

Historical geography I: Vital traditions

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Abstract

In the first of three reports outlining the current state of historical geography, I review recently published work from three research themes: the geographic imagination (maps and cartography), geographies of knowledge, and society-nature geographies. I argue that these themes build upon important and dynamic, or vital, traditions within the subfield.

Keywords

geographic imagination, geographies of knowledge, historical geography, society-nature

I Introduction

Over the last two decades the divisive sparring that had once divided historical geography, as with human geography more generally, has faded to such a degree that students of the discipline today probably wonder what all the fuss was about. In the wake remains a healthy subfield seemingly content with its heterogeneity. Historical geographers seem satisfied to work in thematic niches that intersect with, or derive theoretical inspiration from, other disciplines. We are much less interested in pursuing subfield orthodoxy or proffering the cliché ‘unity in diversity’ than we are in reshaping durable traditions by refining questions, historicizing geographic knowledge, and establishing dialogues with like-minded scholars. In this sense historical geographers are pushing forward vital traditions, but are not necessarily making a big point about doing so or insisting that others follow their lead. Much of the recent scholarship in historical geography bears this out. In the first of three reports outlining the current state of the subfield, I review published work from three

research themes: the geographic imagination (maps and cartography), geographies of knowledge, and society-nature geographies.

II The geographic imagination: maps and cartography

Critical scholarship examining the cultures of cartography, map production and circulation, and how maps contribute to the reality they seek to represent, is now commonplace among scholars from many disciplines (Craib, 2009; Mayhew, 2010a: 249; Van der Woude, 2008). This sustained scholarly attention has also fed a popular appetite for historic maps, the books that describe them, and the worlds they portray (Harmon, 2009; Hayes, 2010; Monmonier, 2010; Unger, 2010).

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Public exhibitions are also more common, and associated publications ensure their influence lingers (e.g. Akerman and Karrow, 2007). A recent exhibit of display maps at the British Library was accompanied by a handsome volume describing their purpose in greater detail. The curators of 'Magnificent Maps' selected large wall maps from 1450 to 1800 meant for display in palaces, government offices, and merchant and landowner houses (Barber and Harper, 2010). The paradox of the exhibit, as Daniels (2010: 475) points out, is that maps meant to be seen by few are available for public display today primarily because they were, in general, well protected or kept under wraps. Focusing on wall maps displayed in Europe, the work also examines maps which portray empires and domains near and far, in media from cloth to plaster. The result is another stunning achievement for Peter Barber, Head of Map Collections, and his staff at the British Library (see also Barber, 2005; Barber and Carlucci, 2002). Contributing behind the scenes to map exhibits are librarians, collection managers, and scholars whose diligent sleuthing often illuminates forgotten treasures. Fleet and Withers (2010) summarize the importance of the holdings of the Bartholomew Archive in the National Library of Scotland. The Bartholomews were engravers, map-makers, printers and publishers, and the archive contains their correspondence and financial records from 1820 until the 1980s. Vernier (2011) brings to light two previously unknown Portuguese manuscript atlases and two manuscript maps of Port Royal, Jamaica from the 17th century.

John Smith's iconic map of New England is the subject of three recent articles by Edney (2009b, 2010, 2011). Taken as a whole, Edney shows how received wisdom about the map was uncritically reproduced and how the map came serve as a 'modern cartographic ideal' but, in fact, is wholly misunderstood. Sutton (2009) examines Dutch allegorical traditions from Ortelius's *Theatrum* to Blaeu's map of Africa

from 1655 to show how the meaning of bodily motifs changed in light of new travel accounts. She finds that pictorial figures, including those found on maps, contributed to the cultural meaning of difference and shed light on European imperialism. Pearson and Heffernan (2009) re-evaluate the 1:1 million Map of Hispanic America produced by the American Geographical Society over a 25-year period ending in 1945. The authors provide an excellent detailed account of the genesis, organization, and purpose of one of the most ambitious mapping projects ever attempted and reveal the objectives of American expansionists 'to fashion a coherent image of a vast, endlessly varied region that the US might aspire to control' (Pearson and Heffernan, 2009: 236; see also Smith, 2002).

