The Geography of Political Geography

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'Without doubt, the German and Anglosaxon schools of political geography and geopolitics have been those that have most profoundly marked the profile of these [sub] disciplines. Because of that, their influences have transcended their particular state and cultural ambits to be assumed and adapted in other contexts. However, it is possible to encounter diverse and equally interesting schools of thought and analysis…' (Fontí and Rufí 2001, 49-50, my translation)

Introduction

This chapter examines key political geography concepts in translation and traditions beyond the Anglo-American realm. This is a tentative move however, confined some political geography terms and categories as they operate in a limited selection of other languages. Moving beyond Europe and beyond written and spoken language into a range of other discourses and modes of representation, the chapter argues that there is something more at stake than supplementing the range of case studies and terminologies that characterise Anglophone political geography. In particular, it is argued that (frequently taken-for-granted) assumptions about universality in political geography are themselves products of particular circumstances. Thus, political geography would benefit from more critical awareness of the situated basis of its claims and vantage point. The next section reconsiders the relationships between Anglophone, Francophone and German-language political geographies. Following this, the chapter reconsiders the complex question of translation and explores the consequences for political geography of moving beyond Euro-American texts and languages and beyond the written and spoken word to other systems of representation. With these in mind, the final part of the chapter

acknowledges the potential of postcolonial critiques in 'repositioning' political geographies and sets out some critical possibilities and challenges.

The languages and vantage-points of political geography

Fontí and Rufí's (2001) Spanish language textbook that was cited at the start of this chapter goes on to chart French political geography, Italian geopolitics, as well as Soviet Russian and Spanish writings on territorial logics, political geography and geopolitics. As they point out, although it has been written – in various guises - for over a century, the course of political geography (and the allied field of geopolitics) 'often considered as disciplines, subdisciplines or scientific fields' (op cit, 29) have been chequered ones. Close associations with state-building and competing national and imperial projects earlier in the twentieth century provided intellectual space and patronage for political geography in a number of European countries and in the Americas. Subsequently however, the vogue for positivism and quantitative analysis which characterised much human geography of the 1960s saw political geography relatively sidelined in Anglophone geography. However in the last two decades of the twentieth century, political geography underwent a renaissance in the UK and North America. The appearance of a specialist journal in 1982 (*Political Geography Quarterly*, subsequently *Political Geography*) marked an opportunity for such revitalised and critical political geography. The journal rapidly established a reputation within and beyond academic geography and in the 1990s it was joined by two other evidently political geography journals; *Geopolitics* and *Space and Polity*. New texts also appeared. The overall sense was of a field of research and scholarship that was relatively healthy in terms of the

number of academics, outlets and courses. Within this, feminist and allied scholarship has broadened the concern of political geography, in particular the connections between 'macro' issues of states and geopolitics and 'micro' politics of everyday lives; summarised by Nogué (1998, 35, my translations) as 'a much more open political geography'. Certain intellectual boundaries were blurred as the range of theoretical inspirations, interdisciplinary crossovers and political orientations broadened.

At the same time however, to some critical observers the revitalised field appeared marked by a primary focus on Anglo-American cases and concerns. Writing a few years after the establishment of the journal *Political Geography*, Perry (1987, 6) claimed that:

'Anglo-American political geography poses and pursues a limited and impoverished version of the discipline, largely ignoring the political concerns of four fifths of humankind.'

Kofman reiterated this in the mid-1990s, noting 'the heavily Anglocentric, let alone Eurocentric, bias of political geography writing.' (1994, 437). In this political geography is not alone; the same critique has periodically been levelled at 'Anglo-American' human geography more widely (e.g. Berg 2004; Minca, 2003; Slater, 1989). And the allied field of International Relations remains configured, as it was in Hoffman's (1977) designation of nearly thirty years ago, as 'An American Social Science.' (cf. Tickner, 2003).

