

‘Rescaling the state’ in question

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This paper puts in critical focus a major tenet of the state rescaling literature. This is that over the last 25 years or so there has been a significant decentralization of state functions, largely with a view to re-energizing national economies. Several points are at issue. The first is that the evidence for a decentralization of any significance is insubstantial. Second, the territorial structure of the state has indeed been in question but largely as a result of bottom-up forces contesting it, in part, on distributional grounds. And third, the American case underlines both the Eurocentric character of this literature and the weakness of whatever decentralization has indeed occurred.

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Introduction

The interest in globalization and the changes it brought in its wake continue to resonate. One of its academic by-products has been an interest in what is known as state rescaling. This is a literature that continues to grow and it provides a touchstone for much of the current work on urban and regional politics, particularly that relating to local and regional development. The current issue of this journal bears witness to this interest. In terms of some of the claims made, however, it raises some serious questions. A major assertion that has attracted a remarkable degree of agreement has been that of a decentralization of the state; a shift of regulatory powers and responsibilities from central to more local branches of the state, in some cases to entirely new tiers at the regional or metropolitan level. I describe support for this view as ‘remarkable’ deliberately and for several reasons.

The first is that I believe the evidence for it to be at least exaggerated and possibly quite thin. This is

so even when one allows for the implicit Eurocentricity of the literature. The American experience has been quite different. The American state is the most radically decentralized of any of the advanced industrial countries and has remained so, with little change, over the period typically considered to have been characterized as one of ‘rescaling the state’. The second reason is that if one wanted to write seriously about the rescaling of the state in the arena typically referred to, either implicitly or explicitly, i.e. Western Europe, then there are other more dramatic changes that should have attracted at least equivalent attention. These are changes that one can defensibly attribute to the uneven geographical development occurring in the wake of globalization. I am thinking here of the emergence of a politics of inter-regional conflict, of claims of territorial exploitation and of regional neglect. This is one that is sometimes reflected in calls for radical changes in the territorial structure of the state, sometimes going as far as its dissolution but which has also been

reflected in the rise of third or minority parties whose goal is simply some regional relief applied from the centre.

Addressing these issues is the major objective of this paper. Before that, a brief historical retrospective is useful. The remainder of the paper is then given over to an examination of some aspects of the recent state rescaling literature. This opens with some remarks on what that literature has consisted of and how it relates to globalization. I then turn to elaborating on three critical points: the claim that there has been a significant decentralization of the state; the fact of an alternative politics of space in Western Europe subsequent to the effects of globalization on geographically uneven development and then finally an examination of just why the American case is not only sobering but also exposes the Eurocentric bias of the literature on the rescaling of the state.

An historical retrospective

In starting a review of the recent state rescaling literature, it is useful to remind ourselves that this is not the first time in the last 50 years that issues like this have attracted interest. They might not have been recognized as issues of ‘rescaling’ since the idea of scale in the developed form in which we know it had to wait for the interest in globalization and in the concomitant global–local. Nevertheless, the major form it assumed, the concern over so-called metropolitan integration in the USA, was indeed about that: how to persuade the numerous local governments into which American metropolitan areas were, and remain, divided to cede their authority to some larger metropolitan-wide entity, or, in other words, transferring authority, or some authority, at least, from smaller scale entities to one at a larger geographic scale.

These were almost entirely a result of concerns of a distributional nature. This was the American central city–suburban fiscal disparities problem. At the time, the balance between investment in real estate projects and disinvestment was moving to the advantage of the independent suburbs. Newer, relatively expensive housing was developing apace

there and shifting the balance of residential choice for the more affluent in that direction. Employment and retailing were also beginning to show a relative displacement from the central city. Central city property values and therefore property tax assessments were beginning to suffer. At the same time, central cities were the destinations for large numbers of relatively poor blacks migrating out of the south with demands for increased outlays on education, social services, mass transit but coming to live in housing that was losing its value and which would lose its value still more as the attempts of landlords to milk it of its value led to overcrowding. The disparity was defined as one between taxable resources, increasingly in the independent suburbs, and demand for services, increasingly in the central city. One way in which the problem might be mitigated was thought to be through extending the suburbanization process to those of low income. This would also help to bring the increasingly unemployed African Americans in the central city into contact with the new employment frontier in the outer suburbs. This, however, was foreclosed by the exclusionary zoning and building codes (Downs, 1973) of the suburbs.

The ‘answer’ to this dilemma was supposed to be metropolitan integration: the creation of a metro government which would pool tax resources and subordinate the land use control policies of the independent suburbs to some authority that would be more reflective of needs in the metropolitan area as a whole. This of course did not occur in its totality; in fact, it was not even approached since the independent suburbs would never have allowed it. In some areas of provision, particularly ‘hard’ public services, like water and sewerage or airports, some metropolitan authorities did manage to emerge. There was also a considerable literature on the politics of integration and its pros and cons (Tiebout, 1956; Newton, 1975; Danielson, 1976; Cox and Nartowicz, 1980).¹ Some of this politics continues down to the present day as Mark Purcell (2001) has shown in his analysis of a movement in the San Fernando Valley to detach from the City of Los Angeles.

