. This article focuses directly on these two concepts, taking a novel approach to the study of territory by raising questions about these foundational, but often unexamined, background assumptions. Interrogating territorial shape thus provides a useful means of examining arguments about the justice or legitimacy of the territorial rights attributed to states or peoples. The contingent origins of the concepts of contiguity and compactness suggest that evaluations of territorial shape have sometimes been based on an implicit affective ‘feel’ or emotional reaction as much as on logical or empirical argument. This conclusion allows us to rethink some of our unstated assumptions about the shapes of states and other political territories, and thus to reconsider the justice or legitimacy attributed to those claims.

Keywords: territory; territorial rights; political authority; boundaries; statehood; emotions

The March 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia brought conflict over territory and boundaries back to the forefront of international politics. In a world where territorial integrity is considered sacrosanct, the invasion and annexation seemed atavistic to many observers. Yet Russia came forward with a bevy of reasons to justify its annexation, politically if not legally: population, past territorial claims, strategic security, and more. Implicit in the discussion, although rarely remarked upon explicitly, was a judgment about the particular geography of Crimea, a peninsula attached to mainland Ukraine by only a few narrow land connections. This territorial shape, apparent to anyone who looks at a map, affected the reactions, both pro

and con, to Crimea's removal from Ukrainian control. Some pieces of territory may appear to be – rightly or wrongly – more connected to a state, and thus more legitimately under that state's control. That assumption has to do with how we think about the shapes of territories, especially with regards to the qualities of contiguity and compactness. Contiguity refers to the way that all parts of a territory are connected by being contained within a single, continuous boundary, and compactness describes the way in which a territory is concentrated rather than spread out.

These two characteristics of territorial shape have occasionally been considered by scholars in political science and geography, and specific practical benefits have been identified when territories are contiguous and compact: ease of communication, defensibility, likelihood of unified national sentiment, and so on. This article argues, however, that these advantages, real though they be, are not enough to explain the importance given to contiguous and compact shapes of states in evaluations by scholars and in decision making by political actors. My focus in particular will be on the discussions of territorial rights among political theorists (e.g. Simmons 2001; Nine 2008a; Stilz 2009; Miller 2012). Even here, we find that, after all the concrete, practical reasons have been given for preferring a contiguous and compact shape, there remains an implicit assumption that such a shape is preferable, in and of itself. This assumption plays a key role in the arguments and claims that scholars make, such that contiguity and compactness are given more importance than is necessarily warranted.

I do not claim that there is an outright belief in certain shapes being normatively superior (based on an appeal to moral values, for example). Nor do I contend that contiguous and compact shapes cannot provide practical benefits. Instead, I argue that there is an unspoken emotional reaction, or *feeling* – which may be socially learned, but is no less powerful for that – that accounts for the inordinate importance we put on contiguity and compactness, an importance that goes beyond strategic or practical considerations. This affective reaction to contiguity and compactness is the result of the spatial foundation of today's political jurisdictions, a geometric territorial structure in which authority is defined by lines between spatial expanses. This feeling implicitly guides the discussion of both normative and practical issues in a way that does not follow from the basic assumptions that ostensibly steer those arguments.

My goal, thus, is to investigate this underexamined aspect of territory, to provide an initial exploration of related issues and questions, and to argue that shape has played a previously unrecognized role in our evaluations of territorial rights and claims. First, I define territorial contiguity and compactness and argue that both the conceptualization and importance of these two concepts result from the particular form that territorial statehood

has taken on in the modern world. The next section introduces a set of concepts and arguments from the literature on the role of emotion in decision making and international politics, arguing that particular territorial shapes evoke positive or negative feelings, which then influence evaluations of those shapes. With this theoretical framework, I next examine, in turn, the way in which implicit assumptions about territorial shape, driven by affective feelings, have factored into decision making and behavior in international politics, into empirical analyses of territorial statehood, and, finally, into the normative literature on territorial rights. Then, building on a direct focus on these concepts, I consider arguments regarding whether they *should* be included in our evaluation of territorial rights. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of this particular issue for broader questions in international relations.

Definition of contiguity and compactness and their origins

Contiguity describes a territory that is all of one piece, in which all parts of the territory are connected to one another and contained within a single, continuous boundary line. The term can also be used to describe the relationship between two or more territories; territories are contiguous if they directly border or touch one another.¹ The two conceptualizations are related in the case of new territorial claims or annexations: successfully combining two contiguous territories will produce a single contiguous territory as the end result. In terms of political jurisdictions such as states, a territory is no longer contiguous when it is divided into separate parts by a large body of water or by another political jurisdiction. Territorial enclaves and exclaves, therefore, clearly violate the principle of contiguity, and they have been exchanged in a process of ‘rationalizing’ boundaries or frontiers – the very term used implying a pejorative ‘irrational’ status to discontinuous territories (Sahlins 1989). Conceptually, contiguity is an either-or proposition; either a territory in its entirety is contiguous or it is not.

Compactness, by contrast, is unquestionably a matter of degree, and significant differences exist among diverse means of conceptualizing and measuring this characteristic. The idea of a territory being compact – or more compact than it would be under a different territorial configuration – can be intuitively grasped, but it is more difficult to devise a comprehensive measure that always captures what is important about compactness.

¹ In the quantitative study of international conflict, for example, ‘contiguity’ most often refers to the presence of a mutual border between two states. This is a means of capturing both proximity between states and the connection between shared borders and likelihood of conflict (e.g. Stinnett *et al.* 2002).

A circle is the most compact shape geometrically, but measuring and comparing divergences from that ideal take many forms, including comparing the perimeter of a shape to its area, or measuring the distance from an internal point to all boundaries (e.g. Vanzo 1999).

Together, contiguity and compactness describe a territory's *shape*, a feature of territorial claims that feels important intuitively but is difficult to operationalize without employing specific concepts like contiguity and compactness. For example, the shape of Italy may be described as a 'boot', and that of France as a hexagon, but those descriptions do not allow us to compare the two shapes, or alternatives to them, in either empirical or normative terms (Vanzo 1999, 79). Instead, the shapes of states are more usefully viewed through the lens of contiguity and compactness, and there is, therefore, a resulting tendency to favor contiguous and compact shapes.

Of course, states exist in all sorts of shapes (including dramatically non-contiguous and non-compact shapes) without necessarily being seen as impractical or illegitimate. Yet unspoken assumptions about territorial shape do come into play when borders are not resolved, for example, in longstanding territorial disputes, in negotiations over new boundaries, or in active conflicts such as Crimea.² In these cases, the conceptual framing of territorial shape has a more direct effect on evaluations of the legitimacy and feasibility of territorial claims, as newly drawn non-compact or non-contiguous shapes do not have the weight of tradition behind them to counterbalance against their 'strangeness'.