In the case of political geography however, there is some irony in this Anglocentrism. In its century-long history as a field of study, political geography had significant roots in French and German language debates. Political geography texts usually mention this

continental genealogy. Sometimes, like the introduction to an early 1980s collection on *Developments in Political Geography* (Busteed 1983, 7) they cite Turgot's *Géographie Politique* (1751). But the more frequent reference point is Ratzel. Both the Spanish-language textbook cited above (Fontí and Rufí 2001) and two other recent English-language texts (Agnew, 2002; Jones, Jones and Woods, 2004) attribute the terminology and foundation of political geography to Friedrich Ratzel's organic conceptions of the state (codified in his 1897 magnum opus *Politische Geographie*). As Bassin (1987) has shown, the influences on Ratzel were a complex (and mix of Prussian-German nationalism, Hegelian philosophy and Darwinian biology). In turn, Ratzel's notions of *Lebensraum* provided ample inspiration to German nationalism. They did not stop at the German borders however. The conservative Swedish intellectual Rudolf Kjellen reworked Ratzel's ideas, coining the term *Geopolitisk* (Geopolitics) in 1899. Subsequently, work on frontiers and boundaries were markedly Francophone and German-language affairs in the first half of the twentieth century. The use (both practical and scholarly) of this material had underlain some of the initial development of anglophone political geography in the 1940s and 1950s (e.g. Jones 1959; Kristof 1959 and Minghi 1963) and its textbooks (e.g. East and Moodie, 1956) were replete with references to continental European political geographers, such as Ancel, Goblet, Demangeon, Obst and Maull. A few years earlier, Derwent Whittlesey's (1939) text both cited German-language material and reflected a commitment to the regional synthesis à la Vidal de la Blache; the doyen the French geography in the first half of the twentieth century (Cohen, 2002). Much of this work (of the 1930s to the 1950s) focused on boundary-drawing and disputes. Likewise, the complex and contested field of Geopolitics

comprised of a (frequently acrimonious) set of conversations and influences between Francophone, German-speaking and other (e.g. Portuguese, Rumanian and Hungarian) figures and institutions (Dodds and Atkinson, 2000; Natter, 2003) and American reactions in the career and writings of the American geographer-geopolitican Isaiah Bowman (Smith 2003) and of émigré Europeans, such as Robert Strausz-Hupé (Crampton and O Tuathail, 1996), Nicholas Spykman, Hans Morgenthau and later Henry Kissinger (Hepple, 1986) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (Sidaway, 1998). Classical geopolitics also found fruitful soil in Japan and its Korean colony in the 1930s and 1940s (Narangoa 2004) and in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s (Child 1985, Kelly 1997). Although deeply rooted in national contexts, in all cases classical geopolitics rested on the *international* circulation of geopolitical ideas, reactions, adaptations and responses. Stephen Kern (1983, 228) thus describes how:

‘Rivers of geopolitics coursed all over the European cultural terrain. They started in the high reaches of theoretical tomes such as Ratzel’s two major works [1882 *Anthropogeographie* and 1887 *Politische Geographie*] and cascaded through volumes of the new periodicals that were founded – *National Geographic Magazine* (1889), *Annales de géographie* (1891), *The Geographical Journal* (1893), *Geographische Zeitschrift* (1895).

However, be it classical European geopolitics or the ersatz-geopolitics of Bowman and his successors in cold war America and the military interest in geopolitics in 1950s Portugal (Sidaway and Power, 2005) or 1970s Latin America, the bulk of twentieth century political geography (especially in the case of geopolitics) was therefore, in Taylor’s (2003, 47) words:

‘conspicuously conservative in orientation….not at the forefront of querying the *status quo*, rather they [Political Geographers] have provided spatial recipes for powerful.’

There were exceptions, figures like Robert Dickson and Frank Horrabin in the UK (see Johnston, 2000 and Heppple, 1999) or Karl Wittfogel in Germany (see Bassin, 1996; Smith, 1987), but they were rarely influential in policy circles or, like Owen Lattimore in the United States, they ran foul of the Cold War redbaiting (see Harvey, 1973). Whilst most political geographers may have been on the political right (often linked to military cliques and nationalist parties), the consequences of their work (in terms of territorial claims and aspirations on planetary space) were often disturbing to the established international order. Of course right-wing geopolitical discourses continue to flourish. For as Murphy et al (2004, 619) point out that, whilst:

> 'Political geographers typically invoke the term [geopolitics] with reference to the geographical assumptions and understandings that influence world politics. Outside of the academy, geopolitics often connotes a conservative or right-wing political-territorial calculus associated with the strategic designs of Henry Kissinger, Aleksander Dugin, and followers of the new *Geopolitik* in Germany.'