The 2005 Spanish translation of J.B. Harley's *The New Nature of Maps* (Harley and Laxton, 2001) has inspired a renaissance of critical approaches to cartography and maps among Iberian and Latin American scholars (Harley, 2005). Two Iberoamerican Symposiums in the History of Cartography held in Buenos Aires and Mexico City have channeled this energy and organizers have now published 19 revised papers (Mendoza Vargas and Lois, 2009). The chapters range from comparing symbolic systems in Chinese and European maps of Portuguese Macao in the 16th and 17th centuries to Spanish cartography of Cuba in the 19th century and state mapping in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the 20th century. Spanish-language works by scholars working in North America have also contributed to this interest in the history of cartography in Latin America (e.g. Davidson, 2006). Emblematic of this is a special section of the Spanish journal *Araucaria* (Dym, 2010), and a thematic issue on maps in Central American history in the *Bulletin of the Association for the Promotion of Central American Historical Studies* (AFEHC) (Offen, 2011a). Both collections are available online for free and provide important resources for Latin American students and teachers alike. Dym and Offen (2011) have also

produced a 'cartographic reader' covering more than 500 years of mapping in and about Latin America. A multidisciplinary team of contributors discuss 120 full-color maps in 57 short chapters. By highlighting a variety of maps drawn for different purposes at different scales by a range of actors, the editors show how maps have influenced social, political, and environmental processes in the region.

Historical studies of cartography in New Spain and Mexico have received deserved attention. Archival land grant materials inform two studies of surveying in New Spain (Aguilar-Robledo, 2009; Hunter and Sluyter, 2011). Though early surveying was not uniform or necessarily accurate, these studies combine to show that surveyor's representational and non-representational practices helped produce colonial territories by giving rhetorical form to spatial abstractions. The innovative visual style of Mexico's first great cartographer and mapmaker, Antonio García Cubas, is the subject of Carrera's new book (2011). She connects the work of García Cubas to his biography and the broader visual culture of the 19th century to show how he altered colonial representational practices to advance his nation-building ambitions (see also Craib, 2004). Meanwhile, following the Mexican Revolution bureaucrats and surveyors went out to the countryside to implement agrarian change. In a fascinating microstudy, Craib (2010) follows one surveyor's work traversing discursive, ethnic, and historical land claims among two neighboring villages in Veracruz.

The study of national mapping projects continues unabated. Hewitt (2011) retells the 'biography' of the British Ordnance Survey (OS) quite well. Originating with cartographic desire to help address uprisings in the Scottish Highlands, Hewitt argues that the OS became an enduring institution that informed national identity in the United Kingdom. Ramaswamy's (2010) copiously illustrated volume documents how an iconic Mother India (*Bharat Mata*) became 'carto-graphed' as the geo-body of the

nation in late 19th-century and postcolonial India. She develops the term 'barefoot cartography' to describe the visual style of relatively unlettered artists who graphically linked the goddess and the nation for the benefit of a heterogeneous and largely illiterate population. Highlighting the relationship between political power and the representation of Taiwan since the 16th century, as well as the availability of poorly known maps of the island, is the objective of work by Lay et al. (2010), their study being enhanced by the full-color reproduction of stunning maps. Wigen (2010) uses a detailed study of Nagano Prefecture in central Honshu to show how Meiji rulers enacted a 'geographic restoration' that centralized power in Edo. The Meiji justified their administrative takeover of feudal provinces by refashioning an 8th-century imperial map for modern purposes. Imperial ethnic cartography during tsarist Russia is the subject of a wide-ranging article by Petronis (2011). By highlighting Russian mapping of Lithuanians, the author demonstrates how scientific cartography and modern statistics came together in the early 19th century to give impetus to map ethnic spaces across imperial Russia, foretelling the political processes and ethnic cartographies that transformed Europe in the 20th century.

