



# The Political Geography of the Mash

by Yael Wicki

The idea of eating together from the same bowl works as a simulation of cohabitation and communal living, or as a unique domain of human action and ethics on a smaller scale.

Eating together from the same bowl, using various differently shaped and sized spoons both distorts and reforms the landscape of modern jurisdiction and political geography of the mash, and produces new forms of these in its own image.

By mixing different textures, tastes and colour shades, we perforate and transcend some borders while introducing and re-thickening others at new scales and in greater quantity.

The word spoon derives from an ancient word, meaning: a chip of wood or horn carved from a larger piece. In our human history of becoming modern men, every region, sometimes every village, produced its own very distinct style and type of spoon as tools to fulfil different food related techniques. – According to the historical socialist Norbert Elias to be a modern man meant 'to be disgusted by the poor table manners of fellow diners, to be ashamed of a relative who spits on the floor, to find embarrassing the sight of a naked person in public space.' –

Each spoon could contain different meanings as shown by the use of various symbols, for instance: a chain would mean a wish to be together forever, a diamond for wealth or good fortune, a cross for faith, a flower for affection and a dragon symbolising protection.

While in Botswana the wooden spoon is used as a token to share duties, responsibilities and knowledge. The holder of the spoon contributes to the work at hand, in whatever small way, like a group contributing to a dish by adding ingredients, mixed by with the spoon.

Many sailors carved spoons as they had much free time at sea on their long voyages in search of new territory to discover and conquer. They would carve such symbols as anchors or ships into their works of spoon. During the peak of the age of sail, beginning in the early 17th century, it was customary (and later a legal requirement) for ships to carry flags designating their nationality, which can be seen as a similar use of Semiotics as implied into the spoons. These

flags eventually evolved into the national flags and maritime flags of today. The use of flags outside of military or naval context begins only with the rise of nationalist sentiment by the end of the 18th century; the earliest national flags date to that period, and during the 19th century it became common for every sovereign state to introduce a national flag.

The frame of the nation-state as the core jurisdiction is a design – deliberate and otherwise – of a geopolitical architecture, derived from the partitioning of planar geography, separating and containing sovereign domains as discrete, adjacent units among a linear and horizontal surface.

That one particular modern model is a specific and durable compositional layering of territorial and governmental fragments into one big structured mash. But today as a design logic for political geography, it is less a monopoly platform than it once was. It leaned on a consensus that was always a bit trivial and today demands attention and revisitation. We could trace this design back to the 1648 Peace Treaty of Westphalia, effectively ending the European wars of religion. The treaties did not restore peace throughout Europe, but they did create a basis for national self-determination.

The Peace of Westphalia established the precedent of peaces and a new system of political order in central Europe, later called Westphalian sovereignty, based upon the concept of co-existing sovereign states. Inter-state aggression was to be held in check by a balance of power. A norm was established against interference in another state's domestic affairs. As European influence spread across the globe, these Westphalian principles, especially the concept of sovereign states, became central to international law and to the prevailing world order.

Immanuel Kant codified and expanded on the implications of this arrangements and gave it deeper philosophical leverage. He articulated " cosmopolitanism " as the polity of those who share the surface of the earth's crust as their locale, and as a moral and legal federation of the national units and of their citizens.

Today the authority of states, drawn from the rough consensus of the Westphalian political geographic diagram, is simultaneously never more inflexible and ubiquitous and never more obsolete and brittle, like a maize of

cracked walls.

The modern norm of political geography is fracturing through its own radicalization and by its own hand, not just by the accumulation of violations to its authority.

At the same time, the future of its governance, and the designability (from design) of that future, is now, as it has been many times before, being decided through encounters with incommensurate external challenges of spoons, to its claimed monopoly on geographic geometry. Such encounters sometimes produce genuinely new things, sometimes they produce what is merely consistent with what can be enforced, and sometimes they produce things that are neither.

The zones fold and flip-flop on top of one another, interweaving into abstract and violent spatial machines of uncanny jurisdictional complexity, as if moved by the animated spoon digging into the mesh and going for the mouth. The act of spooning as an overcoming of old concepts and traditions.

While each individual element of the mesh keeps it's own taste, as a whole it dissolves into a bigger accumulation, the fifth taste, the Umami of an overall new situation. A situation that needs reevaluation, a re-reading and re-understanding of it's components and a study of the various possible emerging combinations, best to be experienced both with wide open and closed eyes for a full taste experience. Bonne Appetite!