

Book Forum (Re-)making Political Geography

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Introduction

Making Political Geography presents a concise history of the making of the field, of how doing political geography has changed since its establishment as one of the key sub-disciplines of modern geography. It is the second and revised edition of a book (Agnew 2002) originally published as the first volume in a *Human geography in the making* series edited by Alexander Murphy. Other volumes were published a few years later: *Making population geography* (Bailey 2005), *Making political ecology* (Neumann 2005) and *Making development geography* (Lawson 2007). These short texts were meant to introduce a broad scholarly readership to the developments in each sub-discipline in the past decades marked by globalization. This volume on political geography goes far beyond back in time to cover the evolution of the discipline since its establishment in modern academia in the nineteenth century. At the same time it engages with the contemporary challenges in the field.

Unlike other introductory texts, *Making political geography* does not follow a thematic structure; it is centered on the history of discipline instead. It stresses the influence of the changing geopolitical context on the evolution of the discipline and reviews topical issues, research agendas and shifts in interpretations and reinterpretations in the context of major geopolitical changes.

The book forum brings a diverse range of views together, inviting the comments of a balanced panel of academics both in terms of approaches and of backgrounds

(gender, generation, language, location).¹ More specifically the commentaries and the authors' responses address issues regarding the usefulness of the book either as a textbook to teach political geography, compared to other political geography textbooks, or as a resource to introduce other scholars to political geography, compared to other short(er) introductions and long(er) companions to political geography or critical geopolitics. Moreover they discuss the pertinence of its account of the making of political geography, especially in the light of the discussions about the representation of specific approaches and of geographical traditions outside the Anglo-American sphere (think of the ongoing debate about the consequences of hegemony of the English language in international geography) and its contribution to the ongoing debates about the reassessment of classics in (political) geography. Finally they explore the influence of geopolitical context on the content of the making of political geography.

(Political geography) textbooks matter!

Elena dell'Agnese

Textbooks are often dismissed as being of little significance for the scientific development of a discipline. Not only they are usually considered less relevant than other scientific publications, if produced in the early stages of a young scholar's career; they are also the objects of a less careful analysis, when published, and deserve fewer reviews in academic journals. Indeed, in their more typical form, textbooks provides no more than a summary of the contents and the topics that their author – who takes a stance of presumed scientific objectivity on the matter - considers most appropriate and relevant for the discipline. So, at a glance, they do not seem to offer any original input. And, for this reason, they are generally considered of little interest. By contrast, it may be argued that they can offer a precious glimpse about the evolution of a discipline, both from the side of the reception, and from the side of the content. Indeed, from the side of the audience, textbooks reach quite a large number of readers, usually much larger than those reached by journal articles and monographs. Besides, their readers are usually students

and not established researchers, tending to accept them largely uncritically. So, even if they are not always capable of “moving generations” as the dedicated section in *Progress in Human Geography* entitled, textbooks generally leave a mark, producing (especially for those who do not become scholars) a subsequently unrevised vision of the discipline and its content. From the side of the content, even if they are usually considered to offer - at the most - the state-of-the art, they can be quite interesting too, since they reflect the situation of the discipline at the time of their writing and publication; sometimes, they even mark a standpoint “from which the distance that [the discipline] has traveled should be measured” (O’Loughlin, 2009).

Generally speaking, this argument applies to any geography textbook, since any form of geographical knowledge might be considered as a “technology of power” (Kuus, 2010). Of course, political geography textbooks are even more significant. Indeed, there is a long tradition of political geography introductory textbooks, where specific attention is devoted to the spatial attributes of the “political” actor par excellence - the State - and to their definition and classification, while very little consideration is devoted to the definition of “the political” itself (“they all treat the political as a given”, Taylor, 1982). Precisely because of this classificatory approach (or “classificatory fetish”, as suggested by Kolossov & O’Loughlin 1998), political geography took shape as a descriptive discipline (“a political geography without politics”, Johnston, 1980), which claims to scrutinize the relations between politics, territory and people through the “cold lenses” of science. This does not mean that these textbooks are not “political”, of course, because even avoiding the definition of the political is a political choice. Indeed, since they tend to be focused on the State, they indirectly delineate what must be accepted as politically relevant and what is not, offering a distinct perspective about who are the actors at play in the international arena, and also about what the meaning of the most relevant analytical categories for political action is. So, political geography textbooks must certainly be accepted as a component of what Yves Lacoste (1976) has described as “la géographie des professeurs”, (the geography of school teachers) but, they are not simply “rébarbatif et inutile” (off-putting and useless), as suggested by the same Lacoste (1976) so many years ago. They are not just a “smoke-screen” (Hepple, 2000); quite the opposite, they are

“constitutive elements of power relations” (Kuus, 2010), fundamental in outlining the ingredients of the taken-for-granted geopolitical discourse of their time.

However, not every author who sets up to write a textbook is satisfied by the idea of offering just a summary or an overview of the discipline. On the contrary, a textbook may be a good instrument to rethink the discipline in its theoretical framework fundamentally. So, a part of the state-of-the-art introductory textbooks, there are also textbooks that, quite bluntly, develop a totally new approach to the discipline, and aims at revising the most common theoretical basis on ways in which is usually conceived.

A big question about the "real nature" of political geography, for instance, was exposed by Claude Raffestin in a textbook entitled *Pour une géographie du pouvoir* (For a geography of power) (1980), in which he took on the challenge of rethinking political geography on the basis of Foucault's notions about power and knowledge. On this basis, he claimed that geography was no longer to be accepted as “the science of places and spaces, as in Vidal de la Blache's traditional definition.” (my translation), On the contrary, it should be considered as the way of “making explicit the knowledge and praxis men use in their relation to space... Knowledge and praxis assume a system of relations where power is circulating, since power is consubstantial to any form of relation...” (p. 2) (my translation).

