



Pergamon

Political Geography, Vol. 15, No. 6/7, pp. 451–456, 1996
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0962–6298/96 \$15.00 + 0.00

S0962–6298(96)00026-1

Editorial introduction

The critical geopolitics constellation: problematizing fusions of geographical knowledge and power

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This special double issue of *Political Geography* contains papers either presented in preliminary form at the 1994 annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers, or written subsequently as part of an on-going intellectual interrogation of the politics of geographical knowledge in both international and national politics and, increasingly, in those spaces that confound that powerful distinction. Within the discipline of Geography as a whole, there is now a well established universe of research problematizing the production and use of geographical knowledge in various orders of power and space (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Godlewska and Smith, 1994; Gregory, 1994; Hooson, 1994; Agnew and Corbridge, 1995; Bell *et al.* 1995; Painter, 1995; Daniels and Lee, 1996; Herbert, 1996). That which has come to be known as 'critical geopolitics' can be understood as one constellation within this larger universe of research. Its ostensible object and center of concern is 'geopolitics', a term first coined in 1899 by Rudolf Kjellen but which quickly spiralled beyond its assigned means in Kjellen's work to become a strange attractor for a number of distinct but related problematics in the 20th century. The sign 'geopolitics' is a convenient fiction, a suggestive name for varying fusions of geography and politics, yet also an inconvenient fiction, an overloaded sign weighed down by the many different significations it has attracted, a sign naming not an essence but a constellation of geopolitical problematics (Ó Tuathail, 1996b).

The metaphor of a constellation is a particularly apt description for the papers that follow. Richard Bernstein (1992: 8) cites Martin Jay's characterization of what Theodore Adorno and Walter Benjamin meant by the term: it is 'a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle'. Bernstein finds the metaphor a particularly useful description of the debates surrounding the modern/postmodern situation and predicament in contemporary philosophical and political theory. The idea of a constellation is

opposed to Hegel's master metaphor of *Aufhebung*. It describes a situation that resists mastery by a single principle or final reconciliation around a revealed core. 'There are', writes Bernstein, 'always unexpected contingent ruptures that dis-rupt the project of reconciliation. The changing elements of the new constellation resist such reduction. What is "new" about this constellation is the growing awareness of the depth of radical instabilities. We have to learn to think and act in the 'in-between' interstices of forced reconciliations and radical dispersion' (Bernstein, 1992: 8–9).

'Critical geopolitics' is a new constellation in the manner Bernstein describes. The papers gathered under its sign herein have many different points of departure, lines of flight and explanatory destinations. They follow varying research trajectories and engage diverse theoretical enterprises. Yet all, in their different ways, strive to negotiate 'geopolitics' with a critical perspective on the force of fusions of geographical knowledge and systems of power. Earlier work within critical geopolitics has traced the importance of specific patterns of geographical reasoning in the popular understandings of international politics (Dalby, 1991; Ó Tuathail, 1992, 1994; Dodds and Sidaway, 1994). Places constituted in political discourse need not be stable to be politically useful; multiple narratives can sometimes render a particular place or state in a number of ways simultaneously (Dalby, 1993). These devices need not be very sophisticated to function in political discourse; as Sharp (1993) notes, repetition of themes is an effective method of constructing identity; it can also be argued that repetition is an important facet of rendering particular understandings 'common sense'. The ideological production and reproduction of societies can, in part, be understood as the mundane repetition of particular geopolitical tropes which constrain the political imaginary.

All the papers collected in this volume challenge some aspect of taken-for-granted geopolitical knowledge by looking at its social production, the parameters of its discursive economy, or some combination of the two. Five problematics, it seems to us, traverse the papers that make up this issue. The first is that of the state as a producer, administrator and ruler of space. To some writers, like Michael Mann and Michael Shapiro, the development of the modern state system and geopolitics go together. Mann has written that the 'very definition of the state as a delimited territory suggests a further set of 'political' relations between this state and other states—that is, *geopolitics* . . . Politics and geopolitics are entwined; the one should not be studied without the other' (Mann, 1993: 56; original emphasis). For Shapiro, the development of the modern state system was the beginning of the geopolitical imagination, for geopolitics is world space as organized by the state. He argues that the state system as a horizontal organization of space around the principle of state sovereignty is inately a moral geography, 'a set of silent ethical assertions that preorganize explicit ethico-political discourses' (Shapiro, 1994: 482).