In the UK at that time, the problem assumed a different character. Instead of central cities versus

independent suburbs, it was a matter of municipalities against rural district or county councils. Exclusionary policies on the part of the latter, particularly through invoking the environmentally sensitive issue of the Green Belt, resulted in what Hall et al. (1973) called 'the containment of urban England'. This resulted in higher land costs for new housing within municipal boundaries and redevelopment of land at higher densities than might otherwise have been the case. Meanwhile, within the Green Belt rural gentrification was the form to be assumed by the most exclusive forms of suburbanization.²

Interestingly, none of this was referred to as 'rescaling of the state', even though the strategies and projects at stake were very similar to those referred to under that heading today. In the American case, much of the manoeuvring occurred within the metropolitan areas themselves though always and necessarily with resort to state (as opposed to federal) law. But the federal government also got involved, notably through the various policies falling under the heading of the War on Poverty. To a very large extent, this was a set of programmes targeted at the central cities and alleviating, at least implicitly, the central city-suburb fiscal disparities problem. So there were certainly strategies and projects of a territorial nature involving shifts in the scale of political structures or practices but the idea of scale had yet to assume its current dominance in urban and regional studies. As I indicated above, this was only to come about with the attempts to characterize post-1970s developments as 'globalization' and concerns for what that meant for 'the local'. In addition, the emphasis prior to the early 1970s was almost entirely on the urban and particularly the metropolitan.

The state rescaling literature

That emphasis can still be discerned in the recent 'state rescaling' literature, particularly in work on a so-called new regionalism, but the 'urban question' has now changed and it has been joined by other themes. For unlike the literature of the 1950s and 1960s, the focus of the new state rescaling literature is not redistribution. Rather and quite emphatically, it is the question of local and regional

development. Three overlapping themes can be identified as follows: so-called 'glocalization', metropolitan regionalism and what Brenner has called 'new state spaces'.

The idea of glocalization is usually attributed to Erik Swyngedouw (1997a, 1997b). It takes off from the observation in the early globalization literature that the state was being hollowed out as a result of a territorial non-coincidence (Murray, 1971) induced by the rapid expansion of trade, foreign investment and international financial flows. Swyngedouw pointed out two other developments, however, that shed a different light on the weakening of state capacities. These were to form the basis of his conception of glocalization. Accordingly, he defines the latter as referring to '(a) the contested restructuring of the institutional, regulatory level (the level of social reproduction) from the national level both upwards to supranational and/or global scales and downwards to the scale of the individual body, the local, the urban or regional configurations, and (b) the strategies of global localization of key forms of industrial, service and financial capital' (Swyngedouw, 1997b, 170). So on the one hand, there is a seeming movement in terms of a rescaling of the state, and on the other, a rescaling of material activity as firms become more dependent on local assets. By way of example, the latter might be defined by an agglomeration specializing in a particular range of products and increasingly dependent on an ability to compete at an international scale. At the same time, there is a shift of state functions both upwards to international organizations like the European Union (EU) or NAFTA and a downward shift to more local and regional branches of the state. The latter complements the emergence of revitalized local economies and their needs for some control of their regulatory apparatus if they are to be effective in international competition.

Swyngedouw's emphases clearly have implications for metropolitan areas. To the degree that their economic structures are indeed 'glocalized', then this serves to put the focus not just on any state functions they might receive from a shrinking central state but also on their internal political organization. As a result, urban or metropolitan governance is also a topic

that has received a good deal of attention. The argument is that jurisdictionally fragmented metropolitan areas are a problem for competitiveness, i.e. for local economic development. On the one hand, they lack economies of scale in public provision so that the burden of taxation and service payments is higher than it need be: something significant in the case of the USA but less so for Western Europe. On the other, the absence of some sort of coordinating authority means that un-internalized inter-jurisdictional externalities run rampant and threaten to undermine local economic growth.

Housing questions have been to the forefront though not exclusively so. The pioneering study was Saxenian's (1983) work on Silicon Valley. The work of While, Jonas and Gibbs (2004) on Cambridge provides another example. The issue is one of making room for more housing in a context of exclusion on the part of most of the local governments affected. The problem becomes one of coordinating or enforcing action among them so as to release land for new housing and, in some instances, for the expansion of the area's economic base itself. A recent example to which I will refer later are the changes in the governance of the Greater London Authority. These shift much of the land use planning power over 'affordable housing' away from the constituent boroughs to the Authority itself with a view to overcoming local exclusion.

Finally, there is the work on new state spaces. This deliberately frames recent developments with respect to previous state territorial structures and explores the forms change has taken and why it has taken those forms. The work of Neil Brenner (2004) on Western Europe has been to the forefront. Like that of Swyngedouw on glocalization, it is widely cited and merits close attention, but its failure to include reference to developments in North America is an important omission and as I want to show later, significant. Again, like Swyngedouw, his argument has a strong material basis.

In the first place, Brenner looks back to the immediate post-war period in Western Europe in which state structures were much more centralized. There was a regional question, just as there is today, but it was dealt with by strongly top-down policies.

He brings these together under the heading of 'spatial Keynesianism'. Notably, they included compensatory regional policies as in the attempts of the British, French, German and Italian governments to steer new employment-creating investments into poorer areas, often ones of relatively high unemployment. There were New Town policies designed to relieve pressure on some of the major metropolitan housing and job markets. An expanded welfare state also worked to provide automatic stabilizers to areas undergoing decline through the mechanism of a lower tax take combined with increased unemployment compensation payments, income supplements and the maintenance of previous standards of public provision. Curiously, Brenner is anxious to give these strategies more of an urban interpretation than I would have been inclined to. He talks about mitigating the regional question less through the spread of new employment and more about 'by spreading urban growth as evenly as possible across the entire surface of each national territory' (p. 115) and how his intent is to examine the interplay between 'urbanization processes and changing state spatial regulation during the postwar period'. Likewise, he argues that New Town policies were partly to subsidize and plan suburban development. This may have been the case around London and Paris, but in areas of relatively dispersed, often mining, populations, they were important in concentrating labour reserves. Washington, County Durham is an example, as Ray Hudson (1982) outlined.