In this perspective, he first developed a semiotic approach to the analysis of traditional political geography textbooks. Specifically, he analyzes them as a system of signs, a specific code built on the general assumption of political geography being "la géographie de l'État", that is the geography of the modern state. For this reason, three different signs are mobilized to characterize the State: people, territory and sovereignty (p. 17); each of them is characterized by a particular syntactic code. Population is considered merely as a resource and described in terms of its number, distribution, and demographic structure, or is analyzed in terms of its cultural composition (ethnic, linguistic, or religious), and evaluated through the (positive) category of homogeneity versus the (negative) one of heterogeneity. Authority/sovereignty is viewed from a historical perspective. And territory is represented within a connotative semiology constituted by a language in which the main signs are dimension, form, position, capital

cities, and boundaries. So, these signs, which altogether make a "discourse", are simply the representation of state power. After this semiotic analysis, he goes further, stating that the analysis of power/knowledge relationships in relation to space is, put simply, the ultimate purpose of geography, and suggesting a new kind of political geography, conceived as a "geography of power".

Unfortunately, this very innovative work, which was quite immediately translated in Italian and also in Portuguese, and became highly influential in the evolution of both Italian and Brazilian geography, but it was never translated into English. As a classic case of a "rendez-vous manqué" (Fall & Minca, 2012), Raffestin's theories, at the time, did not reach the international debate and Foucault's ideas about the power-knowledge relation inherent to any form of geographical representation had to wait till the 1990s to enter into Anglophone political geography through another route (dell'Agnese, 2008). A better known example of "revolutionary textbook", at least among Anglophone geographers, has been offered, in 1985, by Peter Taylor's *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State, Locality*. In the first edition of this extraordinarily successful book, Peter Taylor introduced the world system theory in political geography, dividing the world scale of political action into the three scales of the global, the national, the local. More than thirty years later, it is difficult to understate the importance it has assumed, from then to the five consecutive editions, in the history of political geography (the fourth version, the first one co-authored with Colin Flint, published in 2000, has been defined by Kolossov (2008) as "The best contemporary textbook on political geography").

Of course, there are other examples, earlier, such as Jean Gottmann's *The Significance of territory* (1973), or later, such as the Italian book by Angelo Turco, *Configurazioni della territorialità* (Configurations of territoriality) (2010). Also John Agnew and Luca Muscara's book belongs to this category of textbooks "with ambition" even if it does not propose a new way of thinking about the "political", a "materialistic framework", or a radical revision of political geography as the geography of power. It is something different again, and for this reason it deserves careful attention. Instead of telling what political geography should do, this book tries to understand how it

evolved, why it has been as it was, and what it has been doing, in the context of its past and of its present.

The four contributions included here raise some of the issues inevitably associated with such an attempt, before the two authors took the opportunity to respond. The collection will hereby hopefully stimulate the reader to engage critically with textbooks and their role in the development of the discipline.

Beyond a singular political geography

Takashi Yamazaki

As a political geographer coming from the outside of the Anglophone world and from a country defeated in WWII, I would like to make comments on this excellent and overwhelmingly elaborated book from two points: one is how the authors' critiques of conventional state-centric political geography should be viewed from Japan; the other is how we can share an over-arching explanatory framework such as "geopolitical context" and achieve universalistic values such as cosmopolitanism in and through the circle of political geography.

Japanese political geography and the state

After WWII, geopolitics ceased to be taught in Japanese universities. Instead political science and International Relations in particular, became the successor of geopolitics. Geographers became less and less interested in states and interstate relations and focused on issues at the local scale. Geopolitics was stigmatized, and political geography was regarded as its synonym. The situation of political geography in Japan, however, is somewhat different from what the authors describe for Europe and North America.

Books on geopolitics almost disappeared after the war, but political geographical studies gradually increased until the 1960s due mainly to the activities of the Japanese

Association of Political Geographers (Yamazaki 1998). It is only from the late 1970s to the early 1980s that political geographical studies began to decrease in number. During the same period, political geography was revitalized in Anglophone countries, which was driven by geographers' growing interests in social and political issues. Japanese universities were also thrown into political commotions over academic authoritarianism and the Japan-U.S. security arrangements. Japanese geography, however, did not necessarily politicize itself in this politicized era.

By disassociating themselves from international politics, Japanese geographers focused on the "problem solving" role of the discipline. Policy, rather than political, research has been more actively pursued and differentiated as "the geography of *local* administration and finance." Until today, the geography of politics has not been fully accepted by Japanese geographers, resulting in the absence of states as political agents in their research. Japanese geographers are not "moving away" from state territories and borders as Agnew & Muscará observe; they have already excluded states from their analysis.

Seemingly there are two reasons for the absence of states in Japanese geography: one is that states tend to be considered the most violent and unwieldy political agents to be excluded from a "peaceful" science; the other is that such a perspective has been succeeded by the younger generations as a custom of geographical analysis rather than as a result of theoretical contemplation. The corollary is a predominantly local analysis less sensitive to the political. Therefore, I argue that putting back the national scale in geographical analysis is a necessary step towards the reinvention of political geography in Japan. Without configuring the reworking of states and interstate relations, Japanese geographers would not be able to understand geopolitical and geo-economic dynamism and its influence on localities in this globalizing world. Multi-scalar analysis thus needs to be firmly installed in Japanese geography.

Nevertheless geographical studies on politics in Japan have been increasing in number since the end of the 1990s. This trend is in parallel with the time of growing interests in the political in human and social sciences as a whole. This was stimulated by the introduction of new academic trends such as postmodernism and post-colonialism (Yamazaki & Kumagai 2009). Responding to this, Japanese geographers in general are

paying more attention to the political. The journal *Political Geography* has been one of the gates through which Japanese geographers encounter such critical theories.

