

# BOOK REVIEWS

CARLO GALLI

## Political Spaces and War

Trans. Elisabeth Fay, ed. Adam Sitze. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 304 pp.

Prior to the book *Political Spaces and Global War*, Carlo Galli, *professore ordinario* at the University of Bologna, was only accessible to the English-speaking audience through references on his extensive work on the political thought of Carl Schmitt. However, in his first book translated to English, Schmitt's conceptualization of the "political" was marginal in Galli's discussion on the spatiality of contemporary politics. Galli argues that the politico-spatial categories of modernity—Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction included—are now exhausted and rendered void by globalization.

The book's main charge is to understand the nature of spatial principles from the "geometric space of modernity" to the "formless space of globalization." Part of Galli's strategy in characterizing the political space in a global age is to interrogate the conceptualization of its antecedent, modern space. While not explicitly challenging a particular strand of political thought, Galli's argument can be interpreted as one reacting against the caricature of the modern state as unitary, homogeneous, and settled. He foregrounds the instabilities of Westphalian states' supposed static geometry, and considers the epochal shift of globalization as the "explosion" of these tensions. He defines globalization as "essentially border crossing," deforming, breaching, and obsolescing the internal-external boundaries of states (103). Similar to Appadurai's (*Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

notion of “global scapes,” Bauman’s (*Liquid Modernity*; Cambridge: Polity, 2000) “liquid modernity,” and Beck’s (*World Risk Society*; Cambridge: Polity, 1999) “risk society,” Galli characterizes the global space as “real but contradictory,” driven by multidirectional, elastic processes without clear logic or orientation (111). Globalization, or, using his preferred term, “global mobilization,” creates new spaces for political action, but its ungovernability also creates new forms of uncertainties.

Galli devotes an entire section discussing global war, describing it as one of the emerging modalities and chronic features of globalization. He identifies the September 11 attacks as the first significant manifestation of global war in that it is a particular form of warfare that has neither discernible origins nor clear telos. While a lot of conflicts these days continue to assume a modern character in that they can still be ascribed to issues of territoriality and identity, Galli argues that these occur in a limitless context or frontiers that cannot be seen on a map (166). It is within this context where Galli significantly departs from Schmitt, arguing that distinctions between the friend and the enemy, as well as internal peace and external war, are not trans-epochal constants. Schmitt’s spatially determined concept of the enemy, in particular, has lost currency in that the targets of today’s global war are not enemies but “nebulas” or adversaries that have no face, unrepresentable, and yet forces “us” to act like “them.”

Immediately, students of sociology can locate Galli’s work in the broader theoretical debate about the nature of social change—whether it is characterized by rupture or continuity, whether we live in a postmodern condition or the second phase of modernity. Galli belongs to the first camp, describing globalization as marking a new epochality, and, as in the case of a number of other contemporary social theorists, sets himself up with the task of finding suitable interpretations for illuminating distinct processes happening today. On the one hand, his approach is refreshing in that he successfully prioritizes nuances over ideal types, dynamic processes over conceptual binaries. This approach allowed him to make measured generalizations and engage related literature in a fair, thoughtful, and intellectually charitable manner. On the other hand, however, Galli struggles in overcoming the practice of presupposing or uncritically placing the European narrative of modernity at the center of his discussion. Throughout the book, Europe remains to be the “silent referent of historical knowledge,” undermining other narratives of human inter-connections that are also cross-border,

if not “global” in character, prior to postmodernity (D. Chakrabarty, “Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the critique of history,” *Cultural Studies*, 6.3 [1992]: 337–57). This is particularly troublesome as Galli utilizes a genealogical approach in mapping the evolution of political spaces to one that takes a global character. To uncritically use Europe as central historical referent limits the book’s potential for breaking away from modernity’s epistemology and providing an alternative politics for knowledge production. Nevertheless, this book puts forward an exciting contribution to the discussion on the relevance of modernity’s conceptual categories in the postmodern condition—a suitable reading for both students and scholars of politics, sociology, and political geography.

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## The Promise of Happiness

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*The Promise of Happiness* begins with a discussion of what Sara Ahmed called “the happiness turn” in economics and positive psychology. Books with titles like *The Happiness Formula* and *Happiness and Economics* offer to measure the happiness of individuals, groups, or entire nation-states. According to Ahmed, these books expose the performativity of happiness. As both a word and a desired state, happiness does things. Positive psychology, for example, involves “the instrumentalization of happiness as a technique” (10), reifying certain routes to happiness; economic happiness data locates and stratifies the happy over and in relation to unhappy others. Both discourses are presided over by some “generalized culture of expertise” (9), contributing to the self-work that Nikolas Rose (*Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*; London: Free Association Books, 1999) describes as the government of the soul. “A happy life, a good life,” Ahmed argues, “involves the regulation of desire. It is not simply that we desire happiness but that happiness is imagined as what you get in return for desiring well” (37). A key objective of *The Promise of Happiness* is to describe how this desiring well functions as a technology of social regulation through