

# A Companion to Political Geography

*Edited by*

John Agnew

*University of California, Los Angeles*

Katharyne Mitchell

*University of Washington*

*and*

Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail)

*Virginia Tech*



# **A Companion to Political Geography**

## **Blackwell Companions to Geography**

---

*Blackwell Companions to Geography* is a blue-chip, comprehensive series covering each major subdiscipline of human geography in detail. Edited and contributed by the disciplines' leading authorities each book provides the most up to date and authoritative syntheses available in its field. The overviews provided in each Companion will be an indispensable introduction to the field for students of all levels, while the cutting-edge, critical direction will engage students, teachers and practitioners alike.

### ***Published***

1. *A Companion to the City*

Edited by Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson

2. *A Companion to Economic Geography*

Edited by Eric Sheppard and Trevor J. Barnes

3. *A Companion to Political Geography*

Edited by John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal

4. *A Companion to Cultural Geography*

Edited by James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein

5. *A Companion to Tourism*

Edited by Alan A. Lew, C. Michael Hall and Allan M. Williams

6. *A Companion to Feminist Geography*

Edited by Lise Nelson and Joni Seager

### ***Forthcoming***

8. *Handbook of Geographical Information Science*

Edited by John Wilson and Stewart Fotheringham

# A Companion to Political Geography

*Edited by*

John Agnew

*University of California, Los Angeles*

Katharyne Mitchell

*University of Washington*

*and*

Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail)

*Virginia Tech*

© 2003 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd  
except for editorial material and organization © 2003 by John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and  
Gerard Toal

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING  
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA  
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK  
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal to be identified as the Authors  
of the Editorial Material in this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright,  
Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or  
otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the  
prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2003 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

3 2006

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A companion to political geography / edited by John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard  
Toal.

p. cm. — (Blackwell companions to geography ; 3)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-22031-3 (hardback)

I. Political geography. I. Agnew, John A. II. Mitchell, Katharyne. III. Ó Tuathail, Gearóid  
IV. Series.

JC319 .C645 2003

320.1'2—dc21

2002003789

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-22031-2 (hardback)

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10 on 12pt Sabon  
by Kolam Information Services Pvt Ltd, Pondicherry, India  
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom  
by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry  
policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary  
chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board  
used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on  
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:  
[www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com)

# Contents

---

<i>List of Contributors</i>	viii
1 Introduction <i>John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal</i> <i>(Gearóid Ó Tuathail)</i>	1
<b>Part I Modes of Thinking</b>	<b>11</b>
2 Politics from Nature <i>Mark Bassin</i>	13
3 Spatial Analysis in Political Geography <i>John O'Loughlin</i>	30
4 Radical Political Geographies <i>Peter J. Taylor</i>	47
5 Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements <i>Joanne P. Sharp</i>	59
6 Geopolitical Themes and Postmodern Thought <i>David Slater</i>	75
<b>Part II Essentially Contested Concepts</b>	<b>93</b>
7 Power <i>John Allen</i>	95
8 Territory <i>Anssi Paasi</i>	109
9 Boundaries <i>David Newman</i>	123

10	Scale <i>Richard Howitt</i>	138
11	Place <i>Lynn A. Staebeli</i>	158
<b>Part III</b>	<b>Critical Geopolitics</b>	<b>171</b>
12	Imperial Geopolitics <i>Gerry Kearns</i>	173
13	Geopolitics in Germany, 1919–45 <i>Wolfgang Natter</i>	187
14	Cold War Geopolitics <i>Klaus Dodds</i>	204
15	Postmodern Geopolitics <i>Timothy W. Luke</i>	219
16	Anti-Geopolitics <i>Paul Routledge</i>	236
<b>Part IV</b>	<b>States, Territory, and Identity</b>	<b>249</b>
17	After Empire <i>Vladimir Kolossov</i>	251
18	Nation-states <i>Michael J. Shapiro</i>	271
19	Places of Memory <i>Karen E. Till</i>	289
20	Boundaries in Question <i>Sankaran Krishna</i>	302
21	Entrepreneurial Geographies of Global–Local Governance <i>Matthew Sparke and Victoria Lawson</i>	315
<b>Part V</b>	<b>Geographies of Political and Social Movements</b>	<b>335</b>
22	Representative Democracy and Electoral Geography <i>Ron Johnston and Charles Pattie</i>	337
23	Nationalism in a Democratic Context <i>Colin H. Williams</i>	356
24	Fundamentalist and Nationalist Religious Movements <i>R. Scott Appleby</i>	378
25	Rights and Citizenship <i>Eleonore Kofman</i>	393
26	Sexual Politics <i>Gill Valentine</i>	408



---

<b>Part VI</b>	<b>Geographies of Environmental Politics</b>	<b>421</b>
27	The Geopolitics of Nature <i>Noel Castree</i>	423
28	Green Geopolitics <i>Simon Dalby</i>	440
29	Environmental Justice <i>Brendan Gleeson and Nicholas Low</i>	455
30	Planetary Politics <i>Karen T. Litfin</i>	470
	<i>Index</i>	483

# Contributors

---

**John Allen** is Professor and Head of Geography in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University. His recent publications include *Rethinking the Region: Spaces of Neoliberalism* (Routledge, 1998) with Doreen Massey and Alan Cochrane, and *Lost Geographies of Power* (Blackwell, 2002).