In many circumstances, practical benefits undoubtedly accrue when a territory has a contiguous and compact shape. Legal efficiency, defense and security, economic performance, and even the construction of a cohesive national identity can be facilitated by territorial shape. Empirical cases bear this out, from the difficulties of administering territorial enclaves to the challenges faced by archipelago states. Although these practical effects of territorial shape are real, they are in fact heavily context dependent and thus are not immutable. Transportation technologies, for example, can effectively bring places closer, altering the impact of compactness or even contiguity: before railroads, movement was nearly always faster and easier by water than by land, turning bodies of water into connections rather than barriers to unity. The scale required for pursuing economic development or nation-building, likewise, has changed over time, giving differently shaped or sized territories greater viability.

In fact, the underlying structure of political rule and statehood has shifted over time, altering the context in which concepts of territorial shape like

² Territorial shape can also play a role when there is a perception that a 'natural' shape exists for a political entity, such as the belief that islands should not be politically divided (Steinberg 2005).

contiguity and compactness operate. The modern form of statehood may be an ideal that many governments do not achieve, but it nonetheless gives a particularly territorial structure to the organization of political power both within and between polities. This structure is fundamentally *geometric*: states are spatial expanses defined by lines that in principle have no thickness. Contiguity and compactness are, therefore, defined today in geometric terms, as can be seen, for example, in the complex mathematical formulas proposed to measure compactness. Geometric statehood is pervasive today – at least as a goal – but it is a historically novel form of organization, consolidated in its present configuration in the 17th and 18th centuries (Osiander 2007; Elden 2010, 2013).³ This is not to say that linear boundaries never existed in other historical eras, or that spatially defined political authority was ‘invented’ 300 years ago. Instead, what is novel is the *hegemonic* status of this form of authority – sovereign statehood has become the *only* accepted structure for political organization.

How contiguity and compactness are conceptualized and measured also depends on the tools available for calculation. The concept of territorial shape is founded on a particular way of measuring, displaying, and viewing the world through maps, whose basic structure is provided by a geometric grid (latitude and longitude) and mathematical projection methods (Harley 2001; Pickles 2004; Wood 2010). The basic ‘boot’ shape of Italy, for example, could appear on any quick sketch map of the country’s coastlines and borders, but *measuring* compactness by mathematically comparing the shape to a circle relies on geometrically surveying and mapping the state’s perimeter. Many non-contiguous or non-compact shapes seem ‘strange’ because they appear as non-contiguous or non-compact on maps, not because of the difficulty of inhabiting or traversing those territories.⁴

Before the advent of the idea of territory, the shape of states, let alone their degree of contiguity or compactness, was not a central concern; it is difficult to conceive even of what a non-territorial discussion of ‘shape’ would be. Therefore, before we assume contiguity and compactness to be the ideal or default features of the shape of territorial claims, we should recall that these are concepts with a relatively short history in terms of

³ This point contradicts much of the conventional wisdom about the ‘obvious’ superiority of territorially demarcated boundaries between political claims (superior in terms of defensibility, efficiency, taxation, and so on), and thus the expectation that this form of political claim ‘must’ have been present in all eras. Elden’s (2013) exhaustive study, however, firmly puts to rest the idea that pre-modern political structures followed today’s territorial logic.

⁴ Note that this is not exclusively about the direct visual appearance of a territory on a map, but also concerns the fact that how territory is understood, thought about, and practiced is *shaped by* modern mapping, even in a situation where the specific territory is not drawn on a map. See Branch (2014).

political organization. In spite of their recent vintage, however, these concepts have played a role in evaluations of territorial claims, a role made possible by the way in which the territorial political structure of the modern state has been naturalized and reified. Within this framework of territorial statehood, different shapes evoke particular emotional reactions, the impacts of which are examined next.

Emotions, affect, and territorial shape

The modern definition of states as territorial units with particular shapes may be historically recent, but it is nonetheless powerful. Assessments of territorial shape influence decision making, empirical analysis, and normative theorizing about political territory. In fact, the way in which the contingent origins of statehood are obscured by the ostensibly ‘natural’ character of territoriality supports that power – territorially delimited states are simply taken to be the normal order. One important mechanism by which territorial shape influences evaluations and outcomes is the feeling, or emotional response, that shapes evoke in decision makers, scholars, and other observers. Again, this does not deny the practical implications of different shapes. Yet the feelings evoked by territorial shapes can push those practical analyses in particular directions and, in certain circumstances, even override practical considerations.

This argument builds on the growing literature in international relations about the role of emotions, affect, and feeling in international politics in general and in decision making in particular.⁵ One key insight from these studies is that emotions and emotional processes are important to decision making in ways that go well beyond the idea of occasional ‘irrational’ actions due to emotions. Instead, emotions are central to decision making and behavior by shaping and supporting particular beliefs, by altering how decision-making processes occur, and by transforming the interactions among actors. The following paragraphs review some of the key concepts and findings of this literature – concepts and findings that help to explain how a feeling inspired by a territorial shape can influence policy decisions and academic analyses, including normative theorizing about territorial rights.

Although a growing body of research exists on emotions in world politics, defining key concepts – including *emotions*, *feelings*, and *affect* – has been difficult. *Emotions* have been defined as ‘inner states’ (Crawford 2000, 125),

⁵ See, among many others, Crawford (2000), McDermott (2004, Ch. 6), Mercer (2010), and the recent review by Hutchison and Bleiker (2014).

or ‘a subjective experience of some diffuse physiological change’ (Mercer 2014, 516). One recent review notes that emotions ‘only arise after we have become aware of our physical changes; there is an element of information processing to an emotion’ (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014, 501). Emotions are then distinguished from *feelings* in a variety of ways: Crawford notes that emotions are what ‘individuals describe to others as feelings’ (2000, 124, emphasis in original); Mercer sees a feeling as ‘a conscious awareness that one is experiencing an emotion’ (2014, 516); and Hutchison and Bleiker define feelings as ‘the physiological—or somatic—manifestation of emotional change’ (2014, 501).

Finally, and perhaps most useful for this analysis, there is *affect*, understood to be more unconscious than emotions, lying ‘beyond representation’ (Hutchison and Bleiker 2014). Sasley focuses directly on affect, defining it as ‘the positive and negative feelings evoked by a stimulus’, that is, ‘general valence feelings toward something’ (2010, 689). Sasley then relates feeling to affect: ‘Affect encompasses feelings toward an object, event, or person – with *feelings* being defined as mental states distinct from the cognitive processes associated with *thinking*’ (2010, 689). In this essay, I focus not on the commonly named emotions such as anger or fear that have been emphasized in existing studies of emotion. Instead, I examine general positive or negative *feelings* evoked by particular stimuli – in this case, different territorial shapes. These feelings are experienced as real phenomena, often beyond thought, by the individuals involved, whether the individuals had been socialized into those affective reactions or whether those reactions were inherent to them.⁶

Emotional reactions then have an impact on decision making and analysis. As Hutchison and Bleiker succinctly put it, emotions ‘do work’ in IR: ‘emotions function in often unseen and invisible ways to grant (and withhold) authority and in doing so enable (and also limit) political circumstances’ (2014, 508). One way this occurs is through the role emotion plays in decision making: ‘rational decision making, where an individual considers costs and benefits, is in fact dependent on prior emotional processing’ (McDermott 2004, 153). The same holds true for the actors’ beliefs: emotion and cognition are not competing in the creation and reinforcement of beliefs; instead they ‘co-produce beliefs’ together (Mercer 2010, 5). In other words, cognition and affect are closely integrated in decision making.