Murphy et al cite examples of what they term a 'neoclassical geopolitics' from a range of national contexts. Likewise, O Loughlin (2000, 127) describes this as 'high geopolitics', 'motivated by traditional security concerns'. Yet, at the same time that such 'neo-classical' geopolitics have proliferated beyond the academy, the 1980s and 1990s revival of the field in Anglophone academic geography saw political geography influenced by radical and critical currents; including marxism, poststructuralism and feminism. Within this reinvigorated and critical political geography, the histories (and current reworkings) of classical geopolitics came in for sustained and critical scrutiny (Dodds and Atkinson, 2000, O Tuathail 1996, O Tuathail and Dalby 1998). In the main however, such developments have tended to limit themselves to interrogating English language material (although many of the political and theoretical literatures that have inspired such moves

are translated from elsewhere; Althussuer, Foucault and Gramsci for example). Despite the presence of these theoretical inspirations from elsewhere (usually in translation), work in and from other linguistic contexts remains marginalised in a revitalised Anglophone political geography.

Meanwhile, other critical schools have developed. Inspired in part by critical geopolitics, (and responding also to conservative revivals of geopolitical thought in reunified Germany) German scholars have scrutinised the histories and historiographies of *Geopolitik* (see Natter, 2003 for a summary). Significant French-language schools of academic political geography and (critical) geopolitics also evolved ahead of the revitalisation of political geography in the Anglophone realm. In particular, work by Lacoste (1976), scholarship associated with the journal *Hérodote* (published since 1976) and writings by Claval (e.g. 1994) and Raffestein (e.g. 1995) stand out; but communication between these and the Anglophone scholarship has remained fairly limited. Hepple (2000, 269) thus notes how:

'The Anglophone geographical and geopolitical communities tend to know of the existence of the *Hérodote* school, but there has been remarkably little engagement with its ideas or referencing of *Hérodote* sources…This neglect appears remarkable when one starts to list some of the features of the Lacoste-*Hérodote* school: the early work by Lacoste in the Marxist tradition; the construction of *Hérodote's* analysis within the radical, post-Marxist culture of Vincennes (where Foucault and Deleuze, with other influential thinkers, worked for periods); and a direct engagement with Foucault in the first issues of *Hérodote*…'

Hepple attributes this inattention to the linguistic limitations of many Anglophone geographers. In tandem with this, he identifies a certain linguistic imperialism on the part the wider Anglophone academy (reflecting the societies in which they are embedded).

Hepple also notes that the style and foci of most of the work in *Hérodote* is likely to puzzle many Anglophone political geographers. Likewise:

'…*Hérodote* has been embedded within the Francophone world and within debates of French Geography….analysis of the development and shaping of geography and geopolitics is also set almost exclusively within the French context (with some references to the earlier history of German geography). Likewise, the contemporary debates it includes – with Lévy on Marxism, Brunet on chorèmes, and Raffestin on geopolitics – are Francophone debates.' (Hepple 2000, 270-271).

So far, there is relatively little to show for Hepple's call for dialogue. For whilst it may be informed by theories and literatures from elsewhere, Anglophone political geography (like the wider Anglophone discipline) operates predominantly in a transatlantic space of communication, conferences and journals in which the US-UK link is predominant. This is not to say that there are no differences across the Atlantic in intellectual cultures and the traditions of Anglophone geography and political geography within them (Johnson and Sidaway, 2004). Moreover, English language journals include works published in English by authors based outside the predominantly Anglophone realms and contain some Editorial Board Members and Editors from elsewhere. In the past few years, the journal *Geopolitics* (which edited from the United States and Israel[1]) has published useful special issues, for example, on French (5, 2 Autumn 2000) and German (7, 3, Winter 2002) geopolitics. Notwithstanding these important departures, critical commentators have however recently returned to the restricted linguistic and geographical horizons of political geography, as raised earlier by Koffman (1994) and Perry (1997) and echoed in Hepple's (2000) observations. The Finnish political geographer Jouni Häkli (2003, 660) for example claimed that:

'…as a scholar writing from the North European periphery, I want to pay attention to the fact that where you write from makes a big difference'

For him the concepts associated with political geography as developed in Anglophone literatures might carry ‘the risk of an unwarranted universalism’:

‘A particular parochiality is thus universalised and made to pass as the best available internationally recognized scholarship. But perhaps there is a market for other parochialties. French, Mediterranean, Nordic, Iberian, South American, African, ones that are poorly known by those who cannot read work done outside Anglo-American circles. If this is the case…then the universalism of Anglophone geography is but an illusion caused by lack of knowledge concerning the richness of the political geographical world.’ (Hakli, 2003, 660).