The role of maps in promoting the westward expansion and influencing the internal politics of the United States is well known (Francaviglia, 2005), but began much earlier with colonial chart publishing (Bosse, 2011) and the establishment of a geographic literacy (Brückner, 2006, 2011; Brückner and Hsu, 2007). By the mid-19th century, scientific discourses, statistics and stylized thematic maps reconfigured the relationship among cartography, democracy, and citizenship. The importance of the 1861 US Coast Survey map showing the distribution of slaves in the southern states is a case in point. Schulten (2010) shows how this map informed Lincoln's moral and military projects. Among the first of its kind, the map graphically portrayed the 1860 census in new and powerful

ways. The rise of scientific mapping in territorializing a modern state, and the congressional questioning of its public utility, is the topic of Kirsch's (2010) article on the Allison Commission that questioned Survey Director John Wesley Powell. Powell and his basin-based vision for the American west are also the subject of attention by Worster (2009). Correia (2009) shows how commercial speculation over lands in New Mexico delegitimated Mexican land grants and transformed property rights. Such forms of internal colonialism, he argues, continue to obscure the full story of US westward expansion. Dando (2010) reveals how American suffragists persuasively used 'a suffrage map' showing states that had received female voting rights before the 19th amendment to advance their cause. While these maps served their intended purpose, Dando shows that they also marginalized the plight of women of color. Beamer and Duarte (2009) show that native Hawaiians carried out surveys and made maps during the 19th century based largely upon traditional land boundaries. The authors suggest that this project was strategically undertaken by chiefs and other Hawaiian nationals to better secure the independence of the Kingdom of Hawai'i in the face of creeping US colonialism.

Maps have played an important role in shaping and reflecting notions of race and race relations. Livingstone (2010a) illustrates that despite the increasing scientific sophistication of cartography, the trope of human descent remains persistent on maps since antiquity to the present. These maps present in 'accessible form genetic sagas that are akin to creation myths' (p. 205) and are inextricably tied to racial politics. Livingstone's paper may be fruitfully read alongside three other recent articles, especially Winlow's (2009) account of how cartography supported Griffith Taylor's racialized 'zones and strata' theory that correlated racial types with moral and intellectual traits. Analysis of the idea of race in British encyclopedias and histories in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Stock,

2011), as well as a study on Darwin's 1871 *The Descent of Man* and its support for the abolition of slavery (Moore, 2010), also echo the main points of Livingstone's study. Although not about maps or cartography, several recent studies look at the processes connecting race, landscape, identity, and monuments in Britain and the US South (Alderman, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2011), and a special thematic volume of *Historical Geography* highlights the many ways in which race and memory are entwined through memorialization (Zeitler, 2009).

III The geographies of knowledge

Each of my three predecessors has progressively identified the geography of knowledge, and of science in particular, as a maturing tradition within historical geography (Holdsworth, 2003; Mayhew, 2009; Naylor, 2005). Livingstone (2010b: 3, 4) identifies space as 'a central organizing principle for making sense of scientific knowledge', and sees this as part of 'a more general geographical turn in science studies' (see also Livingstone, 2003; Mayhew, 2010b; Naylor, 2010; Withers, 2007). The idea of placing knowledge production at specific sites/sights, identifying how it travels and is received, ascertaining how knowledge is put together, by whom and to what ends, has animated research in historical geography like few other developments in recent memory. As well it should. Yet I cannot help wondering to what extent this geographic turn in historical studies is not subject to its own geography. With the exception of the recent volume bringing together mostly British and German scholars (Meusburger et al., 2010), the leading geographers advancing a historical geography of knowledge reside in the United Kingdom. This observation is probably part of a larger Atlantic difference that reflects, among other things, the relative decline of historical geography in the United States.