More broadly, the end of the Cold War and deepening globalization seem to have affected the geopolitical consciousness of the Japanese public. The postwar publication of books on geopolitics has two major peaks in Japan: the first peak corresponds to the period of the Second Cold War; the second peak reflects the post-Cold War geopolitical context where Japan is situated in relation to China, North Korea, and the U.S (Yamazaki et al., 2012). When the Japanese public becomes insecure about Asia, books on geopolitics seem to attract many readers. To cope with these trends, *critical* political geography needs to be reinvented in Japan as well. Turning our back to states would not help us understand the meanings and effects of state territoriality and territorialized identity. Instead multi-scalar analysis is again needed for a critical examination of states. The thesis of “territorial trap” is extremely important in this point, especially considering the current geopolitical context of Japan. Japanese territorial consciousness had been “ambiguous” until recently due mainly to its maritime boundaries and the stationing of U.S. military forces as a nuclear deterrent. Such ambiguous territorial consciousness, however, turns out not make immune to the reactionary territorialization of national identity and the formation of nationalistic society. The growing public interest in classical geopolitics in recent years mentioned above, partially reflect the manifestation of such territorial consciousness. Political geographers should not be naïve to such effects of state territoriality. Critical studies on state boundaries and territories become increasingly important in illustrating how territorial traps actually work in our daily and political lives.

Towards plural political geographies

The Japanese specificities I just mentioned bring me to my second point: how can political geographers from different parts of the world share ‘global’ frameworks such as the Cold-War geopolitical context and how can we account for the plurality of situated political geographical theories and practices? Context matters in geography, and the geopolitical context of events such as imperialism and the Cold War has constituted one of the major frameworks for political geographic research. Using the term “context,”

however, the authors seem to bring an abstracted explanatory framework into their arguments although they are critical of a structuralist or reductionist approach. Complexities of the context in which events occur and political geographical thoughts develop cannot be reduced to a singular framework.

We are sometimes preoccupied with the global/local dichotomy in which the global is always more abstract while the local the opposite. The local is not always subject to the global. Likewise, contexts do not always structuralize agents. Unlike other disciplines on politics, political geography can describe and explore such complexities in regional settings from a multi-scalar perspective, offering much more nuanced understanding of geopolitical context.

For example, post-Cold-War conflicts in Asia have been more localized than before and cannot be conceptualized using a global bracket such as “an Arc of Instability.” The demise of the Soviet Union has only revealed previously suppressed regional tensions. The struggle of the U.S.-led capitalist bloc against authoritarian regimes still continues. Military confrontations, territorial disputes, and ethnic conflicts in Asia look very different from those in Europe. Asia can be characterized by its internal historical and geographical diversity that has often hindered any over-arching conceptualization of the region (Murphy, 1995; Rumley et al., 1996). In this sense, seeing things from a global perspective somehow reflects a very elitist view that is poorly informed with insight of what is going on on the ground. Capital, commodities, information, and immigrants are not abstract entities but have concrete origins and natures.

Another example of contextual complexities is the disaster in Fukushima. It is a multi-dimensional/scalar incident including not only the general matter of nuclear security but also Japan’s specific postwar energy policies strongly conditioned by its military-economic alliance with the U.S. The U.S. relations to Japan over nuclear power ranged from atomic bombing to the export of nuclear technology, leading to the construction of many nuclear power plants on the geologically fragile islands (for critical reviews of this aspect, see Enomoto & Takeshita, 2011). The global context of the disaster cannot be divorced from this specific regional context of the Japan-U.S. alliance. This incident is so historically and geographically contingent that it cannot be fully

absorbed into the generalized discourse of nuclear security. Concretization is then more powerful in explaining politics than abstraction and generalization.

Knowing the world cannot be achieved through a unilateral process of abstraction. This is also the case with knowing political geographies in the world. Being critical of “grand theories” and “master narratives,” the authors pay due attention to several trends in political geography outside the Anglo-American orbit and emphasize pluralism in theory and practice. Seeing from outside the orbit, however, the book itself represents a major critical trend in *the* political geography rooted in the orbit and reproduces its dominant discourses (i.e. concepts and theories) in the powerful language of international communication and academic exchanges, English. Apparently the authors well recognize this and thoughtfully propose to cross theoretical divides and share a common language. However, how can we overcome such multiple divides and establish intellectual cosmopolitanism? More specifically, how can we deconstruct Anglo-American intellectual hegemony in political geography?

In my view, there might be two practical ways to narrow the divides: one is the active translation of non-English works into English; the other is more transnational research collaboration and publication as attempted by this book itself. The journal *Political Geography* might become a medium to facilitate such exchange but needs to make itself more accessible to the non-Anglophone audience in terms of contents and circulation, while the International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on Political Geography and the International Political Science Association (IPSA) Research Committee 15 on Political and Cultural Geography, as mentioned in the book, could become forums to promote such endeavors. In any case, we need to go beyond a singular political geography. So let’s make it plural.

Why and how does context “make” political geography?

Colin Flint

The chapters and entries in the recent wave of handbooks and encyclopedias focusing on political geography usually suggest ways in which a sub-topic fits into the broader narrative of the sub-discipline. In contrast, *Making Political Geography* creates the broader narrative and enables scholars to see where their particular foci fit in. The book does this very well and makes a valuable contribution, but, in the spirit of a forum that encourages critique, I will offer some concerns about the purpose and organizing framework of the book.

In sum, the identity of *Making Political Geography* is not fully defined or resolved. Hence, the components of the book do not fit together well. I embellish this critique in two stages. First, I engage the lack of a clear audience. Secondly, and related, the loose definition of context is poorly discussed.