From the early 1970s on, though, Brenner shows that these policies undergo something of an eclipse. This heralds the arrival of new state spaces. First, as employment contracts, there is less of it to move to the depressed areas without impacting employment levels in those cities and regions from which it is being persuaded to move. On the other hand, the spatial basis of development undergoes change. Flexible forms of manufacturing result in an emphasis on agglomeration around vertically disintegrated labour processes and on locality-specific assets, including those provided through the state. In other words, and connecting with Swyngedouw's claims, it is the new growth areas that now need state

support, typically in the form of increased regulatory powers and the provision of infrastructural investments to complement local specialties. And these are things that states, reeling from the impact of globalization, and searching for winners, including geographically defined ones, are happy to provide.

The challenges of globalization have, according to Brenner and others, like Jessop (2002), entrained the competition state. This is in sharp contrast to the Keynesian welfare state with its redistributive agenda, both geographic and otherwise. The objective now is to facilitate the developmental capacities of different places within the state's jurisdiction though, apparently, targeting some more than others. Territorial competition is certainly a new watchword; a response to the pressures felt by localities as the state retreats from spatial Keynesianism. But so too is selective targeting by the state, designed to ensure that the most promising places from the standpoint of international competition and so securing a new role in the changing international division of labour, receive what they require: 'National governments now came to view their most globally integrated cities and city-regions as key motors for national economic growth, and thus targeted them with particular intensity for various types of urban locational policies' (p. 205).

These new 'urban locational policies' include the following: the devolution of regulatory responsibilities ['... state regulatory capacities have been decentralized and customized according to place-, scale-, and jurisdiction-specific conditions ...' (p. 259)]; the construction of place- and scale-specific institutional forms like Enterprise Zones, airport development agencies and the Urban Development Corporations of the Thatcher era; rescaled 'metro-politanized' spatial planning strategies that distribute infrastructural investments across major urban areas in order to enhance their competitive abilities; and state-financed mega-projects on the part of all branches of the state, from the most local to the most central, designed to stimulate growth in particular places—new convention centres, new transport links, office parks and the like.

There is clearly quite a bit of overlap in the new state spaces argument with the two other themes

I have identified. Globalization is a crucial point of reference: the necessary condition for glocalization, new state spaces and for metro-regionalism alike. The same applies to the renewed significance of metropolitan areas. There are claims about the importance of flexible accumulation. Pierre Veltz's (1996) arguments are some of the more convincing and imaginative here. On the other hand, not all the new growth areas can be defensibly defined as 'metropolitan' in the sense of major urban agglomerations. This means that the strains generating demands for cooperation over wider geographical areas have a broader applicability. Cambridge is a case in point, as While et al. (2004) have argued, as is Reading (Barlow and Savage, 1986).

There is also quite a bit of variation in the arguments. Brenner has drawn quite heavily on Erik Swyngedouw's earlier arguments but is implicitly at least, more nuanced emphasizing the spatial targeting of central states in terms of infrastructural investment in addition to the devolution of regulatory capacities. Bearing these variations in mind, however, there is still quite a bit in the state rescaling literature that one can reasonably take issue with. I want to draw attention to two of these here. The first concerns the claims about 'decentralization' or 'devolution' and just how defensible they are. The second concerns the forms assumed by the politics of globalization in Western Europe. While reshaping the territorial structure of the state might be one of these, it is far from the only way in which territorial resolutions to the contradictions of globalization are being sought. Furthermore, based on the conclusions, we can come to about the reality of decentralization it may be relatively insignificant.

The question of decentralization

In talking about glocalization, expectations are raised only to be followed by more nuanced readings. In one of his papers, and in a section headed 'Rescaling the Economy, Rescaling the State' Erik Swyngedouw (1997b) initially advises us that 'regulatory codes, norms and institutions ... are spatially jumping from one scale to another' (p. 170). But very quickly this is substantiated by reference to the shift of wage bargaining from national to

local levels—which has very little to do with the state³—and then to a discussion of the emergence of local forms of governance: ‘The interventionism of the state in the economy, for example, is rescaled, either downwards to the level of the city or the region where public-private partnerships shape an entrepreneurial practice and ideology needed to successfully engage in an intensified process of inter-urban competition or upwards’ (Ibid. 172). So it is all a bit of an anti-climax. Instead of arming local governments with the sort of independence in land use planning and in spending that one might reasonably have expected from the build-up about ‘regulatory codes and institutions’ and which could indeed have opened the window to serious local economic development initiatives, what one gets are public-private partnerships. But on the other hand, in terms of the accuracy and limited nature of the observations, rightly so too!