Despite the limits that Hakli signals, it is perhaps in work on Europe (and specifically on European integration) where a more international literature has evolved. As concepts are translated across European languages and institutionalised (in European Union discourses) the field of political geography (as in other social sciences) has come to interact with and intersect with what Jensen and Richardson (2004, ix) claim is:

‘…a new field of European spatial policy, which is embedding new ideas about relationships across space in a multi-level, transnational field of activity’.

Much of this literature about the European Union project is in political science and planning, although the centrality of space and territorial questions to its concerns means that political geography has found a role (Sidaway, 2005). More widely however, in terms of the concepts and vocabulary of political geography, Hakli's critique invites critical reflections.

Translating political geographies

In the light of the contexts and debates sketched above, one productive way forward is to ask what is lost (and gained) in translations? In such terms, Sidaway, Bunnell, Grundy-

Warr, Mohammad, Park and Saito (2004) explore categories and concepts that have been central to much political geography (they focus on the terms for 'state', 'territory' and border') in Portuguese, Spanish, Malay, Korean, Japanese and Urdu. They point out that the question of what happens to even quite fundamental political geography concepts, such as the state, sovereignty, borders and territory in different national-linguistic contexts begins to problematise taken for granted assumptions. Thus:

'Languages and meanings of the political are everywhere caught up in wider cosmographies and hermeneutics. These are usefully approached with an openness to political thought and meanings: recognising that our categories, terms and analyses deserve enrichment from relatively unaccustomed sources.' (Sidaway et al, 2004, 10)

Likewise, Ingerflom (1993) and Krarkhordin (2001) consider the significant differences in the concept of the state between Russian and west European languages. In all cases however, the state emerges as a complex concept rooted in residual mystical foundations of power and tied-in with the national imaginaries. Critical analysis of these needs to move beyond the spoken and written word to consider other representations. Political geography has long recognised that such national-sovereign representations include mappings. But it is from a historian of Thai ideas of identity/sovereignty that one of the most suggestive ways of conceptualising these has emerged. Based on his study of Thai concepts of territory and sovereignty, Winichakul (1996, 67) thus develops the concept of the sovereign 'geo-body':

'Unarguably, the territory of a nation is the most concrete feature of a nation for the management of nationhood as a whole….For people of a nation, it is part of SELF, a collective self. It is a nation's *geo-body*….Geographically speaking, the geo-body of a nation occupies a certain portion of the earth's surface which can be easily identified. It seems to be concrete to the eyes and having a long history as if it were natural, and independent from technology or any cultural and social construction.'

However, Wincichakul sets out the ways that, the geo-body is an effect of modern practises and technologies of mapping. In the Thai case, the earlier sense of vague frontiers and interlaced sovereign powers was transformed through contact with colonial powers who were carving out bounded territories in Southeast Asia. In response, Thai territory was mapped and demarcated and represented as the geo-body of Siam. In turn the 'Thai-ness' of these lands was further asserted when Siam was renamed as Thailand in 1939. But representations of geobodies are not confined to maps. One striking example is the circulation in South Asia of striking representations of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) as the geo-body of the subcontinent. Ramaswamy (2003, 178) notes the significance of these in late colonial and postcolonial India. Thus:

'…by the middle decades of the century, the map and the mother's body had become interchangeable, one substituting for the other. Indeed, in 1936, when the very first 'temple' to Bharat Mata was opened in Banares, it did not house an image of the goddess but a marble map of India made to scale with all its topographic features shown in great detail.'