**R. Scott Appleby** is Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, where he also serves as the John M. Regan, Jr. Director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. He is the author, most recently, of *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), and a co-author of *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

**Mark Bassin** is Reader in Political and Cultural Geography at University College London. He is the author of *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East 1840–1865* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). He has been a visiting professor at UCLA, Chicago, Copenhagen, and Pau (France), and has received research grants from bodies including the American Academy in Berlin, the Institut für Europäische Geschichte (Mainz), and the Fulbright Foundation.

**Noel Castree** is a Reader (Associate Professor) in Human Geography at the University of Manchester. His interests are in the political economy of environmental change, with a specific focus on Marxian theories. Co-editor (with Bruce Braun) of *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium* (Routledge, 1998) and *Social Nature* (Blackwell, 2001), he is currently researching how economic and cultural value are constructed in the “new” human genetics.

**Simon Dalby** is Professor of Geography, Environmental Studies and Political Economy at Carleton University in Ottawa where he teaches courses on geopolitics and environment. He is co-editor of *The Geopolitics Reader* (Routledge, 1998) and

---

*Rethinking Geopolitics* (Routledge, 1998), and is the author of *Environmental Security* (University of Minnesota, 2002).

**Klaus Dodds** is Senior Lecturer in Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is author of *Geopolitics in a Changing World* (Pearson Education, 2000) and *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (I B Tauris, 2002). He also joint edited, with David Atkinson, a collection of essays called *Geopolitical Traditions* (Routledge, 2000).

**Brendan Gleeson** is currently Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Urban Frontiers Program, University of Western Sydney, Australia. He has authored and co-authored several books in the fields of urban planning, geography, and environmental theory. His most recent book, with N.P. Low, *Governing for the Environment*, was published in 2001. He has undertaken research and teaching in a range of countries, including Britain, Germany, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand.

**Richie Howitt** is Associate Professor of Human Geography, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, where he teaches in the Resource and Environmental Management and Aboriginal Studies programs. His professional work has involved applied research in social impact assessment, native title negotiations, and community development in remote Australia. He has previously published papers on theoretical issues of geographical scale, indigenous rights, and resource management.

**Ron Johnston** is a Professor in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol. He has collaborated with Charles Pattie (see entry below) in a wide range of work on electoral geography since the mid-1980s, including the following books: *A Nation Dividing?* (with G. Allsopp); *The Boundary Commissions* (with D. J. Rossiter); and *From Votes to Seats* (with D. Dorling and D. J. Rossiter).

**Gerry Kearns** is a Lecturer in Geography at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Jesus College. He works on nineteenth-century urban public health, Irish nationalism, and the history and philosophy of geography.

**Eleonore Kofman** is Professor of Human Geography at Nottingham Trent University, UK. Her research focuses on gender, citizenship, and international migration in Europe, including skilled and family migration, and feminist political geography. She has co-edited *Globalization: Theory and Practice* (Pinter, 1996), and co-authored *Gender and International Migration in Europe: Employment, Welfare and Politics* (Routledge, 2000).

**Vladimir Kolossov** is Head of the Center of Geopolitical Studies at the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Professor at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail (France) and Chair of the International Geographical Union Commission on Political Geography. Recent books include *The World in the Eyes of Russian Citizens: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (FOM, 2002, in Russian), and (as co-author) *La Russie (la construction de l'identité nationale)* (Flammarion, 1999).

**Sankaran Krishna** is Associate Professor and Chairman, Department of Political Science, at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in Honolulu. He is the author of *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minnesota, 1999).

**Victoria Lawson** is Professor of Geography and the Thomas and Margo Wyckoff Endowed Faculty Fellow at the University of Washington. Her research and teaching is concerned with the social and economic processes of global restructuring in the Americas with a particular focus on migration, identity formation, and the feminization of poverty. Her most recent work has appeared in journals such as the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography* and *Economic Geography*.

**Karen T. Litfin** is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington in Seattle. She teaches and writes primarily on global environmental politics. Her publications include *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (Columbia University Press, 1994) and *The Greening of Sovereignty in World Politics* (MIT Press, 1998).

**Nicholas Low** is Associate Professor in Environmental Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at University of Melbourne. His interests include urban planning, politics and state theory, environmental justice, participation, decision making and problem solving, and land markets. Recent books, with B. Gleeson, include *Justice, Society and Nature* (Routledge, 1998) and *Governing for the Environment* (Palgrave, 2001).

**Timothy W. Luke** is University Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He is author of recent books including *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ecology: Departing from Marx* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), and co-editor, with Chris Toulouse, of *The Politics of Cyberspace* (Routledge, 1998).

