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A view from the borderlands of Anglophone (political) geography

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Abstract The seven editions of *Geography and Geographers* and of *Political Geography* form two intimidating collections creating order in their (sub)disciplines. As successive editions engage with an exponentially growing and diversifying scholarly literature they have adopted different strategies to order 'work in progress'. This commentary also considers their ordering and bordering of the (sub) discipline, epistemologically but also linguistically, foregrounding the predicament of their readership at the non-Anglophone borderlands of Anglo-American (political) geography.

Keywords History of geography · Political geography · Anglophone geography · Ordering · Bordering · Textbook

The seven editions of *Geography and Geographers* (1979–2016) and of *Political Geography* (1985–2018) form two intimidating collections. Each series has shaped the perception of human geography, and more specifically political geography, of several generations of students in the Anglophone world and well beyond that, in all universities where English language textbooks are widely used. My comments are offered in all modesty, in sharp contrast with the hubris involved in trying to discuss the contribution of reference works of such breadth, originality and endurance. My view on the two series of books is evidently flavored by my own positionality, at the edge of the Anglo American (political) geography they survey. Although I identify as a political geographer (with research interests in virtually all themes addressed by Flint and Taylor 2018) I am definitively not an Anglo-American geographer (neither by origin, education nor affiliation). Nevertheless, most of my work is in English (since the institutional context in which I function values exclusively publications in English and teaching is since the early 2000s increasingly done in English) and I am tightly 'networked' to Anglo-American geographers (including the three conveners of this series of interventions) and one of the many members of the American Association of Geographers not affiliated to an American university.

Ordering work in progress

The authors originally made different choices to create order in their (sub)discipline. Johnston chose to distinguish competing paradigms (a choice that was particularly topical in the midst of the dogmatic disputes of the 1970s), providing an overview of major

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approaches, next to a review of the institutional (academic) contexts in which Anglo-American geographers operate. By contrast Taylor structured the book thematically. In agreement with his geographical elaboration of world-systems analysis, chapters were grouped according to the three vertical tiers: global, national and local, or in other words the scale of reality, ideology and experience).

Both books were originally explicitly engaging social and academic change. The successive editions continue to do so. Each preface returns to the difficult challenge of ordering 'work in process'. *Geography and Geographers* is struggling with the changing academic context in which conflicting paradigms evolved towards autarkic silos and PG with the changing geopolitical context (the end of the Cold war, globalization, the war on terror, the rise of China…).

Across the seven editions the authors and their co-authors (whose contribution to the increasing scope of the books should not go unnoticed) held on to the characteristic outline of their book: Kuhn's paradigms in *Geography and Geographers*, Wallerstein's world-systems analysis in *Political Geography* (otherwise indeed they would just become a different book, not a sequel). The authors have followed however different strategies to deal with the exponential growth of publications and the diversification of approaches. *Geography and Geographers* expanded—apparently unconstrained. From textbook it morphed into an encyclopedia. The book has become a reference work in the most literal way, a collection of references. As a result, as Van Meeteren (2019) noted in an earlier review, a companion book to guide the student through *Geography and Geographers* would be most welcome.

Political Geography by contrast has incorporated new developments in the field but maintain its shape as a systematic introduction to political geography. It came at a price and at some point the architecture was altered by the embellishment. In my opinion, the fourth edition (Taylor and Flint 2000) was the best, because it kept the structure of the original edition while incorporating a wealth of new approaches. Originally each chapter was structured in the same, legible fashion: first a traditional theme in political geography (say elections) was presented, introducing what Taylor has called 'the heritage' (some predominant ideas about how to conceptualize the phenomenon and the processes at work), then world-systems analysis was introduced as a new approach raising new questions and new answers (most specifically foregrounding different dynamics in states/localities in the core the semi-periphery and the periphery of the world economy), and finally these insights were used as a frame to plug in different approaches and case-studies. In the fifth edition the heritage was backgrounded to make more room for new approaches, it disappeared as such in some chapters. As a result the legibility was undermined. Still a manageable size for a course, the book is now a much less compelling format and students perceived the selection of themes and approaches as more random.

Ordering and bordering

In both books, the storytelling, i.e. the construction of a coherent narrative about the evolution of the discipline and its main approaches, is taking shape through an endless process of inclusion/exclusion of published work (based on the theme, the theoretical framework, the methodological approach, the authors, the cases….). It can be criticized from many standpoints, but no such endeavor can avoid bordering the discipline. Likewise the focus on English language publications is both reasonable and problematic. It is explicit in *Geography and Geographers* and implicit in *Political Geography*, but works in rather identical ways. GG has probably been more often criticized about this because of its explicit account (which is unfair of course)[1] and because of the tension between the title referring to Anglo-American Geography and Geographers and the introduction text referring to English language geography. Who is in and who is out? From the references included it seems that English language publications are all included, but the institutional account, no doubt a tremendously useful part of the book for many graduate students contemplating an academic career, only deals with the UK and the USA. Other institutional settings where

[1] Not to mention that the authors did pay attention to these issues elsewhere. One author has written about the problems of Anglophone hegemony in political geography (see Sidaway 2008), the other has also surveyed international geography (Johnston and Claval 1984).

geographical knowledge is routinely taught and produced in English are barely considered.