The geography of the book, as a particular medium of knowledge produced and consumed

in multiple places, commands a great deal of attention. Ogborn and Withers introduce their edited *Geographies of the Book* (2010a) by discussing relevant scholarship since the 1958 publication of Febvre and Martin's *The Coming of the Book*. They use that book's single chapter on the 'geography of the book' as a point of departure to assess the extent to which scholarship has taken up this challenge over the last 50 years. They argue that subsequent scholarship has not yet confronted the fact that questions of geography are 'central to the very constitution of 'the book' itself' (Ogborn and Withers, 2010b: 5). Ten substantive chapters are divided among sections on production, circulation, and reception. Mayhew (2010c) builds on the meticulous documentation illustrated by Safier (2008) to highlight the commonplace role of editing in book production. The heavy hands of Enlightenment editors demonstrate 'the substantive ways in which spaces of book production, reception and dissemination come to exhibit geographical difference' (Mayhew, 2010c: 185). Withers (2010) scrutinizes Mungo Park's 1799 *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, and a posthumous account of his second and failed expedition, to underscore the multiple authors contributing to the books, their maps, and their varied sites of co-production. As with maps (Edney, 2009a), Withers demonstrates that the production of geographical knowledge is not a single endeavor by a single author. Other scholars focus on the travel, reception, and impacts of single works. Keighren (2010) explains why the reception of Ellen Churchill Semple's 1911 *Influences of the Geographic Environment* varied spatially. Semple promoted her controversial ideas, some of which were later termed environmentally deterministic, in public lectures on both sides of the Atlantic, and Keighren shows how the reception of Semple's ideas had as much to do with her orality as her written work.

In other studies, Saldanha (2011) explores Jan Huygen van Linschoten's late 16th-century *Itinerario* using Foucault's understanding of the

production of knowledge to show how travel books fired the European geographical imagination and spawned a new phase of globalization. Although distinct from books, the study of the commerce and circulation of maps and atlases follow a similar trajectory. Following on the work of Pedley (2005) and others, Petto (2009) highlights the role of women in the early modern map trade. She shows that, like men, women developed social and patronage networks, but also 'played the feminine card' when it served their interests.

Research specifically targeting the circulation of knowledge has fostered a fluorescence of scholarship in recent years (Mayhew, 2011). A special issue of the Leiden-based journal *Itinerario* contains five articles on the subject of 'Science and Global History, 1750–1850: Local Encounters and Global Circulation' (Roberts, 2009). The 'hidden history' of exploration is the subject of a recent exhibit at the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and accompanying catalogue (Driver and Jones, 2009). The authors pored over the collections of the RGS to highlight the role of intermediaries and indigenous peoples in the history of exploration and knowledge production. A recent edited volume also covers the role of 'go-betweens' such as messengers, brokers, translators, and missionaries in the production of global knowledge during the Enlightenment (Schaffer et al., 2009). A single photograph from the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition capturing indigenous Ainu and Patagonia women conversing is used as a point of departure by Medak-Saltzman (2010) to illustrate that indigenous peoples have always been global actors whether acknowledged or not.

Offen (2011b) explores the circulation of knowledge and indigenous contributions to Puritan bioprospecting in the West Indies and Central America in the early 17th century. In a detailed study that focuses on the little-known English colony on Providence Island (1629–1641), Offen shows how orders given by adventurers in London were informed by a century of

Spanish empirical research and enacted in the field by settlers working closely with indigenous peoples. He also documents how colonists sent biological, mineral, and animal resources to London for experimentation and profit evaluation. This iterative process of tropical resource hunting, experimentation, and laboratory trial was part and parcel of the entire colonial enterprise, suggesting that the practice of science was wholly entwined with commercial and, in this case, Protestant, expansion. Indigenous peoples were also lead actors in sustaining collecting expeditions for cacao, sarsaparilla, and other commercial products from the Amazonian *sertão*, or backcountry (Roller, 2010). In a study of administrative reform and indigenous agency, the Portuguese Crown created a new economic context in which native Amazonians could shape their own destiny during annual forays: transforming a boom-and-bust economy in the first half of the 18th century to one of steady production by the second half.