**Wolfgang Natter** is Associate Professor of Geography and Co-Founder/Director of the Social Theory Program at the University of Kentucky. His research has explored the ramifications of various poststructuralisms for understandings of space, aesthetics, nationalism, cultural memory, identity politics, democratic theory, and film, particularly in German and US contexts. He is currently pursuing research on Friedrich Ratzel and the disciplinary history of geography in Germany and the USA prior to the World War II.

**David Newman** teaches political geography in the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. He received his BA from the University of London in 1978, and his PhD from the University of Durham in 1981. He is currently co-editor of *Geopolitics*. He has written widely on territorial aspects of the Arab–Israeli conflict, with a particular focus on boundary and settlement issues and, more recently, has become engaged in the debate over deterritorialization and the “borderless” world.

**John O'Loughlin** is Professor of Geography and Director of the Graduate Training Program on "Globalization and Democracy" at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is editor of *Political Geography*. His research interests are in spatial modeling of political processes, the democratic transitions in the former Soviet Union, and Russian geopolitics.

**Anssi Paasi** is Professor of Geography at the University of Oulu in Finland. He has published extensively on the history of geographical thought, on "new regional geography," region/territory building, and the sociocultural construction of boundaries and spatial identities. His books include *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border* (Wiley, 1996) and *J.G.Granö: Pure Geography* (co-edited with Olavi Granö) (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

**Charles Pattie** is a Professor of Geography at the University of Sheffield. His research interests include redistricting, political parties and campaigning, and citizenship and participation. He has published widely in numerous journals and books. Since the mid-1980s he has collaborated with Ron Johnston (see entry above) in a wide range of work on electoral geography.

**Paul Routledge** is a Reader in Geography at the University of Glasgow. His principal interests concern geographies of resistance movements, geopolitics, South Asia, and the cultural politics of development. He is author of *Terrains of Resistance* (Praeger, 1993), and co-editor (with Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby) of *The Geopolitical Reader* (Routledge, 1998), and (with Joanne Sharp, Chris Philo, and Ronan Paddison) of *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance* (Routledge, 2000).

**Michael J. Shapiro** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Hawai'i. Among his publications are: *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender* (NYU Press, 1999), *For Moral Ambiguity: National Culture and the Politics of the Family* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and *Reading "Adam Smith": Desire, History and Value* (2nd edition with new Preface; Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

**Joanne P. Sharp** is a lecturer in Geography at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests are in political, cultural, and feminist geography with a particular interest in popular geopolitics. She recently published a monograph on the role of the media in the construction of US political culture as *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

**David Slater** is Professor of Social and Political Geography in the Department of Geography at Loughborough University. He is author of *Territory and State Power in Latin America* (Macmillan, 1989) and co-editor of *The American Century* (Blackwell, 1999). He is also an editor of the journal *Political Geography*.

**Matthew Sparke** is an Associate Professor with appointments in both Geography and the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington. He has published in numerous journals including *Society and Space*, *Geopolitics*, and *Gender, Place and Culture*, and is the author of *Hyphen-Nation-States: Critical Geographies of Displacement and Disjuncture* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming). He is currently working on a National Science Foundation CAREER project integrating his research on the transnationalization of civil society with educational outreach initiatives in poorer neighborhoods of Seattle.

**Lynn A. Staeheli** is Associate Professor of Geography and a Research Associate in the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado. Her research interests include citizenship, democratization, political activism, immigration, and gender.

**Peter Taylor** is Professor of Geography at Loughborough University and Associate Director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech. Over the last two decades he has developed a world-systems political geography including a textbook (*Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*, 4th edition with C. Flint; Prentice Hall, 2000), monographs on world hegemony (*The Way the Modern World Works*; Wiley, 1995), and ordinary modernity (*Modernities: a Geohistorical Perspective*; Polity, 1999). Current work focuses on quantitative measures of the world-city network and he is Founder and Co-Director of the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Study Group and Network (see [www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc)).

**Karen E. Till** is an Assistant Professor of Geography and Co-Director of the Space and Place Research Group of the Humanities Center at the University of Minnesota. Her research has focused on the cultural politics of place and social memory, national identity, and urban public landscapes in the USA and Germany. Her recent publications include a co-edited volume, *Textures of Place: Rethinking Humanist Geographies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming), based upon 10 years of ethnographic research.

**Gill Valentine** is a Professor of Geography at the University of Sheffield where she teaches social and cultural geography, and qualitative methods. She has published widely on a range of topics including geographies of sexuality, consumption and children, youth and parenting. Gill is co-author/co-editor of eight books including: *Children in the Information Age* (Falmer Routledge, 2002), *Social Geographies* (Longman, 2001), *Children's Geographies* (Routledge, 2000), and *Mapping Desire* (Routledge, 1995).

**Colin H. Williams** is Research Professor in the Department of Welsh, Cardiff University and an Adjunct Professor of Geography at the Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario. He also serves as a Member of the Welsh Language Board and on European government agencies concerned with multiculturalism and multilingualism. He is well known for his scholarly and practical work encouraging the rights of ethnic and religious minorities worldwide.