Audience

The root of my concerns is the lack of a clearly defined audience. In some places it seems as if the audience is senior undergraduate students; i.e. the six vignettes on pp. 37-56. The vignettes have the feel of a textbook about them and are designed to give some examples for readers to interpret the subsequent material. However, the vignettes are not explicitly brought back in to the conceptual discussions. More to the point, the material preceding the vignettes refers to complex theories. The text is dense and assumes some prior knowledge of theoreticians such as Foucault and Rawls. These preceding discussions seem aimed at graduate students and faculty who would not require the empirical support of the vignettes. Furthermore, the last two chapters come across as a “call to arms” and are therefore apparently targeted towards graduate students and faculty.

The attempt to address a number of audiences, without offering an explicit framework as to how this will be achieved, leads to problems regarding the content of the book. The presence of the potential undergraduate audience means that the conceptual discussions cannot be developed through intense engagement with existing literature, as would be seen in something like a *Progress in Human Geography* article. As a result, none of the multiple audiences are satisfactorily engaged: The undergraduates are likely to require more background on the concepts, and graduate students and faculty are likely to want a fuller and deeper discussion.

Context

The lack of a clear audience is at the root of my concern with the discussion of the key concept for the book, context: It is described rather than defined. This may well work well as an organizing theme for undergraduates to situate broad shifts in the sub-discipline, but leaves wanting the idea of context as an explanatory concept for how and why political geography changes. For the authors, the “geopolitical context of the time has been crucial to the making of academic political geography... This is the basic premise and leitmotif of this book” (p. ix). Yet context is not defined. Different temporal contexts are described but never developed as an analytical concept. Description may suffice as a heuristic device, but not if the concept is seemingly given a degree of causal power, as suggested by the word “crucial.” I identify three implications of the lack of conceptual clarity.

How Do We Know That The Geopolitical Context Has Changed? – Without a definition context is identified in a very standard, one could even say politicized, interpretation of historical periods: age of imperialism; Cold War, etc. At one level these phases are recognizable and serve to organize the narrative of the changing content of political geography. But the authors are asking more of the concept of context than this – it is meant to explain change. So, it is not just a matter of how what is visible or tangible has changed, but how these are manifestations of more general or abstract features and mechanisms that constitute context. Change could happen in two ways: the elements of what constitutes context may change, by which I mean context may be composed of different general features across the three time periods. Or the arrangement and manifestation of consistent elements of context may change. Without a definition we don’t know and so must take it in good faith that the contextual setting has changed.

How Can We Identify The Mechanisms That Link Context With The Intellectual Activity That “Makes” Political Geography? – The authors provide a loose idea of how context influences intellectual activity by suggesting the notions of “ethos” and “zeitgeist.” These notions are inadequate, especially with reference to Chapter Two, “How Political Geography is Made.” A notable absence in this chapter is a discussion of the sociology of science, and the ideas of “normal science” and paradigm shifts (Kuhn,

1996). Some engagement with paradigm shifts would provide a greater sense of the academic settings in which political geography is made. Other publications, such as Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition* (1993) focus on intellectual setting and debate, and so there is no need for *Making Political Geography* to fully replicate them. However, there is a missed opportunity to connect individual academics, and their situation in specific academic settings and intellectual traditions, to the broader cultural, political, and economic concerns of historical periods. Political geography is made by individual intellectual activity, but within multiple settings – including the ebb and flow of paradigmatic debates.

There is lost potential to explore the tensions between political geography and geopolitics – or formal and practical geopolitics – by connecting normal science with “normal politics,” by which I mean the establishment of dominant questions and agendas in the policy arena. Political geography is made through the back and forth between global dynamics translated within local settings (Agnew, 1987) and how these provoke and are translated through programs of intellectual activity. In places, the authors do touch on these connections, such as the useful discussion of the well-known case of Owen Lattimore and his battle with McCarthyism. However, the reader has to tease these connections out for themselves rather than the mechanisms linking “zeitgeist” with intellectual output explicitly.

We Do Not Know The Strength Of Context's Impact And How Prevalent It Is, Or How It May Be Resisted – The reader gets a clear sense that the authors do not take a deterministic view of context, but without knowing what context is we are unsure of the freedom of agency of the men (and they are all men in the book – even in the Horizons chapter) who made political geography, apparently, or how the agency of academics negotiates contexts to be able to build new political geographies. Put another way, knowing what context is would illustrate the constraints it provides; and that would go a ways towards explaining, and including in the narrative of *Making Political Geography*, the historical role of gender, race, and class politics in deciding who gets to make the sub-discipline and by ignoring what types of questions (Gilmartin and Kofman, 2004).

Without knowing the opportunities and constraints of context we could be led towards some drastic conclusions. On the one hand, we could conclude that academics

are dupes of their context, merely following imperatives of the times. On the other hand, especially in the authors' discussion of post-modernism, there is a sense in the text that context is actually the product of the writing of academics: The narratives of academics produce new ways of thinking about the world, hence the world has changed, and hence there is a new geopolitical context. The argument becomes circular and we do not know whether "geopolitical context," the key concept of the book, is cause or effect.

I do not believe that the authors think context is either deterministic or the product of discourses. My point is that a reader cannot see its effect or role if context is not clearly defined.

The problems of organizing the book around a concept, context, that is not clearly defined have been elucidated and emanate from the book's attempt to reach multiple audiences. I started the essay by situating *Making Political Geography* within a plethora of companions, handbooks, etc. addressing political geography. The presence of these other books provides an opportunity for any new edition to concentrate on telling the story of how political geography is made. A clearer and more detailed connection between geopolitical context and intellectual activity could be made. In other words, make chapter two into a book, but without the vignettes, perhaps?