Science in the service of empire in the Atlantic world is no longer a new topic (Mayhew, 2011), but the quality and volume of the scholarship continues to rise. Portuondo (2009) has written a stunning book documenting Spanish ‘secret science’ in the New World. Like others (e.g. Barrera-Osorio, 2006; Nieto Olarte, 2009; Sandman, 2008; Turnbull, 1996), Portuondo highlights the role of administration in directing the philosophical inquiry of nature in the field and, thus, re-evaluates Spain’s role in fostering a scientific revolution in the early modern Atlantic. Equally impressive is the edited volume covering science in the Spanish and Portuguese empires before 1800 (Bleichmar et al., 2009). Intended for specialists and non-specialists alike, the book is a major resource for scholars looking for a global overview. Scott (2010) documents the genealogy of creole tropicality through an analysis of a 17th-century treatise *Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo*. This follows her book on non-representational geographies of early colonial Peru (Scott, 2009). Comparing the practices of

‘a creole in Paris and a Spaniard in Paraguay’, Cowie (2011) emphasizes the mobility of scholars, texts, and objects and, in so doing, breaks down the presumed dichotomy between metropole and colonial science. In focusing on the physicality of the pirate ship, Hasty (2011: 42) draws attention to the ‘geographies obfuscated’ in the creation of Dampier’s (1697) *New Voyage*, and scientific travel narratives more generally. A study of the role of indigenous peoples and locals in piratical science and cartography, however, remains to be written.

IV Society-nature geographies

Due to the diversity of topics and methods, the study of society-nature geographies is among the broadest subjects of historical geography. By spanning the ideational-material spectrum, the study of culturally specific and temporally contingent forms of environmental knowledge shares the stage with very different sorts of studies identifying the social and biophysical processes directing environmental change. Naylor (2006) provided an excellent overview of historical geography’s engagement with the environment in general and its relationship to the field of environmental history in particular. Disciplinary anxiety about being eclipsed by our more numerous colleagues is perhaps warranted but wisely rejected by Naylor who proposes instead that we ‘applaud the work done by geographers to bring new theoretical and methodological approaches to bear on questions of landscape formation, environmental change and nature-society relations’ (p. 800). Five years on I echo these comments. However, in my next report, I plan to raise some concerns about whether historical geographers will be forced to confront calls for ‘relevancy’ in a rapidly changing institutional environment, particularly in the United States.

The study of environmental imaginations and change under colonialism and imperialism continues to attract deserved attention. In a recent

editorial, Davis (2009) builds upon her award-winning book (Davis, 2007) and calls by others (e.g. Offen, 2004) to argue that ‘historical political ecology’ is particularly well suited to understand the lingering effects of European expansion on environments and environmental epistemologies. By being attentive to how restrictive land and resource-use policies control people as they ostensibly regulate resource use and access, historical political ecologists show the connection between colonial and postcolonial environmental geographies.

Gupta (2009) shows that ecological concerns were used to restrict indigenous farming practices in the Singhbhum district of British India to better control forest resources in support of railway development. There, dubious science and professed ‘conservation’ underscored exclusionary policies that led to the suffering and out-migration of the ethnic Hos. Siam’s teak forests attracted the attention of British elites who saw the tree as vital to their country’s naval supremacy (Barton and Bennett, 2010). With a fear of a dwindling supply in British India and Burma, Britain helped inspire a forestry department in Siam whose fundamental purpose was to restrict local uses of teak forests by enclosing them. Griffin (2010) provides a sophisticated account of the rise of state forestry in Britain itself in the 18th and early 19th centuries. More James Scott (1998) than E.P. Thompson (1975), Griffin finds that modern bureaucratic procedures and surveying had an impact upon the biophysical and cultural geographies of the forest, and that grand state schemes collapse under the weight of their own internal illogic. For southern Rhodesia in the early 20th century, Musemwa (2009) documents the increasing conflict between white settlers and native miners accused of abusing forests, and shows how policies promoting native African exclusion grow in direct proportion to the rise of colonial declensionist narratives. Kerr (2010) establishes conscious and unconscious resistance among African smallholder farmers to British colonial efforts to

substitute peanuts for millet in Nyasaland (see also Walker, 2004).