*We dedicate this book to the memory of a colleague who most certainly would have had a chapter in it if he was still with us:  
Dr. Graham Smith, Cambridge University (1953–99).*





## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and  
Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail)*

---

In a photograph that won a prize in the *Overcoming the Wall by Painting the Wall* exhibition mounted by the museum at Checkpoint Charlie in West Berlin in 1989, Ziegfried Rischar has superimposed a hand breaking through the Berlin Wall that had divided the city from 1961 to 1989 to offer a white rose to an outstretched hand on the other side. It was poster art such as this that carried the messages of many of the protagonists of the “velvet revolutions” that swept through Eastern Europe and into the Soviet Union in the years between 1980 and 1992. The Cold War division of Europe, symbolized most graphically by the Berlin Wall, had to be overcome and replaced by a new, nonantagonistic relationship between “East” and “West.” This particular poster is also representative of the sense – wildly popular at the time in Eastern Europe – that old barriers were breaking down and a new world order was about to dawn. Many such hopes have been dashed. Certainly, most of the old barriers have come down. But new ones, such as restricted entry into the European Union, Russia’s exclusion from the European “club,” and gated communities protecting the affluent from the impoverished, have replaced them.

Human history has rarely seen such a crystalline moment of change as November 9, 1989, when thousands of cheering people climbed upon, dismantled, and overcame the Berlin Wall by passing through it unimpeded. The revolution of ordinary citizens breaking through a geopolitical division in the heart of Europe was the culmination of a long struggle by new social movements to create a cultural space that challenged and moved beyond the geopolitics of the Cold War. With the mass media in the hands of authoritarian Communists until the very end in Eastern Europe, these social movements gave expression to their principles and aspirations in artistic creations and urban street activities. “1989,” one commentator noted, “was the springtime of societies aspiring to be civil” (Ash, 1990, p. 147). Vaclav Havel, later president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, noted: “In November 1989, when thousands of printed and hand drawn posters expressing the real will of the citizens were hanging on the walls of our towns, we recognized what power is hidden in their art” (quoted in Smithsonian Institution, 1992, p. 25).

At least two lessons seem to emerge from the events captured by Rischar's image. One is that the last decade of the twentieth century was one of the most dramatic periods in the reordering of the world's political geography. Between 1945 and 1989, most political leaders and commentators around the world thought that the Cold War geopolitical divisions were more or less permanent. We now know better. In fact, with hindsight we can see that geopolitical order and the relative barrier to movement and interaction posed by national boundaries have never been fixed but always historically contingent (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995). We can also see that power is not simply concentrated in the hands of states and other organizations (such as transnational corporations and the mass media), but is also a capacity available to people when they mobilize collectively to realise their aspirations (as social movements and new group identities) and pursue their material and symbolic interests. One of the great surprises of 1989 was how the commitment of vast masses of people overcame the coercive apparatus of the states arrayed against them. Of course, we should not be naïve enough to think that coercion could not have worked if external conditions (such as the absence of Soviet military intervention) and internal changes (such as the demoralization of police forces) had not been favorable. "Resistance" does not in itself guarantee political success (Sharp et al., 2000).

### **What is Political Geography?**

We begin this *Companion to Political Geography* with the theme of divisions and power because of the centrality of orders and borders to contemporary "political geography." As an area of study, "political geography" has changed historically but the themes of borders and orders, power, and resistance are always central to its operation. For us, political geography is about how barriers between people and their political communities are put up and come down; how world orders based on different geographic organizing principles (such as empires, state systems, and ideological-material relationships) arise and collapse; and how material processes and political movements are re-making how we inhabit and imagine the "world political map." Barriers are not only global or international, but also operate between regions within countries, and between neighborhoods within cities. They are conceptual and ideological as well as economic and physical. Politics is likewise not simply state-oriented, but includes the collective organization of social groups to oppose this or that activity (such as land-use changes they do not like) or to pursue objectives that transcend political boundaries (such as environmental or developmental goals). Political movements can be open and inclusive, asking critical questions of power structures and always pushing at the limits of human freedom of expression and how humans can live. Alternatively, they can be exclusive and closed to change, radically seeking a return to an idealized past or simplified moral universe, containing and corralling the possibilities of human freedom.

Reflecting on the historical evolution of "political geography" is instructive in situating what we have gathered in this volume to represent contemporary political geography. The use of the term "political geography" dates only from 1750 when the French *philosophe* Turgot coined it to refer to his attempts to show the relationship between geographic "facts," from soils and agriculture to settlement and ethnic distributions, to political organization. Political geography, in other words, was

conceived as a branch of knowledge for government and administration – as state knowledge. As a self-confessed sub-area of academic Geography, the term is even more recent, dating from the 1890s. As reinvented at that time, the field was particularly oriented to justifying and providing advice about the colonial ventures in which the Great Powers were then engaged (Godlewska and Smith, 1994). The word “geopolitics” was also invented in the 1890s, by the Swedish political scientist Kjellen, to refer to the so-called geographic basis of world politics. In the 1920s this word was expropriated by a group of right-wing Germans to offer justification for German territorial expansion. Thereafter disavowed for many years by professional geographers, the word has undergone a recent revival both in the hands of politicians and among political geographers. The former use it to refer to “hard headed” global strategies, whereas the latter are typically interested in how geography figures in the making of foreign policies (Parker, 1998).