Affect thus provides ‘a short cut from our thinking/feeling processes to a decision’ (Sasley 2010, 689). ‘Instead of appraising objects, events, or

⁶ On the possibly social nature of emotions in IR, see Crawford (2014), Hutchison and Bleiker (2014), Mercer (2014), Reus-Smit (2014), Sasley (2011).

people by cognitive analysis, we simply *feel* what these objects, events, or people mean to us and respond accordingly' (Sasley 2010, 690). Furthermore, experimental results show that individuals choose an option that they 'felt' was better even if they 'knew' that another option was more likely to succeed (Sasley 2010, 691). Affectively based attitudes or beliefs are harder to change than cognitively based ones and tend to be held with greater expressed confidence (McDermott 2014, 183). How an actor feels about an object, institution, or outcome shapes the beliefs held about it, whether it is judged likely or unlikely, and other 'rational' calculations. In short, 'feelings influence what one wants, what one believes, and what one does' (Mercer 2010, 2).

In terms of the shapes of states and other territorial political claims, the feelings evoked by different shapes will influence actors' and scholars' beliefs, interests, and actions relating to territory. As research on emotions has established, those feelings may be relatively 'unthinking', but they nonetheless can play a significant role in judgments, analyses, and decision making on issues relating to that emotional reaction. In the case of territorial shape, affective feelings have an impact on three areas: decision making by political officials and their advisors, empirical analyses by scholars, and the normative discussion of territorial rights.

Territorial shape in decision making and empirical analysis

The feelings evoked by contiguity and compactness influence, in particular contexts, both decision making by political actors and the assumptions and arguments of empirical studies of territory. Particular shapes evoke affective reactions through a combination of an assessment of practical consequences of shape with an intuitive reaction to geometrically 'nice' shapes as more normal, natural, or beneficial. There are, undoubtedly, practical efficiency benefits of contiguous and compact territorial shapes. As Nine puts it, 'a contiguous, stable, locally dense territorial authority is necessary in order to perform its requisite functions' (2012, 80; see also Hooghe and Marks 2009). Yet functional benefits only account for some of the emphasis on these shaping principles, which are often supported without any reference to practicalities.

The promotion of contiguous and compact shapes for states or other territories is evident in the kinds of justifications made for new territorial claims, for boundary adjustments, or for secessions and annexations. (As noted above, longstanding boundaries have the weight of history and tradition behind them, allowing them to overcome any negative

affective reaction to their ‘strange’ shapes.⁷) Thus, political justifications for territorial claims include the notion of ‘territorial integrity’: ‘Land is claimed because it is contiguous with territory already controlled or because some physical connectivity is perceived to exist’ (Burghardt 1973, 235). In the late 18th century, for example, the peninsula of Florida ‘was termed “an area that physiographically belonged to the United States”’ (Burghardt 1973, 236). This type of justification may reinforce arguments related to economics, to security, and to other areas, but it is also sometimes presented as a justification in its own right, unrelated to any specific practical concern.⁸

Of course, even when decision makers view non-compact or non-contiguous shapes negatively, other goals may make choosing those shapes a worthwhile tradeoff. For example, at the negotiations leading up to the 1995 Dayton Accords, Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic was willing to draw boundaries giving the Republika Srpska a non-compact shape in the interest of gaining a greater share of the overall territorial area of Bosnia (Holbrooke 1998). In terms of contiguity, the persistence of hundreds of territorial enclaves globally reveals that other interests can take precedence, even when the parties involved explicitly state their distaste for enclaves. The decades of resistance by nationalist politicians in India to ‘giving up’ any Indian territory in order to make a land swap of enclaves with Bangladesh, for example, shows that the rhetoric of territorial area can trump the negative connotation of non-contiguity, even for a very small difference in resulting territory.⁹ In spite of these exceptions, however, the overall aim tends to be *toward* contiguity and compactness, with movements in the other direction requiring explicit justification.

The preference for contiguity and compactness is also often reflected in empirical studies relating to territory and territorial claims. Contiguous and

⁷ In fact, promoting the naturalization of a state’s shape – no matter how non-contiguous and non-compact it might be – can be an explicit policy of nation-building governments. See, for example, Thongchai (1994) on Siam (Thailand).

⁸ The power of contiguity and compactness is also evident when the spatial authority of states is asserted *beyond* the standard framework of territorial statehood. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) distinguishes among various legal and economic rights in different maritime spaces, but contiguity is fundamental to the entire UNCLOS regime: it is only states with territory contiguous with water (i.e. coastal states) that are granted *any* rights over specific oceanic spaces.

⁹ This border was exceptionally complex – with enclaves, counter-enclaves, and even counter-counter-enclaves (i.e. an enclave of Indian territory *inside* an enclave of Bangladeshi territory, itself *inside* an enclave of Indian territory within Bangladesh) – yet it still proved resistant to ‘rationalization’ through territorial exchanges: the enclaves were eliminated in 2015 only after more than four decades of discussion. See *The Economist* (2011), Jones (2009), Berger (2010).

compact shapes tend to be assumed implicitly as goals of existing states, as default expectations for how states will ‘naturally’ be shaped, or as features of legitimate claims over territory. In conflict research in International Relations, for example, one study focuses directly on compactness as a factor in conflict (Vanzo 1999). This study makes explicit, rather than implicit, assumptions about territorial shape as a goal, stating that territorial compactness – and, by extension, contiguity – can provide security benefits to states and thus arguing that states will try to increase their compactness (albeit only through expansion). Unexamined, however, is the assumed link between geometrically measured compactness and outcomes that are also the result of much more complex circumstances. Defense, for example, has as much to do with other aspects of the ‘shape’ of a state, such as geography or terrain, as it does with geometric compactness. Yet because the assumption is shared by decision makers (i.e. they, too, focus on the geometric, measurable form of compactness), state actions broadly confirm the theory’s expectations.

Another discussion that reveals assumptions about contiguity and compactness is the debate about the appropriate *size* of states (e.g. Dahl and Tufte 1973; Spolaore 2012), a debate that rarely addresses the possibility that state shape could be as important as size. Instead, a contiguous and compact shape is often simply assumed. One study from IR about changes in the average size of states over time, for example, defines its scope in those very terms: ‘Territory is defined as home or national landmass, generally a contiguous area governed as a single political unit’ (Lake and O’Mahony 2004, 701). Likewise, an agent-based modeling approach to ‘endogenize’ state boundaries and thus study the dynamics of state size and shape makes a similar assumption about contiguity: ‘To simplify the system’s topology, it is assumed that territorial boundaries have to enclose a contiguous space’ (Cederman 2002, 7298). These assumptions are not hidden or implicit – in both cases, they are stated quite clearly – but they do not require justification: contiguous (and, to a lesser degree, compact) territories are perceived to be the default, or ‘normal’, spatial political order.

