CHAPTER 2
Territorializing the State

Introduction

One of the purposes of this book is to understand the relationship of the Honduran state with its political territory. Analyzing the territorial logic of the Honduran state helps one understand the persistence of social violence in the country. The link between state, territory, and violence is not new. As I indicated in the last chapter, states are bound to territory in complex ways. And it is presumed not only that the state produces and controls its territory because of the principle of sovereignty attributed to the modern state but also that, because the state controls and has sovereignty over its political territory, it controls violence within political territory. This axiomatic link of state, territory, and violence is summed up in Max Weber’s well-known definition of the modern state: “[The modern state is] a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber 1946, 78).

I say these things this way because they seem to be deeply rooted perceptions of the state. I recall a conference I attended some years ago in Leipzig, Germany. My presentation was about the historical formation of Honduras’s national territory, focusing on the nineteenth century. In my paper, I hypothesized that the nineteenth-century Honduran state was unable to produce a viable national territory; rather, central authorities had to resort to other forms of territorial strategies for control and organization. My reading suggested that the incapability of the Honduran state to decrease social violence in the early twentieth century was linked to this crucial historical period of Honduras’s state formation process. My argument—that the territorial logic of the Honduran state does not produce a homogeneous and fragmented national territory/space—generated harsh critique from the audience and the panel discussant. A state, I was told, controls its territory through its monopoly of the use of violence. If it is unable to do so, then it is a failed or weak state. Why, I asked, should we assume that a
state produces national territory? The state in mind was based on Weber’s definition of the state. One person in the audience, however, seemed to catch what I was suggesting: “Well, maybe we’re talking about a different type of state here, yet what kind of state are we talking about?”

I do not have the answer to this question. When I started this research, I saw the need to look at the Honduran state’s relationship to territory historically, not only because of the conceptual framework I elected for understanding state space, which perceives state spatiality as a historical process, but also because my literature review on the Honduran state formation process and, particularly, state territoriality yielded very little information. The production of national territory in Honduras has received little scholarly attention, making it difficult to link state spatiality of the early twenty-first century with processes that originated in the early stages of Honduras’s state formation process. One of the purposes of this chapter is to look at Honduran state space as a historical process. The study of the historical formation of Honduras’s national territory using critical spatial theories is yet to be done. This chapter gives an overview, focusing on certain historical moments that are linked to the persistence of social violence and public insecurity in Honduras today.

**Territorializing the State Apparatus: A Historical Overview**

The territoriality of the Honduran state has been studied with the general assumption that it produces national territory. This is no surprise; the state-territory nexus is deeply rooted in the conceptual understanding of the modern state and the production of national territory and space. This perception is not arbitrary. It too is embedded in historical processes. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the nation-states and national territories, particularly in western Europe, United States, and the former Spanish colonies (with the exception of Cuba). Authors on this historical period notice that postcolonial Latin America saw the emergence of institutions of power and knowledge and the integration of peoples and territories within a given territory, usually known as national territory (Radcliffe 2001; Craib 2002; Dodds 1993). The nation-building project in nineteenth-century Latin America was a “profoundly spatial project” in which the government relied on technologies and institutionalized certain methods such as cartography, census data, and inventory in order to spatialize power (Radcliffe 2001). Though organizing territory was at the heart of most state formation processes in nineteenth-century Latin America, not all countries counted on the infrastructure or resources to organize territory nationally.

In the nineteenth century, Honduras’s nation-building spatial project faced major challenges with organizing and even consolidating a viable national