But with respect to the political organization of earthly space and the links between places and politics, political geography pre-dates use of the term as such. From this viewpoint, it is an ancient enterprise with such venerable practitioners as Aristotle, Thucydides, Sun Tzu, and Livy and more recent exponents as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Madison, Rousseau, and Hegel. Thucydides’ (Strassler, 1996) idea of the fundamental opposition between sea- and land-powers – exemplified for him, respectively, by Athens and Sparta – has repeatedly been recycled as a key idea in modern geopolitics. A book published as recently as 1999 is organized around it but without citing the great man himself (Padfield, 1999). Far-right geopoliticians from South America to Russia and the United States still evoke variants on such radically simplifying deterministic categories (on Russia, see Smith, 1999). Jean Gottmann, possibly the greatest political geographer of the twentieth century, saw each of the historic figures in political thought wrestling intellectually, among other things, with how space is and should be organized politically. He was rightly critical of much of what had been made of them by later generations (Gottmann, 1952, 1973).

Early twentieth century political geography was largely in thrall to the great nation-states of the time, reflecting the common thinking of the era across most fields in the social sciences. A tendency to read geography in largely physical terms was combined with a reductionist understanding of politics as the activities of states and their elites. Thus, successful states were explained in terms of their relative location on a world scale and the resource bases they could exploit. Much effort was taken up with exhaustive accounting of state assets and with boundary disputes of one sort or another (see Kasperson and Minghi, 1969). Little or no attention was paid to politics outside the purview of states or to normative and ethical questions about the nature of rule or the “best” type of political organization for this or that problem. There were exceptions, such as Gottmann (1952) and Wilkinson (1951). But they are the exceptions that help to prove the rule.

Since the 1960s, the field has gone through a long period of reinvention using very different theories and methods than those that characterized political geography in the first part of the twentieth century. Although still focused broadly around questions of political territoriality and boundary-making, the old interest in global geopolitics has been revitalized in various types of “critical geopolitics” which problematize powerful geopolitical discourses (Ó Tuathail 1996), and new research areas, such as place and political identities and geographies of ethnic conflict,

have been engaged (e.g. Miller 2000). This revitalization has produced a veritable explosion of research and publication, including new journals and new research organizations.

Currently, three broad currents of thought run across the field. One adopts a spatial-analytic perspective to examine geographic patterns of election results or international conflicts and relate these to place differences, the spread of democratic practices, or the global pattern of interstate hostility (see, e.g., O' Loughlin, 1986 and chapter 3, this volume). A second takes a political-economic approach to understanding the historical structures of global political dominance, hegemonic competition between Great Powers, the development of a new geopolitical order based around major world cities (such as New York, Tokyo, and London), and the political economy of "law and order" [see, e.g., Glassman, 1999; Helleiner, 1999; Herbert 1997; chapters 4 (Taylor) and 29 (Gleeson and Low), this volume]. A third sees power as always mediated by modes of representation or ways of talking about and seeing the world [e.g. Hyndman, 2000; Ó Tuathail, 1996; chapters 6 (Slater), 18 (Shapiro), 19 (Till), and 20 (Krishna), this volume]. In this postmodern approach, international conflicts are understood in terms of the competing narratives or stories each side tells about itself and the other, nationalist identities are seen as constructed around popular memories that need repeated commemoration and celebration at sites of ritual or "places of memory," and groups invent or maintain identities by associating with particular places and the images such places communicate to larger audiences (see, e.g., Sharp, 2000). These currents are hardly sealed off from one another and innovative thinking frequently works across them. But as a rough and ready way of characterizing the theoretical structure of contemporary political geography the threefold division has considerable merit.

We would argue that three influences have helped to raise the profile of political geography around the world after a long period of intellectual stagnation following World War II (particularly during the early Cold War). The first was the slow erosion of the intellectual grip of the Cold War mentality beginning with the Vietnam War and ending with the Soviet collapse. In a wide range of fields the Cold War had intellectually stultifying effects (see, e.g., Siebers, 1993). Not surprisingly, given its subject matter, political geography was especially affected. Cold-War thinking led to a refusal on both sides to consider the historical character of geopolitical arrangements, a tendency to see each side as concentrated entirely in the capital cities of the two major (non)combatants, a freezing of international boundaries around the world to diminish the chances of military escalation if local conflicts brought in the two Superpowers, and national security states that were put beyond question for domestic criticism or proposals for alternative security arrangements. The final collapse of the Soviet Union was the icing on the cake, so to speak.

The second has been the recruitment into the social sciences in general and political geography more specifically of people from a wider range of geographic and social backgrounds. At one time, political geographers were overwhelmingly European and American males from upper and middle class backgrounds in the various Great Powers. Today, this is much less the case. This diversification of backgrounds has undoubtedly encouraged perspectives less oriented to the central political importance of states – particularly the Great Powers – and research interests that focus on the problems and prospects of subordinated social groups and identities.