Finally, studies from political geography often make a similar set of assumptions, noting, for example, that states ‘tend’ toward ‘uninterrupted sovereign power over large, continuous areas that in terms of their shape are relatively compact’ (Cox 2002, 8) or that ‘a quick glance at a map reveals countries of widely varying shapes, some comfortingly geometric (roughly) and some disturbingly erratic’ (Glassner 1993, 67). The affective language used (‘*comfortingly* geometric’ and ‘*disturbingly* erratic’) reveals the positive and negative valence attached to different shapes – evoked before considering practical consequences.

Empirical studies and action by decision makers, in short, rely on a set of assumptions about territorial shapes, assumptions that build both on practical concerns *and* on the affective feelings that territorial shapes evoke. Moreover, there is a mutually reinforcing interaction between the belief in the positive practical consequences of contiguous and compact shapes and the feelings evoked by those shapes: evidence of beneficial effects strengthens positive feelings, and pre-existing positive feelings make arguments about those beneficial consequences more convincing, easier to recall, and more readily available to decision makers and scholars.

Territorial shape and territorial rights

In normative theorizing about rights over territory, affective reactions to contiguity and compactness play a similarly overlooked role in existing arguments. By establishing what role these two concepts actually perform in current theories, we can then consider more directly how shape should or should not affect the legitimacy of a territorial claim. The discussion of territorial rights has sought to answer the question of what gives states, peoples, or other entities the right to territories, in both general and particular terms. *General* territorial rights would be a justification for the right of states as a rule to claim territories, or the rights of all states together to lay claim to the entire land surface of the globe. *Particular* territorial rights refer to the right of a specific state to a specific territory. While some theorists incorporate a consideration of the justice of general territorial rights (e.g. Nine 2008a), most are focused on claims to particular territories (e.g. Stilz 2009; Kolers 2012; Moore 2014, 128).¹⁰ Normative theorizing thus addresses two distinct, albeit related, questions: is territorial authority legitimate in general, as a principle? What makes a claim by a particular entity over a particular territory legitimate?

Although a number of approaches to territorial rights have been explored, most have shared a common assumption, usually implicit, that contiguity and compactness are important elements in what we might think of as ‘proper’ territorial claims, in general or over particular places. These theories do not ignore other issues that might be more important than territorial shape (such as the distribution of people with a particular identity), but contiguous and compact shapes are nonetheless held as a

¹⁰ Studies of ‘place attachment’ in psychology support the emphasis on rights to particular territories (Korpela 2012). This can take different forms in, for example, nationalist attachments to particular places (Penrose 2002) or in indigenous claims or other forms of ‘autochthony’ (Zenker 2011).

default expectation that does not need to be explained and that can only be overridden with an explicit justification.

For example, Stilz notes that ‘we tend to assume that some degree of territorial continuity is a necessary condition for the uniform application of a body of laws, which is required if the state is to fulfill its mandate’ (2009, 192–93). Miller similarly argues that the background to discussions of territorial claims is provided by ‘the general justifying argument for the territorial state. It belongs to that argument that state boundaries should be clear, continuous and in normal cases reasonably straight for reasons of efficiency’ (2012, 263).¹¹ Moore proposes a ‘non-statist self-determination account’ for territorial rights over a ‘heartland’ (she explicitly does not address boundary issues), in which the relevant group of people is in part defined by being ‘*territorially concentrated* in an area that they legitimately occupy’ (2014, 131, emphasis added). Finally, Simmons argues that a useful theory of states ‘needs to explain why they should end up with legitimate *continuous* boundaries, not just how they can end up with legitimate jurisdiction over various chunks of land’ (2001, 313–14, emphasis in original). As Steiner (2008) notes, there tends to be a loosely defined concept of ‘territorial rights as we know them’ that points toward the importance of ‘territorial unity’ for theories about territorial rights – that is, the degree of unity of a territory provided by its shape. In other words, explaining territorial rights in a way that would allow for non-contiguous or very non-compact states is not good enough; it would not explain or justify what we intuitively assume to be some of the defining characteristics of states and other territorial claims.¹²

Sometimes contiguity and compactness play a more central role, beyond merely assuming that a particular shape is necessary for efficiency and rule of law. For example, among the criteria proposed by Miller for legitimating a territorial claim is the ‘symbolic value’ that nations or indigenous groups may add to that territory through the creation of meaning around it (Miller 2012, 261–62). Not all symbolic attachments are equal, however, as Miller goes on to argue that the symbolic value of territories that form part of the ‘homeland’ count more. Although Miller does not delineate exactly how we would recognize a homeland claim vs. another type of claim, his examples reveal a bias in favor of

¹¹ Note that continuous boundaries equate to a contiguous territory, and ‘reasonably straight’ boundaries result in more compact territorial shapes.

¹² This assumption is shared by scholars in other fields, such as international law: ‘In the abstract, administrative lines defining a compact territory, without unusual elongations and preferably without significant interior natural barriers, will make the state (whether the remnant of the old or the new) easier to govern administratively’ (Ratner 1996, 621).

contiguous territories.¹³ Shape, therefore, is built into the theory. His focus on contiguous homelands then structures his suggested solutions to territorial conflicts. For example, concerning what he terms ‘debatable lands’ (lands subject to overlapping homeland claims, among other conditions), possible solutions such as partition are framed explicitly as needing to yield contiguous territories: ‘The presumption here is that the two [post-partition] territories would be contiguous with the nations they are going to join, so that at the end of the carving-up we would have two states with continuous borders’ (Miller 2014, 113).

The failure of these arguments to engage explicitly with territorial shape is a consequence of the way in which territory itself has been undertheorized in this literature (Elden 2013; Banai and Moore 2014). Instead, what if we consider the implications of territoriality in general – and territorial shape in particular – for theorizing about territorial rights? The following paragraphs consider this question, first by examining the problematic conceptualization of territorial shape used in many studies and second by exploring the role played by ideas about property and property rights. Implicit assumptions about territorial shape have influenced these theories, their evidence, and their conclusions.

When theories of territorial rights address shape, they tend to use the term *continuous* to describe the ideal or typical shape (i.e. a ‘continuous territory’), rather than contiguous and compact. Continuity is meant to describe a spatial area that is both entirely of one piece *and* uninterrupted by territorial claims by other authorities.¹⁴ If a territory is continuous, in other words, except at the boundaries one should not have to deal with neighboring households subject to different laws (Stilz 2009, 192–93). Contiguity on its own, by contrast, does not necessarily have the same effect: even a contiguous territory could suffer from jurisdictional complexity if it contains enough foreign enclaves within it or if it constitutes a dramatically non-compact shape. (Consider, for example, two neighboring territories shaped as interlocking combs, each contiguous but far from ideal in terms of the efficiency expected from ‘continuity’.)