The conception of political space in these figures is thus an invocation of the supposed interface between a cosmic and a geopolitical order:

'…these bodyscapes visually 'Hinduise' India's geo-body by resorting to the familiar image of the Hindu mother goddess such as Durga and Lakshmi on whom Bharat Mata is clearly modelled. But what is also worth noting is the inclusivistic definition of 'Hinduism' that bodyscapes appear to operate with, in that symbolic markers which we associate with other religious sensibilities such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are also incorporated into the mother's body….Bharat Mata's body thus becomes a microcosm of the nation's plural religious history, even while it is used to signal what can – and cannot – be included within its ample folds…' (Ramaswamy 2003, 180-181).

It is partly these cosmo-social-geopolitical interfaces that lead Krishna (1996) to the concept of cartographic anxiety, describing postcolonial India's fixation with territoriality, mappings and the secure inscription of borders. Similarly, Freitag (2001, 39) points to the

acts of imagining nation and community, “where spectatorship meets creation’ in complex interplays between bodies, visuality, discourse , institutions and figurality. In other words, there is a potential diversity of other political geographies – or ways of seeing the political, power and space - to explore. This applies both to sites/foci and theoretical inspirations. In the latter terms, Tyner (2004, 341) calls for a ‘broadening of horizons’ in political geography. Tyner’s focus is on the political thought of the African-American radical Malcolm X. But, writing from the US, he makes a wider point:

‘Our geographies, and especially our political geographies, remain largely distant from non-European theorists and theories. Our texts on nationalism and identities, in particular, are woefully ignorant of Pan-African nationalism and other African diasporic movements. Also largely missing are the geographies of Pan-Asian American and Chicano movements.’

Sustained attention to location, language and context offer fruitful and challenging departures. Yet, as in Tyner’s recognition of Malcolm X’s writings, there is something more fundamental at stake here than the diverse global range of languages, artefacts and experiences supplementing (or even potentially disrupting) the conventional foci of much Anglophone political geography. This comes more clearly into view when it is recognised that assumptions about universality in political geography themselves tend to be products of particular circumstances. An achievement of social sciences (and here geography plays a key role) has been to visualise how connections between diverse phenomena and places are configured through universal processes, narratives and logics. Hence, the references in political geography (as other social sciences), to the reach and roles of capital, modernity and sovereignty. Yet visions of universal processes are both bound up with Western power (as Edward Said and others have pointed out) and

geographically specific and situated. Commenting on this, Mitchell (2003, 167) points out how conventionally:

'….the diversity of languages in which communities articulate their political demands and identities, their visions and their revulsions, are to be translated into the universal language of political economy.'

Material imperatives of capitalism compel convergence in meanings (profit, price, globalization, trade enter wide translation and become commensurate in markets), yet that process is uneven and multifaceted. It is also tied in with meanings and understandings that have a western provenance, but are never simply reducible to a Western telos. As writers such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) have detailed, there is no easy way around this problematic interplay of complexity, diversity and abstraction. A starting point however is to recognise the putatively universal languages into which 'local' phenomena and terms are translated are themselves derived from Western norms and practises. Thus, although his focus is on political economy, Mitchell's (2003, 167-168) critique also holds for the ways that political geography and other social sciences conceive of norms and difference:

'The local forms of political organization and expression are understood as mere languages, meaning the cultural and "ideational" forms for expressing the real interests that shape their world. The language into which these expressions are translated – political economy- is assumed by definition not to be an ideational form, not a cultural practice, but the transparent and global terminology of economic reality.'

In terms of critical geography and geographers, Berg (2004, 555) likewise argues that:

'…geographies of the United Kingdom and America are unmarked by limits – they constitute the field of geography. Geographies of other people and places become marked as Other – exotic, transgressive, extraordinary and unrepresentative.'

It is these problematics that Robinson (2003, 279) tackles in her suggestion for a political geography derived from Southeast Asia (cf. Grundy-Warr and Sidaway, 2000):

> ‘And why not a political geography whose focus is Southeast Asia? The suggestions that I make try to escape the contemporary biases which shape the ways in which different places come into view in the western elements of the discipline: for example, Southeast Asia is seen as “interesting” to western scholars because it has tiger economies and so-called “world cities”. We need to be constantly on the alert for such moves that reinstate a sense of “knowledge” of other places serving “our” purposes and concerns, whatever these might be. The orientation is, rather, towards learning from the complex and rich experiences and scholarship of different places.’