The third is the synergy with a number of powerful intellectual influences originating both within Geography and in other fields. Good examples would be the influence of that political-economic thinking which originated with radical economic geography in the 1970s and the infusion of feminist approaches over the past twenty years. More recently, the variety of intellectual movements and trends grouped (often crudely) under the labels “postmodernism,” “poststructuralism,” and “postcolonialism” have underscored the significance of the issues political geographers struggle to engage: de-territorialization and re-territorialization, the macro- and micro-geopolitics of states and systems of control, space, power, and place. These influences are examined in several chapters of this book.

Together these trends have produced a contemporary political geography that is dynamic and diverse, an intellectual enterprise open to geographers and non-geographers that is distinguished by the critical nature of the questions it asks and the themes it pursues. We have no doubt that the themes and questions that distinguish contemporary political geography will change over the coming decade. Just as the collapse of the Berlin Wall was one of the most important events at the close of the twentieth century, the destruction of the World Trade Center in Manhattan after terrorist attacks (9.11) is one of the defining events of the opening of the twenty-first. The attacks were shocking reminders of the still active legacies of the wars of the late twentieth century, wars that left Afghanistan destroyed and then ignored after its utility as a Cold War pawn ended, and Saudi Arabia as an explicit American protectorate after Iraq’s ill-fated invasion of Kuwait in 1991. The “blowback” from these geopolitical wars of world ordering took the form of a transnational network of radicalized Islamic militarists, *Al-Qaeda*, that declared a *jihad* against the perceived oppressive and corrupt empire of the United States [see chapter 15 (Luke) in this volume]. Networks are organizational systems that do not rely on sharply hierarchical arrangements, but rather, work through embedded, relational linkages. In contrast with slower and more inventory-intensive organizational hierarchies, networks allow fast and flexible movement in response to a rapidly changing environment. Celebrated as the organizational future of capitalism by Wall Street in the 1990s, networks were suddenly powerful because advances in information technology allowed them to function in such dynamic and flexible ways. Informational system networks have also transformed the practice of geopolitics since the end of the Cold War. Many of the same principles of relational, nonhierarchical linkages, and flexibility are evident in the rising power of non-state networked organizations, including transnational criminal and terrorist networks (e.g. Castells, 1996). While the borders of states remain vitally important and legal, and legitimate networks must negotiate with the political geographic order established by states, illicit and covert transnational networks such as *Al-Qaeda*, coordinate activities *through* and *around* state territories in a manner that eludes border controls and challenges territorial sovereignty in a novel way.

The geopolitical questions and moral dilemmas posed by events like 9.11, bioterrorism, and the open-ended war on global terrorism that followed are reminders of the continuing relevance of political geographic themes of (b)ordering in contemporary global affairs. This volume is the first *Companion to Political Geography* but it will certainly not be the last collection covering the best that political geography has to offer.

## Approach and Organization of the Volume

This book is not a survey of the history of political geography or of its “great thinkers.” Neither is it a dictionary nor an encyclopedia. A dictionary is a compilation of technical concepts. An encyclopedia is an official record of a field. This is a “companion.” As such it is designed to both guide a reader through the main concepts and controversies of the field, and offer fresh and stimulating perspectives on the range of topics covered in contemporary political geography. The purpose is to introduce you to the energy and vitality of research and writing that characterizes today’s political geography. Many of the authors are geographers, because in Anglo-American universities most of what goes for political geography is undertaken by geographers. Yet there are also many chapters by those working outside of Geography in other disciplines and domains of knowledge. Political geography has always been interdisciplinary, so it is both limiting and disingenuous to limit authorship to geographers. We have tried to recruit authors who are active contributors to the contemporary field rather than simply senior figures or professional commentators.

The overall purpose of the volume is to provide advanced undergraduate students and graduate students, and faculty both inside and outside political geography, with a substantive overview of contemporary political geography. Our interest is not so much in empirical findings as in the ideas, concepts, and theories that are most debated in the field today. We hope that the essays convey a sense of the intellectual dynamism and diversity that presently characterize political geography. The chapters collected herein differ not simply by the topics they address but by the heterogeneity of perspectives, positions, and analytical frameworks they articulate. Yet while there are many “voices” in the volume – and undoubtedly some “silences” too – the conversation they make possible is political geography at its best.

The book is organized into six sections. The first, *Modes of Thinking*, provides an overview of the philosophical diversity of the field. This is necessarily selective. But it does cover what we consider the most significant modes of thinking in past and contemporary political geography. As our orientation is primarily to the present we cannot possibly provide a survey of all modes of thinking that have affected political geography. Following the first essay, which examines the content and impact of environmental determinism, subsequent essays explore in turn the spatial analysis tradition, Marxism, feminism, and postmodern approaches to political geographic questions and themes. These perspectives differ considerably in terms of their assumptions, theories, and methodological emphases. Essays in later sections cannot avoid taking positions in relation to these modes of thinking. Whether oriented to conceptual analysis or substantive themes, they cannot but situate themselves in relation to one or more of the modes of thinking. It is important to bear this in mind as you read the essays in the other sections.