Brenner is a little more insistent claiming that ‘... state regulatory capacities have been decentralised and customized according to place-, scale-, and jurisdiction-specific conditions ...’ (p. 259). This has been particularly the case, he argues, in France and in Spain. Yet despite the fanfare and widespread support in the literature for this sort of claim about a transfer of regulatory capacities, it is one that cries out for more serious examination. Of the instances with which I am most familiar, it certainly is not the case in the UK, and the French case requires serious qualification. Despite Welsh and Scottish devolution which is taken up later, centre-local relations in the UK remain remarkably centralized: scarcely changed since the days of spatial Keynesianism although the substantive content of the relation has altered. It is true that Regional Development Agencies were introduced in 1998 with responsibility for local economic development but their personnel and policies are subject to close central government scrutiny and their funding is risible (Morgan, 2001). Housing development continues to be subject to stringent central control. Projections for new starts are made for sub-areas and then it is up to the local authorities there to fight it out over where the new housing will go; so at least they have that dubious privilege (Cowell and Murdoch, 1999). It is

the same story with respect to land use planning. Local authorities have to develop so-called Structure Plans but these are subject to central monitoring. There is also something called Regional Planning Guidance which lays down limits with respect to what can be and should be planned for a particular region. On top of that there is a continual flow of Planning Advisories from the Ministry in London communicating shifting priorities regarding issues like the construction of new shopping centres. These are notices, moreover, which local authorities have to assume are a little more constraining than the euphemistic ‘Advisory’ might suggest. Local finance remains virtually untouched. On average, over 70% of a local government’s revenues come from the central government. Furthermore, and most significantly, what is received is adjusted according to the local government’s ability to raise the money itself, given the magnitude of its tax base. To the degree that a local tax base increases, the respective authority is penalized by a reduction in its grant.⁴ This means that while there might indeed be increased interest in local economic development on the part of local government, fiscal reasons remain negligible.

The French case also merits more careful review. According to Pinson and LeGalès (2005), there have been two important changes: an increase in the powers and resources of the 22 regions and a corresponding retreat in the role of the Paris-directed field services and the development of inter-communal government, especially in the large cities. In the case of the latter, the new structures are responsible for urban planning, urban regeneration, public transport and social housing.

The 22 regions have responsibilities with respect to education and vocational training, economic development and land use planning, which sounds promising but is actually much less than it might seem. This is because of continuing and strong central government control. For each 4-year period, each Regional Council has to complete a contract with the central government regarding a broad land use plan for the region and for major infrastructural projects. As Subra (2007) has pointed out, the state tries to impose its wishes on the regions and has the

power to do so. There is also a long-term displacement of funding responsibility for major projects, including Trains à Grande Vitesse (TGV) lines, to the regions. To some degree, the sharing of financing is intended to fulfil distributional goals, with poorer regions committing to lower shares than the richer ones, though this does not always work out that way in practice.⁵ Some indication of the continuing power of the central state with respect to the regions has been outlined by Lipietz (1995) in a discussion of a (region-originated) plan for the region of the Ile-de-France. This foresaw a metropolitan future for the area but was vetoed by the central authorities.

Separately, Pinson and LeGalès (2005) and Pinson (n.d.) also make much of the new inter-communal structures particularly in the urban areas and it is true that they have new responsibilities for economic development and planning. But these are hedged around with restrictions. Land use plans have to conform to the regional plan referred to above and their fiscal powers are limited to something called the professional tax levied on businesses and previously levied by the constituent communes individually. The purposes to which the new structures have been put have not always been the ones intended. There have been some notable instances in which wealthier communes have joined together in order to avoid tax sharing with the poorer.

I am not saying that there have not been changes of the sort Brenner and Swyngedouw highlight. Local government in France has indeed been strengthened and a new horizontalization of relations is apparent in contrast to the verticality dominant in the past.⁶ From a French point of view, the changes might appear dramatic. But from a more trans-Atlantic standpoint, their magnitude and the scope of their effects remain relatively trivial. To understand what, to paraphrase Brenner, a 'decentralization and customization of state regulatory capacities according to place-, scale-, and jurisdiction-specific conditions ...' might indeed look like you have to go to the USA: the veritable paragon of the modern decentralized state. Just 6 months there would quickly disabuse anybody of the claims regarding some seismic shift in the territorial structure

of the state. The arguments being made, therefore, are very West Europe-centric and as I hope to show below, that is part of their problem.⁷

The other facet of Brenner's argument that should be considered before moving on is that of spatial targeting. The decentralization of regulatory capacities, of course, is designed to allow those areas with some sort of competitive advantage in overseas markets to enhance their superiority while at the same time allowing other areas the same possibilities of developing local economies through creating and exploiting some local regulatory advantage. Less even-handed are what he calls state attempts to reconcentrate productive capacities into the most promising regions. It is easy to come up with examples in support of this claim. London is a case in point.

Ever since Mrs Thatcher, London has been the darling of the British economy. Her policies of selling off the nationalized industries and the coal mines (Hudson, 1986) and of liberalizing the London stock exchange, in combination with the inauguration of an international regime of currency convertibility, worked a transformation of the British space economy. Financial services in London, along with North Sea oil, became a saviour of the British balance of payments. Accordingly, London morphed into the sort of regional winner that Brenner has in mind. And it and its surrounding area have indeed been rewarded with massive public investments to clear the way for further expansion. These include the development of Thames Gateway, planned to ease the city's housing problem, and the construction of Crossrail, to mitigate central city congestion and make commuting easier, though it remains unclear how the final bills will be divided up between central government, local government and private interests. On top of that there have been regulatory changes designed to clear away other obstacles to mitigating a housing crisis threatening to undermine the viability of the regional economy. As I pointed out earlier, the Greater London Authority has been given enhanced powers with respect to the land use planning decisions of the constituent boroughs. It should be noted, though, that this is not so much decentralization as a redistribution of powers within London at central state behest.