Making Political Geography: Placing the new generation of political geographers

Natalie Koch

When the first edition of *Making Political Geography* was released in 2002, it was the first textbook in the subfield to consider the post-9/11 geopolitical environment. Now in the book's revised second edition, these discussions of geopolitical context are still highly relevant, carefully and thoughtfully presented, and an important dimension of any up-to-date text surveying the discipline of political geography. However, given the authors' own emphasis on the central role that this context plays in the evolution of the subfield, I want to suggest that given the major transformations in global politics since

2001, we are beginning to see a new era of political geography and a new generation of political geographers who have come of age during the era of the ‘Global War on Terror.’ Having completed my undergraduate, masters, and doctoral work in geography in 2006, 2009, and 2012 respectively, I write from my unique positionality as a young scholar, and part of this next generation. While there is very little to critique in this excellent survey of the subfield, I will argue that it raises two important points that political geographers must consider in the coming years, as we seek to move beyond the consistent framing of our contemporary era as ‘post-9/11’ and, even sometimes still, ‘post-Cold War.’ The first issue is that of periodizing political geography’s history, and the second is the text’s division of the subfield into three dominant theoretical waves.

Generational disjunctures and the ‘horizon’ of political geography

John Agnew (2003, 86) once wrote: “Periods threaten understanding only when we forget that they are imposed on a more complex flow of history. Otherwise, they are extremely useful.” Indeed, the three periods employed in the text are quite useful. Encapsulating the history of political geography, they are presented as three separate chapters in the middle of the book. The first of these is entitled “The historic canon” (Chapter 3) and treats the work of Ratzel, Mackinder, Bowman, Haushofer, and a handful of others. The second period is presented in a chapter called “Reinventing political geography” (Chapter 4) and considers the work that arose with what the author’s term a ‘revival’ of geography as a whole in the 1960s, and in particular the subsequent work in political geography on geopolitics, the spatiality of states, mobility, places and identities, and nationalism. The third period is entitled “The horizon” (Chapter 5), and basically covers the work that has arisen since the end of the Cold War until the present, with an emphasis on geopolitics and the environment, conflict, security and terrorism, global finance, and democracy.

While the ‘accuracy’ of this periodization is not in question, I would question the accuracy of their *titles*. By this I mean that my generation’s understanding of these works in relation to the historic trajectory of political geography is quite different from that of the authors. For the most part, we have not come to the discipline seeing the works of Ratzel, Mackinder and others as the ‘historic canon.’ It is rare that students today actually read these works, but do perhaps read *about* them as historical ‘artifacts’ – or perhaps as

a sort of distanced genealogical curio. The ‘historic canon’ as outlined in *Making Political Geography*, for this generation, is more history than a canon. Likewise, the works surveyed in the chapter ‘reinventing political geography’ are what many political geography students today have come to learn as the ‘canon’ (as problematic as that category may be; see Mamadouh’s comments). For example, by the time I began my studies in geography, the key figures named here (e.g. John Agnew, Simon Dalby, John O’Loughlin, Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Peter Taylor, Kevin Cox) had *already* ‘reinvented’ political geography. I learned and read their work not as a ‘reinvention,’ but as the foundation of contemporary political geography. Continuing on this same line of reasoning, the literature discussed in the chapter on political geography’s ‘horizon’ neatly summarizes the debates that have been ongoing during my entire education in geography (albeit a modest 10 years in comparison to the authors). Surely many of these themes will persist into the future, but one does not gain a clear sense from the second edition of *Making Political Geography* about what this horizon might be in political geography – that is, what the future holds for the sub-discipline. Of course, this is perhaps a question best left for the ‘new generation’ to answer, and as I shall suggest below, this will arguably be far more interdisciplinary and theoretically inclusive than the authors imply in their chapter on the ‘horizon.’

Three theoretical waves: alternative or complementary?

The second trend, which I argue differentiates the experience of the new generation of political geographers from that of the authors, is that geography students today have ‘arrived’ at the discipline in an era marked by widespread efforts to break down disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, many of us have received extensive training in ‘mixed methods’ and have been taught to embrace, rather than shun, theoretical diversity. While Agnew and Muscarà are certainly aware of this trend, it only comes out faintly in the text. This is evident in the framing of Chapter 4, in which they introduce three ‘theoretical waves’ or perspectives that defined the ‘reinvention’ of political geography. In brief, the authors first point to the ‘spatial turn’ starting in the 1960s, second to the Marxist and neo-Marxist wave of scholarship beginning in the 1970s, and third to the postmodernist wave from the 1980s on. The entire chapter is then organized around outlining several case

studies that exemplify these theoretical approaches on a number of key themes in political geography. Despite recognizing that “[t]here are *signs* of theoretical rapprochement [...] in some recent research and writing on geopolitics and the rise of deterritorialized forms of power” (Agnew and Muscarà, 2012: 158; emphasis added), the overarching goal or impetus of this chapter’s structure is to ‘disentangle’ these theoretical approaches and to pinpoint those studies that adhere most clearly to one framework over another.

But what our authors suggest are merely ‘signs’ of theoretical rapprochement are arguably much more pervasive – so much so that they are perhaps the prevailing trend within contemporary political geography. While I certainly hope that my experience is not unique, but widespread, I do not want to argue that that the old theoretical rifts and the ‘quantitative’/‘qualitative’ posturing are of the past – for they certainly are not. Rather, my sense is that the critical political geography of today is more open to theoretical diversity and the use of mixed methods than it was perhaps 10 or 20 years ago. I want to suggest that the heuristic divides in *Making Political Geography* are much less useful and relevant today than they once were. Further, in telling the story of contemporary political geography, we are perhaps better advised to highlight the ways in which scholars frequently and productively *unite* mixed theoretical and methodological approaches.