The notion is therefore not simply such non-western geographies (or political geographies) should be supplements that remain as examples, footnotes or exceptions to the Anglo-American mainstream, but that the mainstream becomes more attendant to its own situatedness. Keeping these challenges and dilemmas in mind, the last section of this chapter sketches some paths towards such political geographies.

Repositioning political geographies

Amidst the transdisciplinary discourse of globalization, political geographers have been keen to point to the contradictory dialectics of global-local-state relations (Brenner, Jessop, Jones and MacLeod, 2003; Cox 1997), the reworking (but continued roles) of borders (Newman, 2003), the dialectics of globalization, imperialism and resistances (Sparke, 2004) and the significance and contest of the construction and intersections of scales (Herod and Wright, 2002; Howitt, 2003) and attendant reterritorialistions (Herod, Roberts and O Tuathail, 1998). A parallel stress on networks – especially in work on

‘Wold Cities’ and their interactions with states – has also been a productive response to tracing new political geographies (Taylor, 2000).

Considerable potential remains however, especially in the domain of those other (hitherto relatively marginalised) political geographies sketched above. In this task however, I am encouraging political geographers to adopt an attitude toward systems of organizing space power that has long been advocated by anthropology (and taken up by aspects of cultural geography). That is, to adopt an attitude that, once a few core questions are asked (e.g. how does this or that group or state use some degree of control over space to maintain political cohesion), there is an open range of prospective answers and categorizations and that these defy hierarchical ordering. Cultural (and to some extent) economic geographers have been willing to engage with alternative organizing systems coming from different parts of the world, yet Anglophone political geography has – in recent years – been less willing to engage alternatives. It is beyond the scope of this chapter (and the competence of its author) to provide anything other than some selective pointers here. In the first place however, it is necessary to reconsider what and where have become taken for granted as the norms in literatures on the sovereign state. Drawing on poststructuralist and postcolonial literatures, and focusing on African sovereignties, Sidaway (2003, 175) articulates:

> ‘A demand for new and unorthodox maps of flows and sovereignties, but coupled with scepticism about the ability of charts to adequately represent what these might amount to (some wariness about the phantom objectivity of mappings); these might serve as promising points of departure towards a postcolonial political geography.’

This argument is linked to a call for political geography to recognize that the diversity and character of postcolonial sovereignties (cf. Sidaway 2000) ought not to be interpreted

as a simple hierarchy with the putatively ‘strong’ long established western states at the apex and postcolonial states (especially those that are visibly fractured by insurgencies or secessionist movements) as somehow abnormal or simply lacking the features of the western state. Instead, it is argued that the supposed weakness of some postcolonial states might be interpreted as arising not from a lack or absence of authority and connection (including the presence of the West), but rather as an excess of certain forms of them. The paper concentrates on the political geographies of Angola and Zaire. In the former case, for example, the ‘normal’ experience of sovereignty has been one of dislocation, turmoil and fractures. Yet:

‘The Key point is not only that Angola’s ‘(ab)normality’ has been many years in the making, but it is profoundly connected with others. Indeed, it would be utterly impossible to imagine or describe without reference to Western normality, to transnational flows of oil, gems, weapons and capital….Angola is symptomatic of how malign combinations of imperialism, Cold War, the power of money, minerals (global demand for oil and diamonds) and violence may interact. Angola’s situation is a product of these interactions….What has become normal in Angola emerges out of profound connections to other modern norms, to all our normalities.’ (Sidaway, 2003, 164)

The focus is in Africa, but these arguments also apply elsewhere. It is especially evident in those places, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Columbia amongst them, which became significant domains of Cold War confrontations. In slightly different terms, Robinson (2003) – whose provocative suggestion for a political geography with a focus on Southeast Asia was introduced earlier - argues that a more nuanced sensibility towards the range of postcolonial trajectories and politics ought to introduce caution into some Western narratives about their universality and value across diverse contexts.