The first three papers in this issue examine moments within this problematic. Clarke, Doel and McDonough's paper investigates the organized state violence of Nazi Germany that produced Auschwitz, examining the spaces involved in constructing its conditions of possibility. Arguing that many accounts of Auschwitz have missed considering it in terms of both physical and social space, they explore the discursive construction of Auschwitz in terms of its singularity. Dominant modes of narrating the Holocaust risk, they suggest, the danger of foreclosing its meaning, of folding it into pre-established stories of exceptionalism and extremity. Seeking to maintain a vigilant and ethical openness to the event, an openness that has not characterized Geography thus far, where the Holocaust—with a few exceptions such as the work of Andrew Charlesworth (1994)—is an unspoken non-event, they offer an alternative mode of representing singularity, in terms of a

Derridean neologism, *seriasure*, as a permanent disruption of our culture's need to make events mean. Clarke, Doel and McDonough are attentive to the impossibility of separating social and physical space in considering the Holocaust. Auschwitz and the other death camps were places where Germany Aryan purity was to be produced. Both *Lebensraum* and *Entfernung* (the elimination of Jews from the German lifeworld) should be considered together, they argue, for 'physical space literally amounted to nothing, unless it conformed to a very particular configuration of cognitive, moral and aesthetic codes'. The attempt by states in our contemporary world to violently engineer space (social, cognitive and aesthetic, all of which are entwined with the territorial) to fit their nationalist, exclusionary and racist visions of the perfect order is unfortunately still part of global politics (Cigar, 1995; Sibley, 1995).

Tim Luke's paper engages with the important themes of territoriality and governmentality that are being rearticulated in the post-Cold-War world. Drawing on Foucault's notion of governmentality linked to sovereignty and territory, he explores the contemporary reconfiguration of power and space as states implode and global cyberspace transforms economics into financial flows and virtual capital. All this suggests zones of contragovernmentality where the traditional claims to sovereign power that structured realist understanding of politics are practically subverted. Not least among the casualties in these circumstances are the conceptual vocabularies of International Relations whose territorial presuppositions no longer fit the flows of contemporary politics.

Paul Routledge's paper addresses spaces of resistance to the state's attempt to master space fully. He writes on specific sites of resistance in Nepal and elsewhere, arguing that political resistance is place specific in contesting particular locales. Critical geopolitics thus operates to interrogate the significance of particular terrains of resistance; power not being simply a matter of elite control or state rule but a matter also of contested localities where rule is resisted, thwarted and subverted by social movements. The flexible spaces of rule and resistance are part of counter-hegemonic struggles and can be understood if these facets of struggle are investigated in particular contexts.

The second problematic is more narrowly focused on the history of geopolitics as a 20th-century discourse of statecraft. The paper by Crampton and Ó Tuathail looks at the career of Robert Strausz-Hupé, an emigré intellectual of statecraft who more than most epitomizes the use of geopolitical reasoning in the formulation of American foreign policy. His career spans the last half-century of world politics and is a window into the ways in which networks of intellectuals, institutions and ideology fuse within states to produce disciplining visions of global political space. In Strausz-Hupé's case, the visions of global space were Manichean ones that smoothed away the messy, teeming complexity of everyday global politics, reducing it to a transparent surface of struggle with an implacable and irreducible Otherness. While not necessarily whispering advice in the ear of the prince, Strausz-Hupé's productions of global space were influential within the bureaucracy of the American Cold War state, a bureaucracy he himself joined in 1969.

The third problematic concerns the entwining of communications, media and the politics of identity in the production of geopolitical knowledge and the nation (Matellart, 1994; Morley and Robins, 1995; Myers *et al.*, 1996). Already engaged in the Strausz-Hupé paper, it also weaves its way through the rest of the papers. In her contribution, Joanne Sharp extends her earlier published work on the *Reader's Digest* (Sharp, 1993), using Gramscian concepts to investigate the social construction of American identity in popular culture. She argues that the *Digest* not only represents external Others who can be portrayed as a threat to 'America', but functions to establish a series of subjectivities through which such threats can be resisted. Thus popular culture is complicit in

maintaining hegemony, not only by its representations of geopolitical spaces, but by the practical construction of the subjectivities that can be politically mobilized in defence of 'our' space against a threat originating from 'their' space.