¹³ Note the progression: symbolic value in far-flung areas of former colonies (e.g. places important to the British in India) are dismissed immediately as not meeting the criteria; Kosovo’s value for Serbian national identity is presented as a possible candidate (albeit a problematic one); and, finally, ‘[s]ymbolic value arguments are most powerful when advanced by groups who presently occupy the territory to which the arguments apply’ (Miller 2012, 262). Occupation of a territory delineated by ‘clear, continuous’ boundaries implies contiguity.

¹⁴ My thanks to Annie Stilz for highlighting this issue. Note that some arguments use the phrase ‘a territory with continuous boundaries’, which, if strictly applied, would simply be equivalent to contiguity. But the discussions that follow those terms reveal that the authors intend a broader concept, incorporating more than merely a boundary that is a single, unbroken line.

Yet defining what makes a territory *continuous* is difficult – unlike contiguity, it is not an either-or proposition; unlike compactness, it is not readily operationalized with a mathematical formula. The idea of continuous territory builds, metaphorically at least, on the properties of a *continuous function* in mathematics: a function that can be drawn by a continuous line, without any breaks or points where the pencil is lifted from the paper.¹⁵ By analogy, a continuous territory is any territory within which one could draw a line connecting any two internal points without crossing over foreign territory (i.e. without ‘lifting your pencil’). But what kind of line? If it is *any* line that connects the two points – a curved line, a squiggly line, etc. – then continuous territory is simply *contiguous* territory, and many contiguous territories would fail to provide the benefits that theorists ascribe to continuity. If, on the other hand, a continuous territory requires that a *straight line* be able to connect any two points, we suddenly have a much more restrictive definition – one that would reject many territorial shapes we *do* find acceptable and that would thus be too narrow to capture the underlying concept.

Steiner (2008) proposes – and rejects – these two options in an effort to find a rule to define the ‘territorial unity’ that serves an essential role in theories of territorial rights. Nine’s response agrees with Steiner that neither option is acceptable, but it offers in return only the argument that ‘territory must have a certain density and stability in order for the territory to serve its function’ (Nine 2008b, 959). The decision, conscious or unconscious, that these assumptions about the expected shape of territories need not be defended and can be justified by vague abstractions (e.g. ‘a certain density and stability’) is the result of the basic affective reaction, or feeling, that contiguous and compact shapes evoke. Although continuous territory cannot be explicitly defined, the positive assessment of such shapes relies on how they simply *feel* better, and thus they can be asserted rather than proven.¹⁶

In another important framing choice, many arguments about territorial rights connect these political rights over territory to theories about property rights over land. This analogy, which in many cases is an application of

¹⁵ Most simply described, at least; detailed mathematical definitions are more complex.

¹⁶ Consider, for example, the proposal by Pogge (1992, 69) of non-state territorial units, based on specific ‘procedural principles’, including that the resulting unit be a ‘contiguous territory of reasonable shape’. In a footnote Pogge writes, ‘I won’t try to be precise about “reasonable shape.” The idea is to rule out areas with extremely long borders, or borders that divide towns, integrated networks of economic activity, or the like’ (Pogge 1992, 69, n. 31). A shape can be labeled ‘reasonable’ without precise definition or extensive justification. See Ochoa Espejo (2014) for further discussion.

Locke's theory of property (or a reaction to those applications), implicitly invokes territorial shape.¹⁷ Theorists who build directly on Locke take a variety of paths to scale up from individual property rights to state territorial rights. Simmons (2001) argues for a territorial right of states themselves, basing his position on the Lockean principle of consent. Nine (2008a) also argues from Locke in a 'collectivist' framework: she sees a territorial right as being attributable to the state itself through its actions rather than beginning with individual rights and scaling up to states. This separates the argument about individually held property rights from collectively held territorial rights, but it still relies on the Lockean idea of combining labor with land to gain rights. Miller (2012) also works from Locke, but argues for the rights of groups of persons – in his case, nations or indigenous groups – rather than the state itself. Again, the process involves creating value through action or work.

As Stilz (2009, 192) notes, however, scaling up from individual property rights to state territorial rights yields a potential problem: the state that results could end up as a 'patchwork' entity, with gaps caused by a few property owners unwilling to transfer their rights to the state.¹⁸ Lockean theories that attribute rights to the state or to the people as a whole (i.e. not scaling up from individual rights over property) still face the same problem: if a state combines its 'labor' with land to legitimize a territorial claim, we cannot assume that the result would be a contiguous and compact territorial shape. A political entity or collectivity could add value to disparate pieces of territory and once again yield a patchwork shape.

The relationship between property and territory, however, is historically complex. As Elden (2010, 2013) points out, property in land – including delineated, mapped, exclusive claims – long predated the modern form of spatial political authority over territory. This suggests that there is no conceptual need for property rights to match up with political rights; the former certainly have not always been scaled up into the latter.¹⁹ Moreover, the focus on property rights reinforces the implicit idea that non-compact or non-contiguous territories are strange and thus unjustified because the

¹⁷ Normative theory is not alone in connecting property to territory: international legal scholarship has also emphasized how territory is 'analogous' to property in terms of settling disputes (Sumner 2004, 1787, *et passim*).

¹⁸ This type of 'patchwork' territorial result has appeared in real-world cases, such as the extensive enclaves along parts of the India–Bangladesh border. Many of these resulted from the transformation of private property holdings into the basis for international boundary delimitation in the 1947 partition (Jones 2009).

¹⁹ As Kolers (2012, 119) points out, it might be helpful to discuss 'a right to bear a territorial relation' rather than 'territorial rights', which would help move away from connecting rights over territory to property rights.

notion of a proper parcel of land is built upon a particular idea of what land is for. From Locke through theorists today, the idea of cultivation, improvement, or other labor has been central to the very notion of property claims, thus emphasizing the idea of *efficiency*. Properties are most efficiently used, in the abstract, through an arrangement that allows the maximum production (with the techniques available) with the minimum effort.²⁰ Working a non-compact or non-contiguous piece of land appears inefficient compared with the alternative. The emphasis on property rights, in other words, reinforces the implicit belief in contiguity and compactness among those theorists who apply Locke's argument about property to political territory.

The historically complex relationship between property and territory sometimes plays a further role in normative arguments when those arguments use empirical examples. For instance, the purchase of territory by states is often mentioned, usually in reference to the question of whether or not property and territory are equivalent. Some theories argue that if a state purchases property within another state, that property does not necessarily become part of the purchasing state's territory (e.g. Nine 2008a, 149–50).²¹ Yet other theories point to the numerous cases of actual historical purchases of rights over territory, such as the purchase of Louisiana from France by the United States (Steiner 2008). Shape plays into our reactions to these cases: a different feeling is evoked by the purchase of territory contiguous with the existing state (e.g. the 1853 Gadsden Purchase by the United States of a stretch of territory along the US–Mexico border) and the purchase of a far-distant, non-contiguous territory (e.g. the purchase of the Philippines by the United States from Spain in 1898). On the one hand, we sense that the Philippines is rightfully independent and, on the other, we show little concern with the status of the territory of the Gadsden Purchase (let alone Louisiana). Of course, this is related to the identities and wishes of the people residing in those territories. Yet the positive affective *feel* of contiguous territorial purchases reinforces their legitimacy.