Still, it is not clear how new this all is and how much of a break it represents with spatial Keynesianism. Spatial targeting also featured there with extensive programmes of central government infrastructural spending in particular places. Policies of redistributing employment called for spending on new towns like Washington and Peterlee in the Northeast, Cwmbran in South Wales and Cumbernauld in Scotland. Money was also ploughed into schemes for upgrading regional highway networks in order to make the areas more attractive to investors. Still other of this spatial targeting was designed to revive older industries with a view to enhancing their competitiveness. One thinks here of the role the French government played in dramatically changing the geography of the French iron and steel industry in the 1960s (Tarrow, 1978). The creation of new coastal works at Dunkirk in the north and at Fos in the south was designed to lower the costs of accessing imports of the basic raw materials. The British government attempted something similar around Tees-side but with less success (Beynon et al., 1986). Other examples in France include the development of a tourist industry in Languedoc through programmes of mosquito control in an area that is generally low lying and marshy, and the creation of new resort towns, notably La Grande Motte.⁸ Government subsidies were also of central importance in building up the Breton livestock industry.

An alternative politics of local and regional development

All this, however, assumes a particular model of local economic development: one in which the emphasis is placed on building up what Brenner calls 'productive capacities'. Yet, if there is indeed a 'new' model of local economic development, then its precise form has to be more debatable. Rather, there is clearly one other that is bottom-up rather than the central state-instigated changes emphasized by Brenner, and whose agendas are more complex, in part because of the class alliances that they bring together. The most apparent agendas are ones of distribution. What are at stake are inter-territorial transfers. Here, the rallying cry is not so much growth through the enhancement of compet-

itive capacities as territorial justice. This is a highly divisive politics. The politics envisaged by most of the 'rescaling the state' literature retains a sense of national purpose; of policies that are supposed to work to the benefit of all, if only through some sort of trickle down.⁹ But what is equally apparent if not more so is a highly territorialized form of the politics of local and regional development which focuses on the supposed exploitation of one region by another and sometimes calls not so much for a rescaling of the state as for separation and the creation of new states altogether.

Conflicts around claims of territorial exploitation are typically fiscal in character and tend to originate in regions or localities that are constructed as paying more in taxes than they get proportionally in return as services. Some of these are relatively harmless stuff. London has long argued a case like that with respect to the rest of the UK—all candidates in the London mayoral election of 2008 made this point—but its impact on national politics has been minor. In the same way, as While et al. (2004) point out, one of the reactions to government failure to hand over more money to relieve the infrastructural deficiencies in the Cambridge area has been to claim that it provides more tax revenues to the government than it receives back in public expenditures. The concerns about the Barnett formula and whether Scotland is benefiting at the expense of Northeast England or not are another case in point. The disputes in Germany between the more rapidly growing *länder* in the south and the rustbelt ones in the north and east have been a little more serious (Jeffery, 1999). Even more so are those in Italy and Belgium.

Accordingly, a second symptom of the new politics of local and regional development in Western Europe has been the rise of regional parties. These include the Scottish and Welsh Nationalist movements, Italy's Northern League and the parties pushing for an independent Flanders. More interesting because of its left-radical edge has been the Left Party in Germany: essentially a left wing vision of how to cope with a geography of uneven development that has been to the disadvantage of the *länder* of the old DDR.

Some of the agendas at stake in these movements are purely distributional with little or no productive goals in mind. This is where their mass support typically comes from. Yet to some degree, this is simply to gain the mass support necessary for other, much more developmental agendas. The most obvious of these is redirecting fiscal flows so as to facilitate the build up of physical infrastructures: money for highways, ports and urban infrastructure. Yet, and most clearly in the Belgian and Italian instances, neo-liberal goals are firmly in view, securing positions in the international division of labour not only through reductions in tax payments and consequently in wages but also through the loosening up of the industrial reserve army. Territorial justice for Flanders through a radical regionalization of the Belgian welfare state and so reducing the fiscal flow in the direction of Wallonia has popular appeal, but taking the 'regional' welfare state in hand has long been a goal of the Flemish capitalist class.¹⁰ And so too with the Northern League. The business concerns have been taxes and paying for physical infrastructure. They do not care how this is done. If a national government emerged with a clear neo-liberal agenda, then their support for the Northern League would evaporate.¹¹ Given the contradictions within the Northern League, particularly its popular appeals in terms not just of a geographic reordering of the Italian welfare state but also its anti-immigrant stance, one can see their point.

Beyond these considerations, though, the fact of separatist parties or regional parties emphasizes the role of party politics at the national level; something neglected in the focus on the rescaling of the state but thoroughly relevant to the dilemmas of geographically uneven development currently being confronted.¹² Parties like the Front National (FN) or the British National Party (BNP) may address their constituencies as the forgotten, the put-upon but their localized support base in the rust belts of Northeastern France, the Marseilles area, east London and the industrial North of England suggests an appeal that is more regional in character. It is, moreover, not only the extremist parties whose support base should be examined from this viewpoint. As Savage (1987) pointed out, at least to some degree British labour

may have tended to divide along regional lines in the 1980s, partly in relation to differences in the buoyancy of local job and housing markets.¹³

However, there is not much new here. National parties without any explicit regional or local agenda nevertheless also represent concerns about local or regional labour markets, housing shortages and the like. Class in the loose sense of a distributional divide is the principle cleavage around which political parties in the advanced capitalist societies congeal. But it bears emphasis that class interests in profits, jobs and incomes are at the same time always and inevitably territorial in character. Voters are not so much concerned with the state of the labour market in the country as a whole as the labour market in their particular region, and the same goes for housing. So to an important degree, the national parties are coalitions of local class interests pushing for policies that will raise all regional boats. As such, they should be factored into any consideration of the politics of space.