The second section addresses what are arguably the most important concepts in political geography. These *Essentially Contested Concepts* are power, territory, boundary, scale, and place. The purpose is to survey the range of meanings associated with these concepts and show how they figure in different theoretical frameworks and substantive studies. The point about calling these concepts “essentially contested,” a phrase drawn from Gallie (1956), is not to suggest that there are such

profound disagreements about their meanings that they cannot be communicated to “non-believers.” Rather, the purpose is a “rhetorical stratagem” to “call attention to a persistent and recurring feature of political discourse – namely, the perpetual possibility of disagreement” (Ball, 1993, p. 556). Indeed, this disagreement is to be valued as a resource for making present and future conversations restlessly critical and self-reflexive.

One of the motifs that connects contemporary political geography to its past is that of “geopolitics.” In its most recent manifestation, geopolitics has reappeared in political geography as *Critical Geopolitics*: the study of the ways in which geopolitical thinking has entered into the practical reasoning of politicians and mass publics and how formal geopolitical analysis both represents and communicates essential features of the “modern geopolitical imagination.” The essays in this section cover the competing imperial geopolitical visions at the beginning of the twentieth century, Nazi geopolitics, Cold War geopolitics, “postmodern” geopolitics, and the century-long tradition of resistance to geopolitical discourse which forms an “anti-geopolitics.”

Another historic focus of political geography has been on *States, Territory, and Identity*. If in the past the relationship between the three elements was often taken for granted, today it is the subject of intensive investigation. Four of the most important substantive foci of contemporary research are opened up in this section: nation-states, places of memory, boundaries in question, and transnational regions. The intent is to provide a sense of how these phenomena are examined from political–geographic perspectives.

More recently, much energy has also gone into exploring *Geographies of Political and Social Movements*. Here attention is directed to the geographic formation and mobilization of groups directed towards affecting, disrupting, undermining, and supporting various policy goals and institutional frameworks. The classic focus on political parties and elections is the subject of the first essay. The following essays consider nationalism, religious movements, civil rights and citizenship, and sexual politics. Reflecting the politics of the day, these are all “hot” topics in contemporary political geography.

Last, but by no means least, political geography has begun to engage once more with questions of the physical environment. As part of Geography this might appear appropriate and unsurprising. But if in the past a causal arrow was seen as running from the physical environment to political outcomes (as in local geology causes predictable electoral outcomes!), today the interest is in how the natural environment is (mis)managed politically and how this generates political activities of one sort or another. *Geographies of Environmental Politics* addresses this emerging area of political geography with essays on the geopolitics of nature and resources, green geopolitics, environmental justice movements, and the appearance of planetary environmental politics.

The essays in the later sections can be read without having read the first two sections. It is our conviction, however, that a more informed reading of the more substantive essays would result from some familiarity with the modes of thinking and concepts examined at the outset. The hope is that you will come away from this book with a well-versed sense of the wide range of topics and approaches in contemporary political geography. We also hope that you will identify gaps and openings for your own research and writing – “silences” that need to be articulated.

In the final analysis, and in spite of the diversity, we hope that you see a common objective at work: to understand the ways in which people divide themselves up geographically and use these divisions for political ends. This is no small task in a world still stratified by barriers and walls of many kinds.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agnew, J. A. and Corbridge, S. 1995. *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Ash, T. G. 1990 *We the People: The Revolution of 89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague*. Cambridge: Granta.
- Ball, T. 1993. Power. In R. E. Goodin and P. Pettit (eds.) *A Companion to Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gallie, W. B. 1956. Essentially contested concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 167–98.
- Glassman, J. 1999. State power beyond the territorial trap: the internationalization of the state. *Political Geography*, 18, 669–96.
- Godlewska, A. and Smith, N. (eds.). 1994. *Geography and Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gottmann, J. 1952. *La politique des états et leur géographie*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Gottmann, J. 1973. *The Significance of Territory*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Helleiner, E. 1999. Historicizing territorial currencies: monetary space and the nation-state in North America. *Political Geography*, 18, 309–39.
- Herbert, S. 1997. *Policing Space: Territoriality and the Los Angeles Police Department*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hyndman, J. 2000. *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kasperson, R. E. and Minghi, J. V. (eds.). 1969. *The Structure of Political Geography*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Miller, B. A. 2000. *Geography and Social Movements: Comparing Antinuclear Activism in the Boston Area*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- O' Loughlin, J. 1986. Spatial models of international conflicts: extending current theories of war behavior. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 76, 63–80.
- Ó Tuathail, G. 1996. *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge.
- Padfield, P. 1999. *Maritime Supremacy and the Opening of the Western Mind: Naval Campaigns that Shaped the Modern World, 1588–1782*. London: Pimlico.
- Parker, G. 1998. *Geopolitics: Past, Present and Future*. London: Pinter.
- Sharp, J. 2000. *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity, 1922–1994*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sharp, J., Routledge, P., Philo, C. and Paddison, R. (eds.). 2000. *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination and Resistance*. London: Routledge.
- Siebers, T. 1993. *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, G. 1999. The masks of Proteus: Russia, geopolitical shift and the new Eurasianism. *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, N. S., 24, 481–500.
- Smithsonian Institution. 1992. *Art as Activist: Revolutionary Posters from Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: Universe.