In their study on British elephant hunting in mid-19th-century Ceylon, Lorimer and Whatmore (2009) highlight the importance of considering embodiment and intercorporeal exchange to shed light on the ethics and epistemologies of colonial visions and postcolonial historical geographies. British sports-hunting is also the topic of a study by Hussain (2010). He compares local and British ‘moral ecologies’ in the north-western frontier region of British India to show how indigenous collaboration played a crucial role in the construction of identity among colonial hunters. In Timor Leste, struggles to control the sandalwood and beeswax trade pit customary practices and ritual against the interests of Chinese traders and Portuguese missionaries (Meitzner Yoder, 2011). On southern Java, Schwerdtner Máñez (2010) describes the destructive exploitation of pearls by the Dutch East Indies Company and how this forgotten extractive economy interacts in memory and policy with more recent oyster harvesting.

Environmental history and historical geography associated with the Columbian Exchange have a long tradition in Latin America (Carey, 2009). In a magisterial study, historian McNeill (2010) highlights the relationship between a New World ‘creole ecology’, particularly landscape transformation associated with plantation agriculture in the Caribbean basin from the Chesapeake to Suriname, and the ecology of yellow fever and malaria mosquito vectors. He demonstrates how these diseases ravished newcomers after 1640 and helped defend the Spanish empire. But, by the 1770s – after having achieved immunity from yellow fever by virtue of survival – disease helped the Spanish, French, and English colonies achieve independence. Perri (2009) finds that a ‘tragedy of the commons’ wreaked havoc on pearl-bearing oyster beds around the island of Cubagua off the coast of Venezuela in the early 16th century. As with the smelting of lime to plaster temples in the

pre-Hispanic period, silver mining in colonial New Spain relied on fuel wood for energy. Studnicki-Gizbert and Schecter (2010) explore the ecological dimensions of silver mining in general and charcoal making in particular, and show that deforestation had direct and indirect impacts on local indigenous communities.

The African dimension of the Columbian Exchange has received sustained attention only recently, thanks in large part to work by Judith Carney. Her recent book with Rosomoff breaks new ground by summarizing Africa's botanical legacy in the New World (Carney and Rosomoff, 2010). Using slave ship records, oral histories and archaeological assessments, the authors focus on how everyday subsistence plants for food, fiber, spice, medicine, and clothing, as well as knowledge about them, survived the middle passage and transformed the oppressive landscapes of plantation societies and, in effect, those of the New World. Duvall (2009) argues that the modern use of living fences in Spanish America can be traced to their use in early colonial maroon communities. The survival and then diffusion of this practice has shaped the cultural landscapes of tropical and subtropical America, yet its potential African origin has been unrecognized. Sluyter (2009) investigates whether African cowhands from the British Lesser Antilles also contributed to open-range cattle herding traditions that diffused to South Carolina. He finds that Barbudan blacks almost certainly contributed to techniques that reached the Carolinas, but it remains to be seen whether these practices derived from Africa. Understanding cattle is also the topic of work by Van Ausdal (2009) that explains the expansion of cattle ranching into the lowland forests of Colombia. He challenges a number of stereotypes about cattle and deforestation in the tropics by showing a relationship between investment and productivity in the cattle industry that emerged in Colombia in the century before 1950. In a related historical economic geography, Brannstrom (2010) uses an organizational

and institutional perspective to analyze the replacement of forests with cotton in the western region of São Paulo state, Brazil, in the mid-20th century. Combining oral histories and sediment records with judicial documents and agronomic texts, Brannstrom finds elite producers captured state subsidies and manipulated labor institutions to effect environmental change. Gautreau (2010) investigates the dynamics of woody vegetation in the Uruguayan campos from 1800 to 2000 and finds changes blamed on European immigration to be simplistic. In a sophisticated comparison of land-survey charts with modern and historical maps, he finds no evidence for major changes in forest distribution, extent, or shape.