A second path is set out through Oren Yiftachel and As'ad Ghanem's (2004) notion of ethnocracy, where they argue (using the Israeli case, but also venturing into comparisons where similar tendencies are evident such as Estonia and Sri Lanka) that *ethnos* and not *demos* becomes the main organizing political principle. In other words, political subjects are not defined primarily according to territorial convention, but according to ethnic criteria. Elsewhere Yiftachel (1998, 1) defines ethnocracy:

'…as a regime type with several key characteristics:

- Despite several democratic features, ethnicity, not territorial citizenship, is the main logic behind resource allocation.
- State borders and political boundaries are fuzzy: there is no identifiable "demos," mainly due to the role of ethnic diasporas inside the polity and the inferior position of ethnic minorities.
- A dominant "charter" ethnic group appropriates the state apparatus and determines most public policies.
- Significant (though partial) civil and political rights are extended to minority members, distinguishing ethnocracies from Herrenvolk or authoritarian regimes.'

This academic work has led to fierce attacks from the Israeli right-wing, for clearly it poses an analytical and political challenge in the specific context of Zionism. The concepts contain more universal assertions however, to describe the operation of democracy and electoral geographies elsewhere. The Arab states of the Gulf spring to mind, where (as in the UAE or Kuwait for example) not only is political space for opposition and parties circumscribed by the ruling Sultanates, but citizenship (and voting) restricted by an ethnically defined (and relatively narrow) citizenship criteria that enfranchise a minority of the population. The category might be pushed further; the South of the United States prior to the mid-1960s had ethnocratic features, as did Australia until the 1970s as well as the more obvious case of apartheid South Africa and indeed many cases (in Europe and elsewhere) where *Jus Solis* (citizenship by birthplace within a

territory) is displaced by *Jus Sanguinis* (citizenship primarily by the parent's birthplace or nationality).

A third example of the ways in which other political geographies might be produced relates the quite basic issue of conventional political maps of the world, especially their margins. Over recent decades the basics of (western) cartography have certainly been questioned and problematised. The critique of the Mercator projection and the circulation of alternatives (notably the Peter's projection) which portray the world from other vantage points have developed since the 1970s, along with broader awareness of Eurocentrism across the disciplines. Similarly, Lewis and Wigen's (1997) book on *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* and Alastair Bonnet's (2004) *The Idea of the West* have summed up the ways that a fundamentally Eurocentric vision of the world had come to be taken for granted. Even so, some spaces tend to remain relegated to the margins, fragmented and often forgotten. Commenting on this, in the context of the trajectory of area studies, Van Schendel (2002) notes how:

'…atlases commonly have maps with the captions 'Southeast Asia' and 'South Asia'. These apparently objective visualisations present regional heartlands as well as peripheries – parts of the world that always drop off the map, disappear into the folds of two-page spreads, or end up as insets. In this way, cartographic convenience reinforces a hierarchical spatial awareness, highlighting certain areas of the globe and pushing others into the shadows.'

He points to the mountainous region covering Burma, northeast India and parts of China, as sharing a certain cultural-linguistic and historical commonality.

Van Schendel charts how the combined geopolitics of the Cold War (which fragmented the region into different spheres of influence), the ways that it included only relatively marginal areas of states (in social sciences that continued to work with states as the basic

units of organization and analysis) and the lack of an influential scholarly community committed to its study meant that the linguistic and cultural connections and affinities across the region rarely became the domain of systematic attention. Instead, other 'regions' (such as East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia) emerged as supposedly natural domains of study and interaction. In turn, these regions saw intensified political, cultural and economic exchanges (and narratives) which produced the objects (Southeast Asia for example in the form of areas studies programmes and ASEAN after 1967) they sought to describe (Evans 2002).

Today however, there is a sense of critical possibility and challenge in terms of alternative meso and macro-geographies. Each (including the conventional western designations) carries distinctive sets of exclusions and focus points. Consider for example, the ways that Arabic representations have long constructed the lands of the 'East Indies' as a distant archipelago of Islam, yet one deeply and closely configured by the common circulation of pilgrims and commodities (Laffan, 2004). Similarly Halliday (2002, 15) notes how Arabic discourses describe what in English is termed the Arabian Peninsula as *Al-Jazira*, the peninsula. In recent years, the term has become more familiar to anglophone audiences, since it came to be used as a name for the pan-Arab satellite TV station based in Qatar since 1996. It was also adapted in the rhetoric of Osama bin Laden and others who now reject the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia and the political fragmentation of the peninsula (into the seven states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirates) to *jazirat Muhammad* (the Peninsula of the Prophet Muhammad). The relationship of these spaces to South Asia is also charted in Ghosh's (1994) *In an Antique*