- 
- Strassler, R. B. (ed.). 1996. *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*. New York: Free Press.
- Wilkinson, H. R. 1951. *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnic Cartography of Macedonia*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.



# **Part I    Modes of Thinking**

---



## Chapter 2

# Politics from Nature Environment, Ideology, and the Determinist Tradition

*Mark Bassin*

---

### Introduction

In 1997, the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs published a lengthy thinkpiece in the *Economist* under the rather unlikely title “Nature, Nurture, and Growth.” The title was unlikely insofar as Sachs – whose international fame (or noteriety) came from his work as the number-crunching patron saint of the “shock therapy” approach to economic reform in post-communist Eastern Europe – never seemed very preoccupied with environmental or ecological concerns. Yet as the essay makes clear, these latter have now moved to the very center of his analytical interests. In his essay, Sachs considers the current prospects for economic convergence and equalization between the various regions of the globe, now that communism no longer operates as a divisive factor and thus, “for the first time in history,” almost all of humanity is bound together in a single network of global capitalism. Yet despite this circumstance – which Sachs obviously believes is a very good thing – his conclusions are not positive, and he speaks rather about the “limits of convergence;” that is to say the eventuality that despite capitalism’s new universality, many developing countries are going to be left behind nonetheless. The reasons for this, he argues, are not only or even primarily political or ideological. Rather, they relate to the objective environmental or geographic conditions within which less-developed countries find themselves. An entire range of countries, Sachs argues, are “geographically disadvantaged,” indeed “cursed” with what he variously terms a “geographical penalty,” a “geographical deficit,” or “poorer geographical endowments.” This is particularly true of countries in the tropics, where endemically poor soils together with climatic conditions favorable to the proliferation of debilitating diseases act as “fundamental geographical barriers” to economic development and prosperity. The great geographical contrast, unsurprisingly, is offered by the countries of the “temperate zone,” that is to say Europe and North America. Quite unlike the blighted tropics, these regions are geographically “blessed” with moderate conditions favoring industry and the

expansion of agricultural production. And while Sachs is at pains to “guard against a kind of geographical determinism” that he apparently feels the manner in which he marshals his facts might suggest, he nonetheless concludes that in the short and medium terms, “for much of the world bad climates, poor soils and physical isolation are likely to hinder growth whatever happens to policy.” Indeed, for the tropics in particular prosperity can only be assured through a sort of tenuous symbiosis with the developed world, through which the former will be fed chiefly by “temperate-zone exports” (Sachs, 1997).

Despite his protestations, Sachs is in fact offering a distinctly geo-deterministic argument, which he has further elaborated in a series of highly visible articles (Sachs, 2001; Sachs et al., 2001). It is, moreover, an argument which broadly resonates with the views of other scholars. A sort of corresponding historical scenario has been presented, for example, by Sachs’ Harvard colleague David Landes, whose much-praised overview of the history of global economic development is premised upon the “unpleasant truth” that “nature like life is unfair, unequal in its favors, [and] further that nature’s unfairness is not easily remedied” (Landes, 1999, pp. 4–5; see also Diamond, 1998). In a similar spirit, a belief in the critical salience of physical-geographic conditions to political affairs is fundamental also to the international renaissance of geopolitics, as betrayed in Zbigniew Brzezinski’s succinct observation that “geographical location still tends to determine the immediate priorities of a state” (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 38).

Exactly why this preoccupation with environmental influences should be gaining popularity at this particular moment is a complex question, but at least one contextual factor already mentioned would seem to be fairly significant. This is the collapse of the communist system, the existence of which served to bifurcate global relations into two exclusive and opposing networks whose political and ideological oppositions could themselves be taken as the ultimate source of variation and difference between societies across the globe. As we have seen, Sachs in principle happily heralds the burgeoning universality of triumphant capitalism, but importantly refuses to draw Francis Fukuyama’s comforting “end of history” conclusion about the universalization and standardization of social life that should ensue (Fukuyama, 1992). Quite to the contrary, Sachs makes it clear that divisions between societies and regions are going to persist, and that economic-material – and thus human – conditions will most decidedly not converge.

Such scepticism does not sit entirely easily with capitalism’s own distinctly more optimistic vision of the universal well-being that it can bring to the world if provided full freedom of operation, and insofar as communism is no longer available for convenient fingering as the culprit obstructing capitalism from realizing its universal mission, then something else has to be found. And the physical conditions of the natural world, which can be plausibly invested with a virtually endless variety of meanings and implications, prove in this regard to be very useful.

As a substantial literature already makes quite clear, what we may call the “argument from nature” has a rich and controversial history (Bassin, 1993, 1996; Bergevin, 1992; Glacken, 1967; Lewthwaite, 1966; Martin, 1951; Montefiore and Williams, 1955; Peet, 1985; Tatham 1951). The aim of this chapter is to provide some insight into the tradition of geo-determinist thinking, as developed in the work of three very influential scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: