




# **Conceptual barriers in Anglo American geography's treatments of the State: examples from 20th century Italy**


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Christian Sellar, University of Mississippi






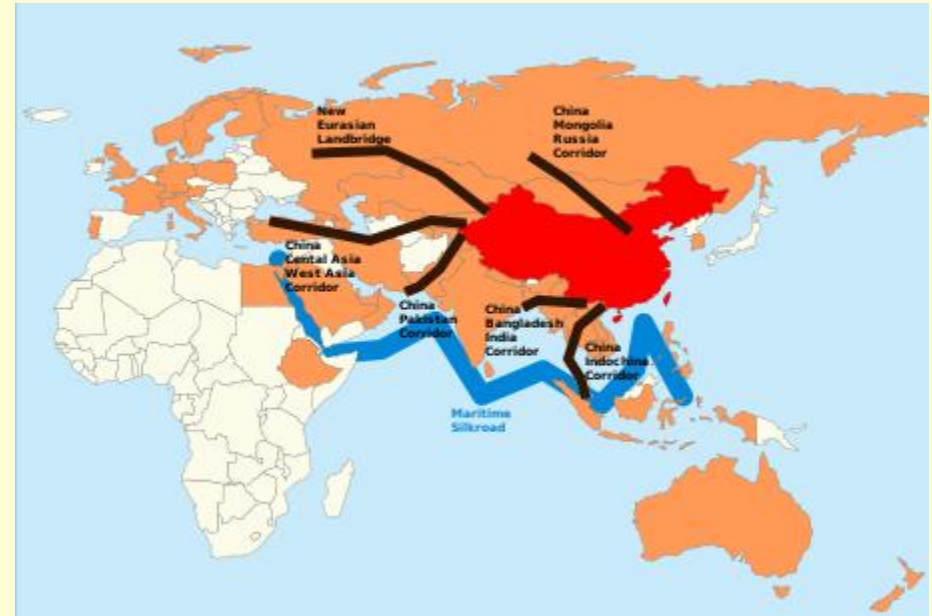
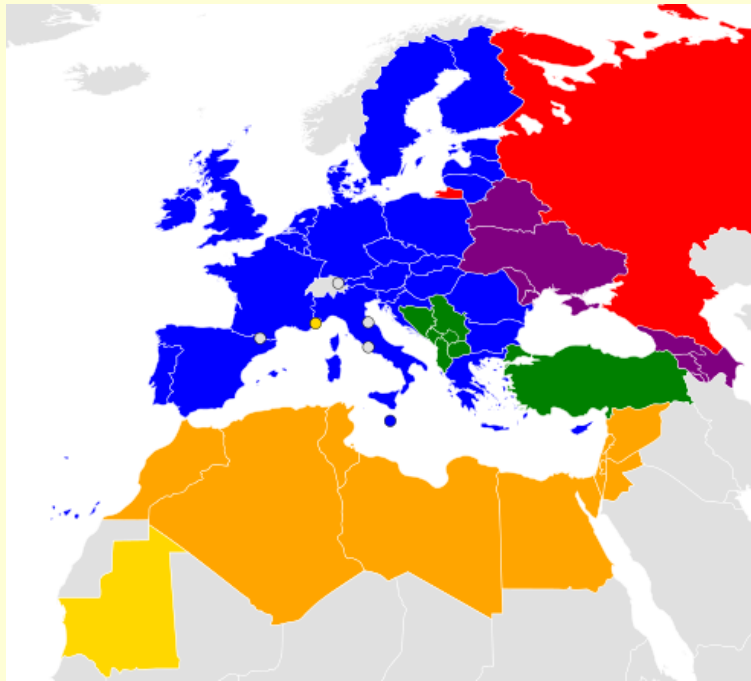
# Concepts as Barriers

- Academic disciplinary boundaries may hinder a fuller understanding of globalizing processes
  - Obvious in Anglo-American human geography: ‘political’ and ‘economic’ geography evolved in independent sub-disciplines that do not speak to each other
  - Focus: Growing interests in the role of the state in economic geography - State as part of theory of governance: one among factors facilitating and regulating capital, commodity and labor flows along value chains; Global Production Networks (GPN) – strategic coupling between firms and states – firms centered
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# Problem: where is the political?


- Research in political geography on the nature of the state largely ignored
  - No discussion of sovereignty, territoriality, state spaces as frame vs. networks
  - Political geography part of the problem: research in geo-economics tends to focus on 'markets' without specific reference to firms
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Left: European Neighborhood Policy; right: China's 'One Belt One Road' policy: both policy initiatives have implications in both state territoriality and value chains restructuring (source: Wikimedia commons)




# What constitute conceptual barriers?

- Divergence in theoretical approaches: wide array of political theories vs. value chains, production network, Polanyan approaches
  - Divergence in methods: GPN scholars take on qualitative research
  - Divergence in language
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# Argument

- Anglo American geography lost the integrative nature of 20<sup>th</sup> Century regional geography
  - The independent and disconnected treatment of the State in economic and political geography is not merely a duplication of concepts.
  - Instead, it creates disciplinary blind spots in which the mutual influences of re-territorializing states and re-structuring value chains are not adequately analyzed.
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# Research questions


- In what cases value chains restructuring drives changes in the organizational or territorial structure of states?
- How do firms exercise such influence?
- What time frame should be considered?