Further evidence of the effect of contiguity and compactness on normative theory can be found in the hypothetical examples scholars offer – usually as a means of showing the absurdity or illegitimacy of particular

²⁰ Of course, the definition of 'effective use' in Lockean theory is a point of significant contention; many authors (e.g. Kolers 2012) note that establishing what type of work is required can be ethnocentric.

²¹ The extraterritorial status of foreign embassies is an exception to this, but the specificity of the exception shows the strength of the rule: extraterritoriality is granted *only* to the embassy itself, not to other properties purchased by foreign governments for consulates, economic missions, etc. The extraterritorial status, moreover, cannot be sold to a third party.

types of territorial claims, especially annexations. Simmons, for example, points out that '[n]o matter how just its Constitution and its policies might be made, the United States could still not justifiably extend its political power to include, say, Pakistan or Antarctica within its jurisdiction' (2001, 302). Stilz (2009, 187–88) makes a similar point with a hypothetical US claim to the territory of Guatemala. As with the purchase of a distant territory, the illegitimate nature of a hypothetical US annexation of Pakistan or Guatemala is overdetermined: there is an established population with identities and interests inimical to US control. But what about Simmons' example of Antarctica? There is no indigenous population to consider, but with the current Antarctic treaty regime, most states (including the United States) have agreed specifically *not* to make territorial claims there. Yet the fact that the claim would not be adjacent to existing US territories makes it easy to reject the hypothetical claim *out of hand*. What if, instead, the example concerned a similarly uninhabited landmass that *was* contiguous to the United States? The broader acceptability of Canada's claims to the Arctic – that is, to maritime space well beyond the land already recognized as Canadian territory – shows the difference that contiguity makes in supporting the justification of territorial claims.

Note that these hypothetical examples rarely take as their proposed annexations lands that *do* adjoin the current boundaries of the state making the claim. For example, a US claim over parts of northern Mexico would also be rejected, based on the illegitimate nature of an annexation against the interests of the population concerned, but that hypothetical example would not be as rhetorically useful – it would not suggest as clearly the 'absurdity' of the proposed claim. The arguments against making claims to occupied pieces of territory could stand on their own, to be certain, but the way in which non-contiguous hypotheticals evoke a negative affective reaction helps to support the theorist's point.

In other words, the kinds of emotional reactions, or feelings, induced by different types of territorial shapes have not necessarily led theorists to make fundamentally different arguments, nor do those emotional reactions mean that the arguments being made are not valid. Yet inspiring an affective reaction does accomplish two persuasive tasks. First, as just noted, these reactions give a negative valence to examples scholars have presented *specifically* in order for them to be rejected (e.g. US claims over distant territories) and a positive valence to examples that are meant to be accepted (e.g. the Louisiana Purchase). Second, relating to the more general discussion of territorial rule as a legitimate institution, the feelings evoked by contiguous and compact shapes allow the assumptions about 'continuous territory' or 'territorial unity' to be made without being questioned in detail and without having to be carefully defended.

The next section considers what might result if these assumptions regarding contiguity and compactness *are* explicitly put front and center.

Do contiguity and compactness have moral value?

Contiguity and compactness have played a role in existing arguments about the territorial rights of states, but only in an indirect or implicit fashion based on the positive affective feel of those shapes. If, instead, we try to sidestep those emotional reactions by taking territorial shape as a central concern, how *should* shape enter into the discussion of territorial claims? In terms of a general right to territory, are states in general more normatively acceptable if they are contiguous and compact? In terms of rights to particular territories, is a claim normatively superior when it is asserted over a contiguous and compact territory? This section approaches these questions by examining the different ways that territorial shape could be justified in terms of contiguity and compactness.

What goals should the shape of a territory serve? This can be thought of as a component question of the broader issue of the purpose of the state itself: economic development, security, self-realization, and so on. Existing theories of territorial rights offer a number of possible justifications, including justice, deserts, the promotion of liberty, or increasing efficiency (e.g. Nine 2008a). These are all worthy goals – although, as often noted, difficult to measure or even conceptualize. With regards to territorial shape, once we dig beneath the implicit assumptions based on affect, it is useful to distinguish among three categories of justification: those relating to *the expected consequences of a territorial shape*; those based on *an assumed correlation with other outcomes*; and those that have to do with *the territorial shape itself*.

The promotion of liberty or efficiency, for example, would justify contiguous or compact territorial claims through their expected consequences. In this category, we could include a number of possibilities, such as increased security (e.g. Vanzo 1999), the achievement of self-determination, or ‘the pursuit of a decent life’ (Agnew 2008, 183). The practical justifications for particular territorial shapes, including compactness or contiguity, are often quite convincing. As discussed above, however, these consequence-focused reasons are not the only way that territorial shape is evaluated, and some of the expectations about these consequences are strengthened and informed by implicit assumptions and affective reactions.

The second category (shape correlated with other outcomes) comprises justifications or evaluations of a situation in which compactness and

contiguity are not causing the outcome but instead are evidence of it. This appears prominently in discussions of territorial shape and gerrymandering in US electoral redistricting: non-compact and non-contiguous shapes are often held up as evidence of unfair partisan line-drawing. As US Supreme Court Justice Souter wrote, '[l]ack of compactness or contiguity ... certainly is a helpful indicator that some form of gerrymandering (racial or other) might have taken place' (*Shaw v. Reno* 1993, 671–72). A strange shape does not itself *cause* the negative outcome (e.g. disadvantaging a particular group of voters), but the two are correlated, and thus such shapes should be avoided as a way to reduce gerrymandering.

The third category of justifications for a territorial shape – those based on the shape itself – are rarely set out explicitly and are thus more difficult to identify. Examples could include justice and deserts: if a group can be argued to have the right to hold a territory of a particular shape (or degree of contiguity and compactness) because they are deserving of that territory or because it is a just claim, then the consequences of such a shape are possibly irrelevant. In international legal forums, the use of 'territorial integrity' as a justification for particular claims – a justification made separately from practical economic or strategic arguments – suggests that territorial shape can, on occasion, be presented as a justification in and of itself (Burghardt 1973; Sumner 2004).