Like Routledge's paper, Klaus Dodds's contribution deals with opposition to state power, but in a very different context. His paper is an extension of his earlier work on the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982 (Dodds, 1993), but this time looks to the symbolic construction of geopolitical entities in Steve Bell's 'if' cartoons published in the *Guardian* newspaper in 1982. This study of the spatial symbolics of satirical representation extends the analysis of critical geopolitics to examine modes of dissident thinking, and the subversive imagination of one dissident in particular, in the face of nationalist scriptings of place and the boundaries of supposedly sovereign territory.

Simon Dalby's paper links the media and identity problematic to questions of a fourth problematic concerning the geopolitics of environmental questions. This paper draws inspiration from Neil Smith's (1990) argument that modernity is simultaneously a matter of the 'production' of 'space' and 'nature' in the related processes of enclosure, colonization and commodification. Dalby's paper suggests that these themes are important in contemporary global politics but silenced in most official and elite discussions of the post-Cold-War world order. His paper is a reading of the *New York Times* coverage of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, popularly known as the 'Earth Summit', in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. He argues that the practical geopolitical reasoning in play in the coverage was often a rerun of traditional Cold War themes focused on diplomatic rivalry and presidential action. The themes of development and environment are never explored in detail, their meaning taken for granted in the geopolitical scripts. The social movements and nongovernmental organizations that were present and who offered alternative political possibilities were nearly entirely excluded. The coverage acts to reproduce traditional American foreign policy interpretations of an event that was much heralded elsewhere as a new beginning for global politics after the Cold War.

The final problematic concerns the entwining of questions of geopolitics with those of gender (Dalby, 1994; Weber, 1994; Ó Tuathail, 1996a). Matt Sparke deals with the construction of national identities and the importance of taking gender seriously in the question of national spaces and the constitution of citizenship (Kofman, 1995; Painter and Philo, 1995). Looking at the work of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Canada he examines the spatiality of gendered citizenships in a complex federal state. He reveals the contradictory plays of gendered identity and power in the changing political landscape of a decentralized state, one which is facing the possibility of secession by one of its largest provinces while simultaneously dealing with the neoconservative-inspired destruction of some important parts of the welfare state, and the complex identity questions raised by international free trade agreements.

Finally, as an alternative to rehearsing the possibilities and divergent theoretical assumptions informing these different approaches to the task of writing 'critical geopolitics' here, we have included in this issue a *Political Geography* 'debate' between the two editors that originally developed quite independently of the special issue. Ó Tuathail's review of two books by David Campbell (1992, 1993) offers many possibilities for discussion about both the relationship between critical political economy and what Dalby, in his response, calls 'dissident scholarship', and the context of the emergence of critical or dissident theorizing both within International Relations and Political Geography. Ó Tuathail carries the debate further in a rejoinder to Dalby's critique (see also Dalby, 1996; Ó Tuathail, 1996b).

The varied essays that make up this double special issue span the new constellation of critical geopolitics, a constellation that hopefully will continue to launch critical theoretical enterprises into the strange new worlds of geographical knowledge and power already fusing on the emergent horizons of the 21st century. We write 'hopefully' because what makes these interrogations important is the theme, most explicit in the first problematic but running through all five, of the implicit ethico-political consequences of specific organizations of geopolitical space (Walker, 1993). The designation 'critical' in relation to geopolitics implies disruptions of the taken-for-granted designations of political spaces, disruptions that seem especially important in light of contemporary ethical thinking that ineluctably raises questions of how geopolitical discourses function to elide questions of responsibility for the Other (Campbell, 1994; Dillon, 1995). On a small planet facing growing disparities of wealth, continued militarization and violence, assumptions that contemporary sovereignties, as currently practised, offer solutions to political difficulties seem increasingly dubious. In this context we present these papers as intellectual and political challenges to engage with the questions of the contemporary politics of geopolitical knowledge.

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