Picture: 989 Changle Road, Shanghai. Two floors of the skyscraper are occupied by the Italian consulate, two state agencies, and a chamber of commerce. They are called 'Italia' – territoriality and value chains intertwined




# Research design

- Identify key historical moments in value chain transformation
    - 1920s-30s: end of the first phase of globalization – compression of trade
    - 1990s: post Cold War new phase of – neoliberal - globalization
  - Identify a strong exporter, but not a rule changer
    - Situation in which firms may lobby the government to adapt to external changes, rather than the government causing them (major powers are not good)
    - Italy fits the bill: limited access to colonial markets in the 1920s, strategically
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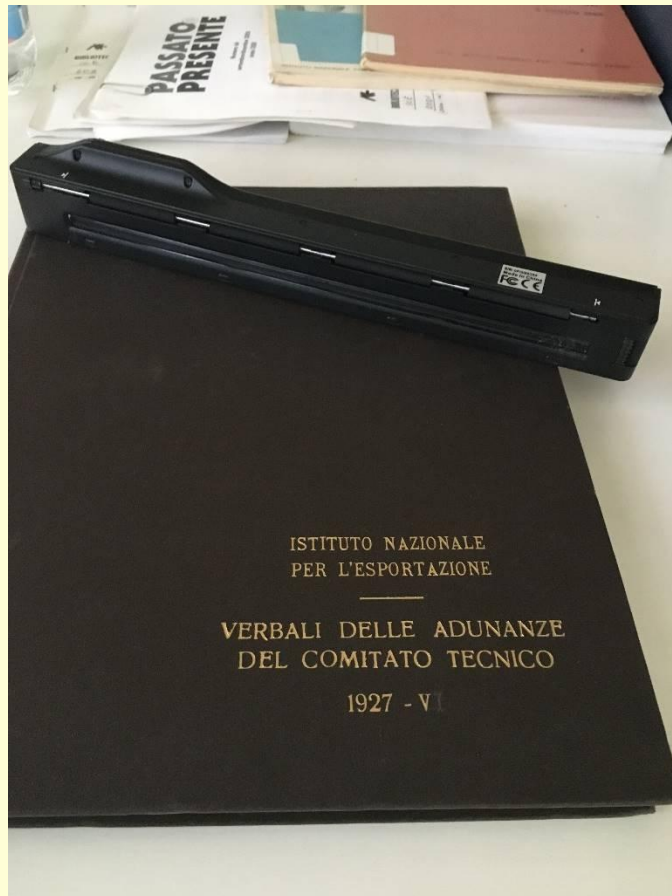




# Method

- Archival research – ICE – first trade agency dedicated to export promotion, est. 1926
  - Interview and working documents – informest – regional agency dedicated to promoting firms internationalization in CEE, est. 1991; various consultancies and agencies
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Research in action. Left: minutes of ICE steering committee in 1927; right: research participants, Slovakia





# Preliminary findings: State motivations


1920s-1930s	1990s-today
REACTIVE: State perceives the need to keep export markets open	PROACTIVE: State understand foreign commerce as tool of foreign policy = aid firms to explore new export market
CONDITIONS: Colonial powers are building protectionist barriers around empires	CONDITIONS: Fall of Soviet Union = opening up of new markets, beginning of globalization; 2008 economic crisis Need to establish new political relationships





# State strategies


1920s-1930s	1990s-today
Establishing state agency 'Institute for foreign commerce' - ICE	Establishing a plethora of new state agencies, initially focused on Central Europe Encouraging business associations and private consultancies
Focus: within Italy (certifications), missions to trade fairs; beginning of representative offices abroad (United States)	Focus: networks of service providers in Italy and abroad – linked with the Italian expat community and firms' clusters (Romania, later China)






# Services provided


1920s-1930s	1990s-today
Focus on agricultural exports; certifications for exporters in Italy (guaranteeing high quality)	Focus on manufacturing SMEs,
Means: Providing information to firms, subsidies for participation in trade fairs, inspectors and certifications in Italy	Focus: networks of service providers in Italy and abroad – linked with the Italian expat community and firms' clusters (Romania, later China)






# Role of firms in shaping state's decisions

1920s-1930s	1990s-today
Direct: Leading entrepreneurs instrumental in establishing ICE (Pirelli; Jung as founding and first director)	Indirect: policy makers 'interpret' the need of firms in establishing new state agencies
	Direct: entrepreneurs organize associations abroad, acquiring state recognition; ask consultants to follow them





## **Breaking the conceptual barrier: Firms' Cumulative effect on territoriality**

- 1920s-30s: reinforcing the territorial state – ICE activity occurring mostly in Italy + missions abroad – beginning of extraterritorial networks
  - 1990s-today:– attempt at direct influence host economies and polities abroad through Italian speaking services and lobbying
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**Thank you!**