The issue of presentation is not a trivial matter. By focusing on the ‘quintessential’ studies of one particular approach, there is a danger in inducing students into assuming their incompatibility in an era where they are most commonly united. If we are to truly start transgressing these theoretical and methodological divides, and embrace a more creative and open political geography for the ‘horizon,’ it is important to emphasize to students the cases where political geographers *have* productively united all these various frameworks and methods. This, I would argue, would be a more contemporary treatment of the issue, rather than holding onto this triad – which threatens to produce the increasingly outdated reality it seeks to describe. The divisions of yesterday are not those of today and we should be moving beyond this conventional account.

In making these arguments, it is important to note that Agnew and Muscarà are admittedly working with a ‘moving target.’ As with any effort to account for a discipline’s historic trajectory, the difficulty lies in giving the most up-to-date account possible. The agenda of *Making Political Geography* is thus impressively ambitious, and the authors are to be commended for their creative approach to the task. And yet, as I have argued here, political geography is beginning to see a new generational disjuncture. Thanks to the very successful ‘reinvention’ of the subfield, young political geographers, such as myself, have come to the field in an era of interdisciplinarity and healthy diversification, which bears some parallels to (roots in?) the fleeting breakdown of binary worldviews that characterized Cold War-era geopolitics. And while my generation has come of age during an equally bifurcated geopolitical era defined by the ‘Global War on Terror,’ with care and appreciation of this diversity, there is great potential to retain and even *deepen* the ‘theoretical rapprochement’ set in motion by those who revived political geography from the ‘moribund backwater’ (Johnston 2001). Such a project has a privileged role in disciplinary texts like *Making Political Geography*, and their significance for shaping the analytical lenses of young scholars should not be underestimated.

Canons and classics and the (un)making of political geography

Virginie Mamadouh

Writing a history of a sub-discipline is a perilous exercise and highly significant to its “making” through the institutionalization of a common body of knowledge that peers share. In this commentary I examine why political geographers – while they so reluctantly engage with their classics – need such a history/story, possibly in lieu of a canon, and how *Making political geography* fulfills this task.

Canons and classics and identity politics

It has often been noted that (political) geographers demonstrate overt disinterest for classic texts and the founders of their discipline (Keighren et al 2012a 2012b). This lack of interest for canons among geographers has even been celebrated (Agnew 2012) as it frees the discipline from the obligation to keep true to foundational theoretical approaches and methodologies, right or wrong, and makes it more inclusive and more open to new development than others, although it makes it more liable to hypes and fashions.

Three characteristics possibly explain such a collective attitude. The first is the fragmentation of the field (there is simply no canonical work that have significantly mark the evolution of the whole discipline). The second is the orientation towards fieldwork rather than books as most valued source of insights and knowledge. The third is that geography has arguably reinvented itself much more radically than other social sciences in the past fifty years, and that it is particularly true for political geography. As a result the interest in old publications is limited: why bother about outdated empirics? and why study approaches that have been in the meantime discredited, for example for their association with environmental determinism or with criminal regimes?

Discussions about classics and canons, like the recent set of interventions published in *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2(3), focus on internal identity issues: Keighren, Abrahamsson and della Dora (2012a, 2012b) call for a more serious engagement with the legacy of past geographers, to the benefit of the disciplinary historiography, disciplinary consciousness and the future of the discipline itself (see also Powell 2012). Commentaries highlight many of the problems linked to the issue of having, nurturing and transmitting classics to new generations of students.

But the lack of a canon and the neglect of classics is also consequential for the external identity of political geography, i.e. for the perception of political geography among scholars in related disciplines such as International Relations and political science, among policy makers, journalists, and the general public. Our visibility is notoriously limited. Even more troubling is the way geographical classics can be revisited. The “Mackinder revival” promoted by publicist Robert Kaplan in *The revenge of geography* bothered many political geographers over the past years (Dittmer 2012, Mamadouh 2013, Powell 2012 over the previous round of controversies, Antonsich 2010, Murphy &

O'Loughlin 2009 and Morrissey et al 2009). We might not care so much about Mackinder's legacy nor about Kaplan's engagement with it, but we need to be concerned about the collateral damage it brings to our discipline when the public wonders what this geography is that has to take its revenge, and when we have to explain over and over again that what Kaplan does has not much in common with what contemporary academic geographers are doing. Obviously traditional approaches still appeal to a wide audience especially outside academic geography and they are seen and used as a geographical canon to define geography from the outside. We might just as well make sure that our version of what counts as political geography and of the history of our discipline is heard.

Since the late 1980s it has been more common for political geographers to engage with their predecessors, reassessing the work of famous geographers and geopoliticians, and rediscovering the work of others that has been silenced for several decades (most notably anarchist geographers). It has been one of the main goals of at the core of the project of critical geopolitics, but it remains a specialist subfield, a reserve for connoisseurs, while it should be part and parcel of students' introduction to political geography.

The making remaking and unmaking of political geography

Does *Making political geography* offer a step in the right direction for such an engagement to the political geographical heritage? Most valued in my eyes is the fact that it is not teleological. The history of the discipline, whatever that is, is not written as to "explain" the present state of the art as the outcome of a linear and necessary evolutionary process. Instead it foregrounds the diversity of political geographical approaches and experiences.

It is especially welcome that the periodization of the long century under scrutiny is not based on some internal meta-logics of the field, reifying the successive "triumph" of certain schools over others (this echoes the notion of hybrid geographies advocated by Kwan 2004). Instead it is based on major changes in the geopolitical context in which geographers made political geography. It is however problematic that it endorses a periodization of the evolution of the geopolitical context at the global scale, that

inevitably gives more precedence to the views of the geographers associated with the mightiest actors on the scene and neglects the margins (See Yamazaki's comments).