The other point that needs to be made here is that national party politics would not be relevant to the changing politics of the space economy if the national had lost much of its power; if indeed, as per the glocalization thesis, functions had shifted upwards and downwards. The FN and the BNP would be out of business if states had no continuing power over immigration. The other bugaboo of the FN has been the EU, particularly its eastward extension and its implications for plant closures in France. But despite the creation of a single market in Europe—the upward displacement bit of the glocalization thesis, though one that Brenner tends to de-emphasize—the national continues to play a significant role in the politics of local and regional development there. What has emerged at the level of the EU is something which increasingly approximates to the American politics of regional development. The individual member countries act more and more like the American states, providing financial assistance to localities bidding for major international investments and provoking accusations from other members of 'social dumping'. Not only is this inseparable from the single market, allowing firms to reasonably select from locations in different countries,¹⁴ but also, and despite the surface

fluff of financial incentives, there is the fact that states still vary a great deal in their labour laws and regulatory procedures, or what the Americans would sum up as 'business climate'. This competition has greatly intensified following the expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe.

At this point, it might be useful to recall Becky Mansfield's (2005) arguments regarding the state rescaling literature and how it has tended to draw attention away from the continuing role of the national. Equally important, and more consequential, is her argument that in terms of their conditions events cannot be assigned to one scale or another; that they are not either local, regional, national or global but often all of them together. In this regard, Massey's (2005) arguments about the construction of place resonate; that in that construction, relations both near and far, and conditions at very different scales are drawn on. In fact Brenner, in some of his writings, has not been oblivious to considerations like these and his vision is less radical than that of some others. His urban locational policies designed to enhance the productive capacities of some metropolitan areas are always national, for instance. In this regard, he has written effectively about London as a global city and its relationship to the British state (1998).

Mansfield's intervention also brings to mind a more recent contribution to the state rescaling debate from John Allen and Allan Cochrane (2007). Unlike Mansfield, they are suspicious of the idea of bounded spaces like scales, though they find it hard to avoid reference to them altogether. For them, the idea of region is a political construct; it is mobilized in practice in order to defend or advance some private interest spuriously dressed up as a shared, territorial one. Rather, and to use their terms, construction brings together 'elements of central, local and regional institutions' in what they call 'regional assemblages'. Within these regional assemblages, hierarchical scale relations tend to break down as 'upper level' agencies find it difficult to get their own way without negotiation.

Lessons from the USA

While Neil Brenner's book focuses on the West European case, much of the literature on rescaling the state

assumes a universality, at least across the advanced capitalist societies, that I find, living in the USA, a little disarming. The USA has been different, it continues to be different, albeit with some interesting convergences with the EU to which I referred earlier. What has unfolded there has important lessons for anyone considering changes in the politics of local and regional development since the Second World War.

In the first place, it was wise of Brenner not to try to apply his spatial Keynesianism/competition state contrast with their contrasting political geographies to the USA. This is because in the USA, spatial Keynesianism was at best a very, very stunted creature. In fact, one wonders if one could claim that it ever existed at all. There was very little in the way of a federally led programme of employment redistribution. New Towns, to the extent that they appeared, were private creations. And the sorts of inter-regional equilibrating mechanisms working through the national fisc were severely compromised. This was partly because the USA has never had one welfare state, rather, it has had 50 of them. In addition, and partly in consequence, the states have been important in the raising of revenue. The result has been that much of the alteration in tax impacts subsequent to changes in the geography of unemployment has been intra-state.

Second, while it is true that there is an important shift among local governments in the West European countries in the late 1970s and 1980s towards an increased emphasis on development activities and away from being a relay for the welfare state, this is much less the case in the USA. The balance between 'entrepreneurial' and 'managerial' postures was always different on the two sides of the Atlantic. Boosterism has a very long history in the USA and it was an important feature of the post-war period.¹⁵ Growth coalition activity operated at numerous levels. As John Mollenkopf (1976) showed in an early paper, downtown landlords seized on the federal urban renewal programmes of the 1950s and 1960s as a way of clearing the way for reorganizing downtowns as major centres of office employment and so staunching the red ink that was affecting their balance sheets as central business districts imploded. Also significant is the fact that it was during

this period that virtually all states acquired State Development Departments (Anton and Reynolds, n.d.) and of their charges was to bring new investment into respective states; they were to the forefront and remain so in marketing and providing financial incentives.

The USA was affected by globalization and its fallout in much the same way as the West European countries. There were both rust belts and new growth areas. Many of the older industrial cities of the Midwest and Northeast were badly affected while population growth burgeoned around the leisure and high-tech industries of the West coast and the Southwest and to a lesser degree Florida and Texas. The South became the recipient of the branch plants of firms headquartered in the North and Midwest so much of the rural turnaround of the 1970s that was noted in Western Europe and linked to increasing unemployment in the major cities (Fothergill et al., 1988) assumed a sharp regional form in the USA. The upshot was the elaboration of regional distinctions around the Coldbelt/Sunbelt axis and a politics whose key idea was one of inter-regional exploitation: this was the calculation of what different states sent to Washington minus what they got back 'in return' in the form of various subsidies, social security payments, military expenditures and the like. When the averages were calculated, the Northeast and Midwest were proclaimed the losers.¹⁶