The Anglo-American connection was particularly meaningful in the 1960s and 1970s when many British (and Irish) geographers became expat academics in the US. The evolution of these networks over the past decades deserves more attention, especially the role of the European Union in funding research (see Heffernan's contribution in this collection) and the brain drain from continental Europe (both likely to be disrupted dramatically by the lack of arrangements in the implementation of Brexit). Brain drain or rather brain circulation. Students, PhD Students, postdocs and academics from wider places have increasingly been temporarily affiliated to UK universities—in addition to those enrolled in American PhD programmes—and the phenomenon has greatly expanded the circles of those that can be seen as (partial) Anglo-American geographers. Even more fundamental is the change in publication cultures, the Anglicization of academic journals and of research progammes across Europe (and in postcolonial settings—Latin America being probably the only macro-region resisting this effectively). Both *Geography and Geographers* and *Political Geography* were inclusive of all English language publications in so-called international journals and with international publishers, considering—correctly I believe—that they contribute to a shared academic conversation.

Reading from the borderlands

The Anglophone hegemony is actively produced and reproduced in the periphery of Anglo-American geography. This invitation was a welcome opportunity to reflect on how "we"—the non-Anglophones—read these books. I noted with interest that the book reviews of the first or second editions of *Geography and Geographers* that I consulted in other languages other than English (I did not find any in German but it might be an artefact of the poor accessibility of old book reviews online) were reporting about a book that would help the readers to find their way in a foreign branch of geography (Belil and Clos 1983; Broc 1985; Bergevin 1993), for the French review of *Political Geography* as a textbook about Anglo-Saxon political geography (Sanguin 1988) although much less in the Dutch review (Van der Wusten 1986).

Thirty years later I doubt any (would-be) geographer in the Netherlands and many other places look at any of these books as a book about "them" out there and "their ways of doing geography". That story is as much the story of "our" geography, in which we are at best mentioned once or twice in a footnote (often condemned to providing the Dutch case study….even if time and again great geographers have shown that you can make an original and influential conceptual and theoretical contribution based on empirical cases outside the UK and the US): Good to remember also that the first response to *Geography and Geographers* came from Norway, when another British publisher published in 1981 an English translation of Holt-Jensen's *Geografiens innhold og metoder*.[2] When *Political Geography* was published in 1985, Dutch students of political geography were using a textbook in Dutch *Een wereld van staten*[3] (Van Amersfoort et al. 1980), with contributions by lecturers at the University of Amsterdam. What a change since then! We do not have a Dutch language textbook and in fact we do not teach political geography in Dutch anymore. But even more striking than the language of the textbook back then was the linguistic diversity of the references in *Een wereld van staten*: Dutch, English, French, German. This has changed dramatically. Academic publications in Dutch have disappeared. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, the journal of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society, is published in English. The same applies to most academic journals in other European languages (even French and German, both former languages of international academic communication). A Dutch language counterpart of *Geography and Geographers* (De Pater 2014) reviews also increasingly a discipline that is mostly shaped by English publications.

Attempts to cross the language barriers are few. Johnston edited an international volume pretty similar in intent to *Geography and Geographers* (Johnston and Claval 1984) noteworthy for its attempt to avoid methodological nationalism and present language based communities of geographical knowledge

[2] Litt: Geography content and method. It was published originally in Norwegian in 1976 in Bergen. The fifth edition of *Geography History and concepts* was published in 2018.

[3] Litt: A world of states. This was referring to the fact that with last wave of decolonization there were hardly non-state territories left, apart from Antarctica.

(compare to Dunbar 2001 with a more national approach). Large regions of the world remained empty, others were portrayed from the outside (Soviet Union/Russia in both volumes by an American specialist) or from the former motherland (Iberian and Latin America geographies were covered by a Catalan author)[4]. The collections did clearly not attract large audiences (and were not re-edited), probably because each chapter remains idiosyncratic and a geographer—even an internationally oriented one—is not believed to need to know much about say Japanese geography—unless she is working in, from or about Japan.

What is lacking is a true account of the institutional context of the circulation of ideas (through publications, through translation, through exchanges, brain drain and intellectual remittances, through fieldtrip and increasingly through digital networks and …) and of the reverberation of ideas about themes, approaches, methods, ethics and all what is shaping geography across languages. No doubt such an inquiry would reveal the prominent position of *Geography and Geographers* and *Political Geography*, as English texts, but also in translation, to my knowledge in Portuguese (1986), Russian (1987), Malay (1989) and Japanese (1997) for *Geography and Geographers*, respectively Spanish (1994, 2002), Arabic (2002) Turkish (2014) and Chinese (2016) for *Political Geography*. This list reveals once more the shadow of the contour of the periphery of Anglo-American (political) geography, where such a translation is apparently redundant.

[4] Another intriguing thought is that the chapters are ranked alphabetically by the name of the (first) authors.

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