Often more than one category of justification is brought to bear, and different claimants to the same piece of territory may justify their claims using different types of criteria. Yet many of them rely, at least implicitly, on the affective reaction that contiguous and compact territorial shapes evoke. For justifications based on consequences and correlations, the effect of feeling often supports the purely 'rational' or 'practical' arguments presented, strengthening their rhetorical power. Justifications based on shape in itself, on the other hand, rely almost entirely on the feelings evoked. Two political issues useful for illustrating the assumptions made about territorial shape are, first, the relationship between democracy and territorial shape and, second, the role of contiguity and compactness in colonialism and decolonization.

If territorial shape affects democratic development or improves democratic performance, what level of contiguity or compactness would be ideal?²² Arguing for a particular shape implicitly relies on the notion that people's characteristics or actions are spatially dependent: for example, neighbors might share interests or have an increased (or decreased) ability

²² Recognizing, of course, that this glosses over a number of issues: democracy itself could be challenged on normative grounds, how democracy is defined is contested, and so on.

to get along with one another. Variation in those dimensions could then have an effect on the functioning of a democracy. As Ochoa Espejo points out, many theories about how to define the people in a democracy (the *demos*) ‘tacitly make the people a function of a well-defined territory’ (2014, 470). This even includes cosmopolitan theories that reject the state as the only possible institutional frame for democracy but that nonetheless ‘depend on majoritarian decisions of “the inhabitants of any contiguous territory of reasonable shape”’ (Ochoa Espejo 2014, 471; quoting Pogge 1992). Territorial shape, in other words, provides the frame for arguments about the *demos* as a collection of people.

This can also be seen in arguments about the shape of US congressional districts, many of which have extremely complex and non-compact shapes.²³ Although those shapes are often presented as evidence of gerrymandering, *any* change in shape – even one that makes the district more compact – could favor one partisan side or the other. One goal of drawing district lines is to gather together a community of people who share interests or experiences and thus might be represented effectively by a single elected official.²⁴ That community, however, is not *necessarily* going to be correlated with a compact or even contiguous territorial shape. When considered spatially, a community or neighborhood is often defined in terms of distance, with individuals in a single neighborhood closer to one another than to individuals in other neighborhoods. Yet distance is ‘a complex sociological concept’ that is not always captured by a simple linear measure or geometrically compact shape (Logan 2012, 521).

Redistricting battles in the United States thus illustrate the perceived connection between democracy and the shape of a territorial jurisdiction. New district boundaries have occasionally been rejected by courts, at least in part because they have shapes that appear strange (Monmonier 1995: Ch. 6). As a 1993 US Supreme Court ruling held, ‘appearances do matter’ in the shaping of electoral districts, when those shapes are joined to race-conscious redistricting (Pildes and Niemi 1993, 484, 494–95). Nonetheless, similar to the use of non-contiguous hypotheticals in the normative theorizing discussed above, evoking an affective reaction to

²³ Though still usually maintaining contiguity because of legal requirements, at the level of state laws at least. In terms of federal law, ‘[t]here is no independent constitutional requirement of compactness or contiguity’ (*Shaw v. Reno* 1993, 677).

²⁴ For example, the section on redistricting in the California state constitution includes the following: ‘A community of interest is a *contiguous* population which shares common social and economic interests that should be included within a single district for purposes of its effective and fair representation’ (Article XXI, emphasis added; http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/const/article_21, accessed on 13 August 2015).

different shapes can serve a rhetorical purpose: repeatedly referencing the shape of a district as “highly irregular”, “tortured [and] dramatically irregular”, “bizarre”, and “irrational on its face” helps to support the majority decision (Pildes and Niemi 1993, 494).²⁵

The connection between ‘regular’ shapes and positive democratic outcomes could also be reflected in arguments about how to draw boundaries between sovereign territories. This might particularly operate in post-conflict negotiations if the focus is on similar democratic goals: representation, efficiency, and so on. Are we likely to reject non-compact shapes in terms of the territorial rights of states for the same types of reasons that justify our negative reactions to ‘bizarre’ electoral districts? In other words, are we rejecting them because of an expected correlation with some other negative phenomena, because of their possible consequences, or even because of some inherent illegitimacy ascribed to those shapes? Separating out those logics would be useful for evaluating the justice of a ‘strangely shaped’ territorial claim – and for properly assessing any ‘practical’ evidence that may actually be built upon and rhetorically supported by an affective feel.

Territorial shape has also played an underappreciated role in the process of decolonization. Unlike in the discussion of redistricting, contiguity and compactness have rarely been brought up explicitly in relation to colonialism. Yet territorial shape may have implicitly influenced some of the rhetoric and actions of anticolonial movements and colonial powers. In short, claims to contiguous areas appear to be more justifiable than claims to distant, non-contiguous territories – at least during the era of decolonization. This is suggested by a comparison of some of the features of the decolonization of overseas empires against the very different history of land-based empires.

The French effort to hold onto Algeria, for example, reveals some of the effects of non-contiguity on ideas about the legitimacy of territorial claims. After World War II, the French government unsuccessfully attempted to construct a hegemonic idea of Algeria as a fundamental part of metropolitan France, a failure in which the non-contiguous character of the Algerian departments *vis-à-vis* France played a significant role (along with many other sources of conflict).²⁶ Geographical discourses and depictions reinforced the idea of Algeria being separate from France, in spite of the administrative incorporation of Algeria as several ‘metropolitan-style

²⁵ The focus on shape, however, was contested by Justice Souter’s dissenting opinion: ‘The Court offers no adequate justification for treating the narrow category of bizarrely shaped district claims differently from other districting claims’ (*Shaw v. Reno* 1993, 686).

²⁶ The discussion of Algeria relies on Lustick (1993).

departments' in 1871 (Lustick 1993, 81). For example, even though many French maps from the 1940s began to depict the Algerian departments with the same color as mainland France (reversing what had been a visual differentiation between the two in most pre-World War II maps), this did not lead to a view of Algeria as part of the metropole (Lustick 1993, 102). Even on the later maps, the two territories continued to be separated by one of the most obvious visual cartographic distinctions – that between land and water. Because of non-contiguity, in other words, Algeria and France never gave the impression of constituting a single territory, even to the French themselves.

Consider, on the other hand, the different effect that a non-visual means of describing political authority would have had: a written text, for example, would incorporate the Algerian departments in a list of metropolitan departments, without automatically highlighting the territorial non-contiguity. In the 20th century, however, a purely textual approach to describing political authority is no longer acceptable. Maps are demanded – and, even if one is not presented, a mental map can and will be constructed based on the description given. Non-contiguity then shapes both the evaluation of territorial claims and the legitimacy of those claims, because contiguous territories are implicitly assumed to be 'more connected' and thus potentially more legitimately treated as parts of a single political entity.

A different perception thus dominates in the case of land-based empires, including that constructed by Russia up to 1917 and inherited – and subsequently re-expanded – by the Soviet Union. When expansion occurs outward on land from a center, with the resulting imperial space being one contiguous territory, the tendency to see the entire entity as a legitimate territorial claim is increased. Of course there are numerous differences between the France–Algeria relationship and that between Russia and the outer parts of its empire, but the ability to more easily construct a hegemonic discourse of unity through territorial contiguity is worth further investigation.²⁷ If nothing else, highlighting the contingent origins of this framework – in which contiguity obscures imperial relations – might help undermine the instrumental use of territorial shape. Our rejection of imperial domination and colonialism should apply not only to empires that stretch across oceans but also to contiguous territorial empires.