So as in Western Europe, the years after the collapse of the post-war boom have witnessed the emergence of sharp inter-regional tensions but, and an important 'but', without the formation of regional or third parties to pursue particularistic agendas. Party politics has been business as usual and it is the 'business as usual' bit that needs explaining and which places claims about decentralization of West European states in a harsher light. The fact is that the American state is extraordinarily decentralized and has been for a very long time. The debates over the form of the welfare state in the 1930s were around an attempt to reduce the powers of the states relative to that of the federal government but the centralizing impulse was still-born. It is not just that American federalism is of

a highly radical sort. The states have also delegated very considerable powers to local government in matters concerning land use, revenue extraction and borrowing money for public works. For most American states, oversight of local planning decisions is minimal. The idea of structure plans to be submitted to a more central branch of the state for approval would be anathema. On top of that representation at state and federal levels is extraordinarily territorialized. Congresspersons represent first and foremost their districts and Senators represent their states. The primary system in which candidates go head to head for a party's nomination without any intervention from the national parties is an important reason why they are elected on the basis of what they will do for their district or state. Once in the respective state house or in Washington, the committee system, weak party discipline and the ability to form bipartisan coalitions, as around the Coldbelt/Sunbelt issue, mean that they can deliver, perhaps not all, but something that will appease local demands. They can get themselves appointed to the committee that considers legislation particularly pertinent to their state and amend it to their advantage or push to have it dropped. And they then get to vote on what comes out of committee. The centralized party systems of Western Europe are an entirely different species. Particularly in a period of enhanced uneven development, they have had trouble accommodating local demands in the way the American state has and this has led to the formation of regional and third parties.¹⁷

Even so, decentralization does not mean any simple precedence such that the local branches of the state and the forces, typically locally dependent, that cluster around them always get their way. Becky Mansfield is right, as are John Allen and Allan Cochrane. There is an element of mutual dependence among forces located at different levels of the state. Arizona wants irrigation projects from the federal government, but so too does a federal agency, the Bureau of Reclamation, since it depends on a stream of such projects for ensuring its own viability as a continuing part of it, and they will happily do the favourable cost-benefit

analyses. The state of Utah and some local governments may put themselves vigorously behind plans for a major new skiing destination there—a new ‘Sun Valley’—but they need the agreement of the USA Forestry Service if they are to obtain access to all the necessary land.¹⁸ So thinking in terms of what Allen and Cochrane call assemblages may be a more useful direction to go in than assumptions of hierarchical scalar relations.

Concluding comments

In sum, current writings on rescaling the state are provocative and occasionally insightful but could be more convincing empirically. Quite aside from doubts about the decentralization of functions to more local levels, there is the fact that the political geography of Western Europe is more complex than that depicted by the state rescaling literature. Geographically uneven development increased subsequent to the initiation of what Robert Brenner (1998) has called ‘the long downturn’ in the global economy in the early 1970s. New international divisions of labour, the turn to macro-economic austerity, the de-nationalization of industry, all played a role in this. There certainly have been changes in national policy towards the localities and the regions. Notably, the post-war apparatus of regional planning that aimed to disperse employment to distressed areas has been dismantled. Brenner is correct when he talks about increased territorial competition for local economic development as left to take up the void. But beyond that the claims of the rescaling literature become a little more dubious. And whatever decentralization might have been achieved pales in comparison with that which has been characteristic of the USA for a very long time.

More evident in my view is a politics less of building up local productive capacities and more one of territorial redistribution, though in its most radical incarnations this often has behind it a capitalist agenda of enhancing their accumulation prospects through a regionalization of the welfare state: not exactly the ‘high road’ to local economic development that is implicit in Neil

Brenner’s understanding of state rescaling. There is a generalized struggle for central state spending characterized by claims and counterclaims of territorial exploitation: something that was foreign to the ‘golden age’ of capitalism. Regional parties have emerged or achieved new life in wealthier regions around demands to withdraw from a national welfare state that is seen as exploitative. A perceived neglect by the central state, on the other hand, has led either to demands for separation as in the cases of Scotland and Wales or support for new national parties, typically towards the extremes, demanding a change in national policy, but one that would implicitly favour some localities and regions more than others.

Responses to globalization and its attendant geographically uneven development do not have to be through the rescaling of the state, and in the USA, of course, they have not been. In my view, the significance of state rescaling in Western Europe has been exaggerated: what it has amounted to is not only trivial compared with the radical and longstanding character of decentralized forms in the USA but the transformation it has wrought in Western Europe has not been very substantial. What might repay further investigation and reflection is the role of representation: new political parties, sometimes regional, sometimes not and a heightened sensitivity to regional questions. This sensitivity has been a hallmark of the American case, bipartisan coalitions often forming around the politics of geographically uneven development as in the case of the conflict between Coldbelt and Sunbelt in the 1980s. The form of the West European state precludes this but the politics of uneven development may now be intruding into party strategy.¹⁹ And this in turn testifies to the continued significance of the central branches of the state there in the politics of geographically uneven development.

Endnotes

¹ For a case study that brings out the possibilities and limitations of metropolitan integration see Cox and Jonas (1993).

² For an account of the difficulties that the old Greater London Council encountered in trying to construct public housing in the more suburban of the constituent boroughs, see Young and Kramer (1978).

³ There is, however, a certain slipperiness about the argument here since it is not always clear whether reference is being made to the state or to the economy.

⁴ See www.statistics.gov.uk/events/gss2006/downloads/A1Sussex.doc (Accessed 26 October 2008).

⁵ Increase in the regional shares of financing the 'contrats de plan'—from 40% in 1984–1988 to 50% for 2000–2004 (Subra 2007, 274).

⁶ Pinson (n.d.) is particularly good on this.

⁷ In addition to France, Brenner singles out Spain as a case where the decentralization of state responsibilities has assumed especially sharp proportions. Yet arguably this was much less about a new territorial frame for local and regional development and more a response to long term and aggravated senses of regional difference assuming, at least overtly, a more cultural character; more about preserving a culture than geographically uneven development, therefore.