In the first period, the authors present the work of some key geographers, all male and all based in the great powers of the time. It would have been insightful to add the example of a political geographical school that emerges in smaller nations, not because any Hungarian, Danish or Japanese political geographer of the time has been particularly influential, but because it would have shown the dynamics of making political geography at the margins.

Arguably the focus on the core is even more marked for the second period. In addition the authors use a typology crafted earlier by Agnew (1997) to deal with the prolific and expanding Anglo-American academic networks. It is based on three perspectives and five subject areas. Simplification is key to make sense of such a huge and variegated body of work and comes at a price (see Koch's contribution above) but let me take issue here with the neglect of feminist approaches, implicitly subsumed to the third stream, the postmodern perspective. This disregards the significance, the specificities and the vitality of the feminist turn in (political) geography that has been widely documented (i.e. Staeheli et al 2004) that definitively warrant recognition as a specific perspective in such a typology (as in the matrix used in Agnew & Mamadouh 2008).

In the last post-cold war period, the core seems to be lost and political geography seems still very in becoming. There are different reasons for that fog. First making political geography is becoming a bricolage with clumsy combinations of existing approaches trying to get the best of different worlds (see Koch's contribution above), rather than new approaches. Second due to intensified interconnections, the diversity of political geography made by geographers confronted to different geopolitical contexts and different contingencies within the same time period is more difficult to neglect (See Yamazaki's and Flint's interventions). Third we may be witnessing the unmaking of political geography. The pervasiveness of issues of power is widely recognized, and political geography is "done" by plenty of geographers that do not usually define themselves as political geographers but go under the flags of critical geographies, radical geographies, feminist geographies, urban geographies, cultural geographies, financial

geographies, queer theories, geographically sensitive approaches to political economy and political ecology, etc.

Again, this dilution and ensuing lack of visibility to the external world is consequential for getting political geography research and teaching noticed, funded and sufficiently institutionalized. It means that we need to maintain the visibility of a certain sensibility to time-space contingencies of the political and that we need a flag to do that. The flag needs not to be holy but it needs to be known. We need books like *Making Political Geography* for disciplinary survival: not to fix the canon for the sake of having one, not to guard the territory of political geography and police its borders to exclude ‘improper’ kinds of political geographies, not to fossilize the discipline, but to get enough leverage to empower ourselves and more importantly our students to continue studying and making political geography – as we see most fit in the societal contexts we happen to function, and for the struggles we see as most urgent.

Reading and re-reading *Making Political Geography*

Luca Muscarà

I am grateful to all contributors to the AAG Meeting session and this forum for their comments, and in the first place to John Agnew for the invaluable opportunity to collaborate to the making of a second edition of *MPG*. My reply will focus on the role of a history of political geography (PG) in relation to changing geopolitical contexts which, in a textbook on the last 140 years of PG, has strong implications for disciplinary identity, given its relation to teaching, especially in view of the coming to maturity of a post-9/11 generation of political geographers.

In a history of geographical thought perspective, a history of PG is a cautionary tale on the risk of neo-determinisms of various types for geography (and the social sciences in general). Geography seeks generalizations, however, history shows that borrowing ‘laws’ from the natural sciences, physical geography, economics, etc. to improve its perceived scientific status and visibility, (sometimes as an answer to

academic competition in securing resources) may damage it, rather than contributing to its quest for generalizations (considering its post-WWII vulnerability to administrative decisions, especially at times of financial crunch). So while the risks of normative neo-determinisms keep looming over the horizon, an excessive fragmentation, promoted also by the publishing of multiple and intellectually competing texts, could lead to a Tower of Babel syndrome, in a field, which, under the PG label, gathers together a variety of theoretical perspectives, substantive *foci* and geographic scales on a number of themes. A history of PG provides a ‘map’ to navigate between the extremes of borrowed explanations and celebrating disintegration.

The authors of this book wanted to avoid another fully-fledged textbook in the tradition of Flint & Taylor (2011) and Glassner & Fahrer (2004). It was instead conceived as a useful directional/supplementary text, at a time when many teachers have turned against committing to a single massive textbook to guide their students. In providing a history and overview of the subfield, it leaves scope for instructors to develop themes from the book in the directions they desire, with the sources they prefer. Rather than trying to impose a single ‘fashionable’ theory, such versatility in the use of the book is possible thanks to the underlying (not over-arching) role of history as a general frame of reference. As far as we know, no other book takes this approach and fulfills this purpose, but certainly its usefulness depends on the style of learning, teaching, and examining.

The textbook aims also to reach a broader audience than British and North-American students. One way to do so is to promote translation into other languages and thus reach non-Anglophone audiences. The first edition was translated into Italian. The second one will be too. Adding to the second edition a non-Anglo-American co-author, was a second conscious step challenging Anglo-American hegemony in PG. Still, some of the objections raised in this forum, from the point of view of a co-author who, before using it for over a decade, both with Italian and American students, has also overseen its Italian translations, and with a background in literary analysis, leave the impression that books such as this one are read quite selectively (which also reflects the proliferation of literature in the competitive context of the contemporary imperative of publishing or perishing).

In fact, the basic theoretical foundations of the book are actually spelt out in Chapter 2, beginning with the apparently overlooked reference to Nagel (1986). His notion of the ‘incompleteness of knowledge’ explains why it’s useful to rely on contexts to introduce political geographers and their ideas: “*There can never be a view from nowhere that is not also, and profoundly, a view from somewhere*” (p.14.) Placing authors and theories in their historical-geopolitical contexts doesn’t imply everyone is a “dupe of context” or that necessarily “contexts structuralize agents” (as the Lattimore and Gottmann academic histories show), but is exactly an attempt at better specifying that “*somewhere*”, by alerting the reader “to the contextual biases built into any and all knowledge claims”. Thus, inter-imperial rivalries and ‘naturalized knowledge’ do help to contextualize Ratzel and Mackinder, as much as the onset of the Cold War contributes to explaining the historical shift in PG’s focus from the human-environment nexus to the power-knowledge one.