People have long sought to modify or control water and its cycle to serve human purposes. A new book dealing with the environment and world history by leading historians contains an interesting section on rivers, their control, and social impacts over the *longue durée* (Burke and Pomeranz, 2009). Chapters by the editors on the Middle East since 1500 BCE (Burke, 2009) and China since 1500 (Pomeranz, 2009), and by Adas (2009) on rice and deltas of mainland Southeast Asia seem particularly relevant (see also Hedley et al., 2010). A tenfold increase in the book's number of maps (only two), and a deeper engagement with human geography would have improved an otherwise excellent collection. Westerberg et al. (2010) use climate data from northern Tanzania over the last 1200 years to reconstruct the rise and fall of the ancient irrigation system of Engaruka. Iqbal (2009) investigates the social and economic impacts of water hyacinth in colonial Bengal in the first half of the 20th century and finds that legislation to deal with the menacing weed was inadequate. Oliver (2010) investigates the 'improvement' of the River Thames: there, a discursively produced materiality helps explain the varied approaches taken since the medieval period, culminating by the early 19th century in an engineered solution amenable to the dictates of capital.

The impact of irrigation projects on rural population decline in the Ebro basin, Spain, during the 20th century is the subject of a study by Silvestre and Clar (2010). De Pater (2011) uses competing images of the Zuider Zee in 1900 in the context of proposed enclosure and reclamation project to discuss Dutch nation-building and ideas of cultural authenticity. Competing 'ecological nationalist narratives' between Tibetans and Chinese concerning Tibet's Lhalu wetland is the subject of work by Yeh (2009). Tibetan exiles claim that their nature-friendly way of life was destroyed by the Chinese after 1950, but the Chinese argue that Tibetans were simply incapable of modifying their environment. Yeh finds instead that Tibetans managed the Lhalu wetland in socially significant ways. Brannstrom and Neuman (2009) illustrate the many ways that land speculators portrayed South Texas as a 'Magic Valley' ripe for the plow, full of pliable and cheap Mexican labor, and irrigated by unlimited water from the Rio Grande. Although this geographical imagination was not enacted as planned, it played an important role in shaping those landscapes which did emerge in the valley.

With half the world's population now residing in cities, urban environmental geography is a field ripe for expansion. Two new books on the environmental history of specific cities, a monograph of San Francisco (Dreyfus, 2009) and an edited collection concerning Boston (Penna and Wright, 2009), underscore society-nature interactions since before European settlement. Biehler (2010) and Garcier (2010) discuss two different dimensions of the rise of scientific, urban medical geography. For Biehler (2010), early 20th-century cities saw competing strategies to combat fly-borne disease, one that promoted changes to human waste and horse manure management, and which prescribed screens to control the domestic sphere. Resistance to these interventions was socially and geographically diverse. The exploration by Garcier (2010) of river pollution in 19th-century France finds that scientific ambiguity and a mixed

hygienist response curtailed adequate legal rejoinders and allowed industrialists to establish rivers as legitimate places for waste deposition.

V Stabilizing traditions

Limits of space insist that this summary of the subfield will remain partial and uneven. In this first of three reports, I have tried to highlight the range of scholarship by authors who identify as historical geographers, or whose work is in dialogue with or contributes to historical geography. I have suggested that recent work fits broadly into three traditions whose origins predate the 1990s but which have come into their own since then, particularly in their acceptance of mixed methods, engagement with social theory, and close thematic ties to other fields. These traditions are, of course, often interconnected in practice. The geographic imagination evident in maps, for example, shares much with the geographies of knowledge production and with society-nature geographies. Perhaps future research will attempt to make these connections even more explicit, particularly in attempts to understand how geographic imaginations shape and reflect material conditions, social relations, and environmental change.

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