⁸ See http://www.languedoc-roussillon.ecologie.gouv.fr/seminaire/Philippe%20Jouvin_amenagement%20littoral.pdf (Accessed 20 August 2008).

⁹ Compare Subra (2007, 8): 'A la représentation qui prévalait du temps de Trente glorieuses—celle d'un territoire national et d'une communauté nationale unique et unifié, dont toutes les parties bénéficiaient, bien qu'à des degrés divers, du processus général de modernisation et d'enrichissement—s'est substituée, au moins partiellement, celle d'une collection de territoires locaux et de populations locales, aux sorts tragiquement différents, certains gagnants, d'autres perdants dans le grand jeu de l'intégration européenne et de la mondialisation. A un schéma relativement simple qui voyait coexister une identité territoriale dominante, la Nation, et des appartenances de classes très tranchées, a succédé un tableau bien plus confus où la première est en concurrence avec de multiples identités territoriales, certains supranationales (la planète, l'Europe), d'autres infranationales (la région, la commune, le quartier)—tandis que les identités de classes et les clivages générationnels semblent jouer un rôle moins important.'

¹⁰ Compare Daniel Tanuro (2008): 'The nationalists of the North of the country denounce the "financial transfers" from wealthy Flanders to poor Wallonia (in fact the

solidarity of the more numerous and better paid employees of Flanders with the more numerous social security claimants in Wallonia). This agitation is only the deformed political translation of the fact that the Flemish employers want to "reform" social security in line with their specific neoliberal project, and to be able to rely more on the available workforce ... in Wallonia.'

¹¹ 'However, the "deep North" entrepreneurial class is not sincerely committed to the NL (Northern League) nationalist project in all of its aspects. It is far more interested in the establishment of a laissez-faire economy than in the promotion or defence of the ridiculous Padanian identity. The economic needs of this class can also be satisfied by other political forces promoting extensive neo-liberal reforms as shown by the support that Berlusconi received among the Northern entrepreneurs at the 1994 election. Many of them eventually shifted back to the NL when Berlusconi proved unwilling and unable to deliver what they expected' (Cavatorta, 2001).

¹² There is a sense in Brenner that geographically uneven development is a result of the new policies initiated under the aegis of the competition state. My own view is that it is more complicated than that. While globalization might indeed be the necessary condition for the competition state, it also set in motion other changes which led to increased uneven development. Globalization is a cover-all for many of the strategies engaged in, by firms and by states, to restore the lost profitability of capitalism's so-called 'golden years': the period corresponding to what Brenner calls spatial Keynesianism. These included the creation of new international divisions of labour and macro-economic policies of austerity; both of which hit certain areas in the advanced capitalist societies—areas later to be defined as 'rust belts'—with particular severity.

¹³ The challenge for Savage was to try to explain why working class homeowners might be diverging in their voting preferences according to the strength of local job and housing markets. Although the use of aggregate data made more reliable inferences difficult, it seemed that in constituencies outside of London and the Southeast, where rates of working class homeownership were particularly high, rates of voting for the Labour Party, holding some other variables constant were elevated. The reverse applied in London and the Southeast. He speculated that this was due to different positions on macro-economic austerity on the part of the two major parties. Labour's promise of more expansive policies would benefit Northern labour and therefore housing markets more than those in London and the Southeast. Among

other things, it would allow people to cash in their capital gains and open up more options, including moving to London and the Southeast. On the other hand, working class homeowners in the latter area were continuing to do very well, despite the deflationary policies of the Conservative government.

¹⁴ There has been a flurry of rationalizations in the location patterns of the multinationals as they seek out economies by serving the EU from fewer sites.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Salisbury (1964).

¹⁶ Struggles between the coal mining states of the West and those of the Midwest and East are also indicative. See the discussion in Cox (2002, 24–27).

¹⁷ This is with the interesting exception of France; ‘interesting’ because of its reputation for a high degree of centralization celebrated in the idea of the Napoleonic state. The institutional mechanism at stake here, connecting local interests to central government decisions, is that of the *cumul des mandats*. Historically this has meant that a mayor or the president of a regional council could be, simultaneously, a government minister in Paris or at the very least a deputy. This has opened the door to obtaining local and regional favours. A case in point was the decision to locate a major junction point in the TGV network at Lille; see Newman and Thornley (1995) and Subra (2007: 83–85).

¹⁸ For the less than savoury background to how this ‘cooperation’ was acquired, see <http://www.motherjones.com/news/outfront/2001/11/saltlake.html> (Accessed 3 September 2008). See also ‘Olympic Angle Helps Utah Ski Resort Gain U.S. Land to Expand’ *Wall Street Journal* July 9, 1998, p. A1.

¹⁹ For example, this from a story on the BBC website: ‘At one time the Conservatives had more than 60 MPs in the North of England, but now the party has just 19. It has invested heavily in new campaign centres in Bradford, Newcastle and Salford in an effort to rebuild its strength on the ground in parts of the country where it has all but disappeared from local councils. It has also identified transport as an area where voters in the North East feel they are missing out. Mr. Cameron accused Labour of unfairly favouring London in transport investment, spending £1,637 per head in the capital since 2000 compared with £577 in the North East’ [(Hague woos North with roads pledge): http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk_politics/7298342.stm. Published: 15 March 2008 13:11:59 GMT]. This sort of explicit attempt to appeal to the electorate along regional lines was virtually un-

known in the 1950s and even into the 1960s but has become much more significant recently.

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