²⁷ Arguments suggestive of this point are made by, among others, Bunce (1999) and Spruyt (2005). Note that in different historical contexts, non-contiguous imperial claims have been a source of pride (e.g. the British Empire upon which 'the sun never set') rather than a threat to legitimacy.

In sum, we should separate out the second-order effects and correlates of shape – that is, connections with democracy, decolonization, security, or efficiency. Then we can ask if there is something more justified and justifiable about a contiguous and compact shape *for its own sake*. Our assumptions about the ‘normal’ way to understand and act upon the political world – founded on and supported by an affective reaction to particular shapes – lend positive connotations to contiguity and compactness. Those connotations, however, are not sufficient to support normative rights to those features.

Conclusion

Territorial shape has been an underexamined aspect of territorial disputes, claims, and rights. In particular, contiguity and compactness have often been assumed, without explicit examination, to be goals for the drawing and maintaining of territorial boundaries. How we think about these shapes is derived from the form that political territory takes in the modern world: a spatial expanse delineated by boundaries. By understanding the contingent origins of this form of rule, we have a better frame for asking about the normative foundation for different territorial shapes: which aspects of shape are favored because of their consequences, and which are favored – implicitly, perhaps – because of the way they ‘feel’ more normal or natural to us? Likewise, we can ask better empirical questions about how leaders and peoples go about drawing or changing political boundaries: do decision makers pursue more compact or contiguous shapes? If so, do they pursue those shapes relying purely on a rational calculation of outcomes or also because of an implicit – even hegemonic – preference for contiguity and compactness? Questioning these underlying preferences may allow us to reevaluate the connection between territorial shapes and consequences, especially the consequences for the well-being of the people involved.

This article is meant as an exploration of these issues, an initial mapping of questions that should be asked. Further research could usefully proceed along several lines. For example, are there ‘analogue’ concepts to territorial shape, from other historical eras, that might provide us with more theoretical traction on the justice or legitimacy of claims? In the context of political life in a *polis* or a *civitas*, for instance, what concepts play the same role as contiguity or compactness? Are there analytical or normative arguments made about those concepts that might be helpful in rethinking the legitimacy of contiguity and compactness today? What about specific types of disputes over territory, such as secession? Do secessionist movements in territories that are not contiguous make different claims or receive different treatment from the international community? (Roeder 2007;

Griffiths 2014). Finally, even if the territorial structure of politics is changing – or the world is becoming fundamentally deterritorialized²⁸ – we still need to understand how the dominant means of asserting political authority (i.e. through territorial delimitation) have been examined and justified. After all, more complex ideas for defining authority in shared or overlapping ways tend to build outward from existing theories of territory (e.g. Nine 2014).

This study also highlights the benefits of applying recent findings on the role of emotions in world politics to normative and empirical studies of substantive topics. As has been noted, further work on emotions should bring neuroscience findings into closer engagement with social and political theory, connecting emotions to ideational theory (Reus-Smit 2014). Because of the inherently materialist framework of much of the scholarship on emotions, many of its findings have been difficult to integrate with the ideational framework of constructivist IR (Jeffery 2014).²⁹ Yet ideas and ideational structures provide the context for emotional reactions and effects, as different ideas will suggest particular valences. Those emotional valences, then, operate through a process that may take place largely – or even entirely – at the material level of the body, thus driving beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes.

Emotional processes, furthermore, may be shaping our arguments and theories as much as the processes that we study. In other words, if we see a particular (psychological or emotional) process occurring in international politics, we should consider whether similar or related processes are occurring in our own decision making and judgments as scholars. Bially Mattern recently argued that ‘emotions may shape not just world politics but also our knowledge of it’ (2014, 589) and noted that a particular idea or argument may be appealing ‘because we are literally physiologically moved, or affected, by it’ (2014, 593). This reflexive application of our theories and findings is an important step forward. Uncovering those processes will not necessarily falsify our existing arguments, but it will help us separate out implicit, affect-based rhetorical power from logical argument.

The modern understanding of science and knowledge has made this reflexive approach to our own theories and arguments more difficult, especially when it comes to the role of emotions. The longtime neglect of emotions in fields like IR ‘can be at least partially attributed to a number of deeply embedded modern assumptions that conceptualize emotions in opposition to reason’ (Bleiker and Hutchison 2014, 490). Ironically, while

²⁸ This goes beyond abstract statements of the impact of globalization: see, for example, Antonsich’s (2008) finding that there is clear evidence of a post-territorial form of identity among some European Union citizens, and Pollini (2005) on the transformation, rather than disappearance, of attachment to local places in globalizing societies.

²⁹ See McDermott (2014) for a defense of the ‘somatic’ approach to emotions in IR.

modernity has made illegitimate the idea of relying on emotions for reasoning (and thus made emotions, until recently, an overlooked framework for IR), modernity itself has also given particular emotional valences to particular things. In this case, specific territorial shapes are lent a positive or negative affect by the way in which all political territories are framed in terms of the geometric spatial authority of the modern state. In other words, modernity explicitly challenges the legitimacy of emotional reasoning while simultaneously giving a positive emotional valence to ‘rational’ or ‘reasonable’ objects (or shapes).

Thus, how we think about and practice territory in general is constituted by an extensive set of material, social, and ideational technologies, deeply embedded in modernity and together making possible the ‘birth of territory’ as we know it (Elden 2013). All of the more specific issues of territory – disputes, claims, rights, size, shape; the list goes on – *all* are shaped by the ideas and practices that make modern territorial authority what it is. The territorial-rights literature has debated, and will continue to debate, the grounds for a defensible general right to boundary-demarcated territory. Yet we also need to deal with the world as it is, and today the political world most certainly *is* defined in terms of delimited states and their exclusive claims to rule over spatial expanses. Problematizing the historical and conceptual origins of the state allows us to more easily escape the constrictions imposed by our affective reactions and thus to ask the right questions about the legitimacy and justice of territorial rule – and the shapes of particular territorial claims – but it does not determine the answers.

Contiguity and compactness constitute underlying assumptions about how territories should look, and they cannot be wished away. Furthermore, there may be good reasons to favor (or reject) them because of their origins or their expected consequences – making contiguous and compact shapes appear to be a good ‘all other things being equal’ guide for drawing boundaries. Yet with the ongoing evolution of contextual factors like communication and transportation technologies, those expected benefits of a compact and contiguous shape may be diminishing. A shape’s consequences, moreover, should be evaluated without allowing affective reactions to play an implicit role. Then, once the emotional aspects are set aside, we can see that contiguity and compactness – shape itself – do not lend territorial claims additional legitimacy on their own.

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