Land: History in the Guise of a Traveller's Tale. Part travelogue, part history, part history, this text defies easy classification[2]. In this, Ghosh sets out how his experiences as an Indian-born anthropologist in an Egyptian village led him to examine 12th century documents by Jewish and Arab merchants who traveled and traded through the Arab world and South Asia. In turn, Ghosh's narrative connects this with the contemporary flows of migrants and workers between South Asia, Arabia and the Gulf. Ghosh's account of 'transnationalism' is removed from the modern West in both time and place and therefore does not have the latter as its key reference point.

Elsewhere Halliday (2002, 214) reminds us of the significance of vantage points in naming practises with an example from Cold War narratives:

'What the Western world calls 'the Cuba missile crisis' of October 1962 is to the Russians the 'Caribbean crisis' and to the Cuban's, who point out none of the missiles involved was 'Cuban', it is *la crise de octubre*.'

These superficially trivial issues of nomenclature reveal more profound differences of vantage point and scales and geometries of reference. In terms of alternatives for political geography, Van Schendel in particular points to other 'regions' crosscutting the conventional ones, and thereby focuses on unfulfilled potential for the study of borderlands and transnational flows. In these suggestions however, Van Schendel is far from an isolated voice. The Thai scholar Thongchai Winichakul (2003, 10) (whose work on *geo-bodies* was introduced above) for example notes how:

'As the arbitrariness of the world of nations and the limitations of national history come under scrutiny, plenty of alternatives are emerging. Among them are a transnational history of Southeast Asia as a common trading zone…a history of areas that span or cross borders between different modern nations, especially if they shared a common history before the drawing of modern national boundaries…and subnational histories of regions

and locales that once were “autonomous” and not part of the major nations, but were “integrated” with them later….And with a different geography, different stories emerge.’

Other possibilities emerge too when political geography escapes its conventional earth-bound focus and moves into the space of flows and movement of ocean-spaces. There is a long history of work in the field that extends the study of the territorial state into the realm of competition for maritime resources and spaces, a topic that was rejuvenated by 1994 of passage of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Steinberg, 2001). But when the oceans are seen too as spaces of connection and flow (rather than merely competition and control as in classical western geopolitics), then (continental) margins and centres are also repositioned. The Indian Ocean, for example, becomes a space of interchange that connects and configures littoral communities in Eastern Africa, the Mashriq, South and Southeast Asia (Chaturvedi 2002; Lewis 1999; Lewis and Wigen 1999). Similarly, the Atlantic, so key in Anglo-American notions of geopolitical and geocultural connection also contains a subaltern Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1992), of multiple, African, American, Caribbean and European cultural, political and commodity interchanges. Developing such conceptual alternatives transcends the foci, resources and concerns of (even an expanded) political geography. In this collective task however, perhaps something of the tradition of political geography’s focus on boundary drawing might be reworked, resituated and redeployed for critical effect.

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[1] It is notable that, with the exception of the work of the Palestinian-Canadian Ghazi Falah (e.g. Newman and Falah, 1995), very little political geography from the Arab world or by Arab geographers has appeared in English. Although Falah wrote some of his work with an Israeli political geographer (David Newman), the geopolitical location of the chief Editor of *Geopolitics* (the same David Newman) probably forecloses this journal becoming a significant forum of work from Arab writers under present circumstances. But nor has the journal *Political Geography* been able to attract a significant flow of manuscripts from Arab states. In 2002-2004, the latter journal became embroiled in a controversy over the personal decision on the part of one of its then co-editors to sign and follow calls for an academic boycott of submissions from Israel. This issue culminated in this co-editor quickly revising his original position and the editor, the publishers and the editorial board reaffirming the complete openness of the journal to submissions from anywhere, irrespective of the nationality, orientations, location or affiliations of authors (O'Loughlin, 2004).

[2] I have adapted the summary of Ghosh's book from the details provided at the postcolonial studies at Emory website (http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Intro.html, accessed 24 March 2005).