While the meaning of “political” is certainly not avoided (pp.26-29), the power-knowledge postulate (pp.14-19) inevitably requires a focus on the sub-disciplinary “core”. Still, it could hardly be said we avoid the “margins”: French geography, including Vidal de la Blache, has not been at the “core” of previous histories from an Anglo-American perspective, our Historic Canon includes Reclus, Kropotkin, Siegfried, Italian and Japanese PG in the 1930s or Soviet geography during WWII). In Chapter 4, in the context of the Cold War and as PG was somewhat eclipsed as a field, Lattimore, Gottmann and the Sprouts are presented as exceptions in the 1950s. A center-periphery perspective requires moving beyond nationalities after World War II: national schools have not disappeared, but raising participation to transnational networks around shared perspectives and themes has made PG more cosmopolitan since the 1960s. This is why, in view of the wider variety of scholars involved in the Cold War era’s re-invention of PG (and related proliferation of literature), the narrative is not centered on national schools as it is for the pre-World War II period. To include post-WWII Japan’s PG, we would need to create similar follow-ups also for French, German and Italian PGs.

Maybe a PG historical atlas, written by a transnational network of PG historians, could in the future provide a widely shared framework for the sub-discipline. To write

such a thing we would need to agree on terminology and periodization, before trying to define “mechanisms”, or rather, interactions through which geopolitical or intellectual contexts could influence any given author. Such links are multiple and can be traced back retrospectively for each case, but how to do so prospectively without risking to induce deterministic views of history in the students? I find it less interesting to try to extract rules in order to know prospectively how relations between geopolitics and PG might be defined in the future: these are already qualitatively different for the three periods considered. Retrospectively, we defined some interactions between geopolitics and PG, by comparing the role of geographers during and after each World War (pp.103-105). While in the Historic Canon political geographers were ‘problem solvers’ serving their States from a position close to it (p. 79, 100), since the Cold War their position has been increasingly that of critics from outside (p.243). The plurality of that outsider perspective has been specified through a matrix, which still holds its value as historical artifact of that second period, while the feminist approach, its geographies and geographers, have been duly dealt with, as part of the post-modern perspective.

This focus on historical difference is doubly important for defining how geopolitical “change” happens. “Change” in the geopolitical context is a matter of historical discontinuities in the prevailing order, but attempts at establishing typologies will continuously be superseded by events. Could the political-economic-military and technological nexus that brought about the Cold War ever be repeated *ad seriam*? Personally, I’m more attracted by other questions: is the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War’s bipolar order sufficient to assume the existence of a post-CW period? Or do we need a scientific/technological discontinuity, of a magnitude comparable to the role played by nuclear weapons in the onset of the Cold War? And are the continuities since the late 1940s stronger than the discontinuities, as suggested in Isaac and Bell (2012)? We chose to keep three separate periods, though some continuities between Cold War and post-Cold War PG are maintained.

Our post-Cold War geopolitical context section (pp.162-181) was entirely rewritten for the second edition, as a unitary period, exactly to avoid “reproducing the dominant discourse” of the War on Terror as the necessary singular future context for the development of PG as a field. Given that the tenth anniversary of 9/11 was our cut-off

date, the rewriting of the book in 2011 was characterized by ongoing geopolitical challenges, whose relevance to PG (and to the media) competed for our attention, and required effort to gather local information and to interpret it (the Fukushima multiple crises, the demand for democracy in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, the financial-economic crisis, the UK-France governments bombing Libya from Italian bases, etc.). This felt more urgent than engaging in a forecasting venture on the mobile horizon on the future of PG.

This perspective on how PG has evolved alongside geopolitical events reflects a specific approach to the history of thought. As the book claims: “The field has not evolved simply as the result of an internal dynamic, as one ‘paradigm’ simply replaced another because of intellectual fancy or academic competition” (p.ix). Could Kuhn’s theory of “normal science” and paradigmatic shift still contribute to understanding of the book’s approach to periodization? His phases 1-4 can be found in Chapter 3 on the Historic Canon, while phase 5 (and Lakatos’ coexistence of perspectives) has been taking place since 1945 and especially in the recent period defined in terms of the ‘horizon’ (Chapter 5). Instead, this may even require to historicize Kuhn: would his attempt at discovering the structures of scientific revolutions have been possible before WWII? This maybe another reason why it’s difficult to see a ‘normal’ PG after WWII. In terms of paradigms (p. ix, 40, 44): if the state-centered sovereignty paradigm was the normal science before WWII, does its more recent challenging constitute a new paradigm? If the State was once seen as ‘natural’, then PG has never been ‘normal’ again. We could assume the power-knowledge nexus as the new ‘normality’, but wouldn’t we need to include also a new perspective on nature, compared to that of the pre-1945 PG? The invention of nuclear weapons and nuclear power made a difference in this respect and we linked it to the rise in environmental awareness on *PG’s* horizon (p.197). This is also why we expanded the environmental section in Chapter 5, with Michael Hulme’s radical perspectives (p.184).

Writing a new textbook is easier than rewriting an existing one, but an historical perspective gives meaning t re-writing *MPG* exactly because of PG is in the making. Like most books, *MPG* could undoubtedly be improved: by considering many precious comments within this debate, and perhaps also by following up the discussion on the

growth of the environment as an active subject of inquiry in PG, or by developing the very interesting connection between economic and religious fundamentalisms, proposed in the film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012).

If setting limits is a necessary part of writing any book, I believe this second edition keeps doing two things very well. It succeeds in avoiding the mono-causal explanations (predominantly environmental and economic determinisms) that have long bedeviled the field (p.184, 238). Beyond the attempt at historically-geopolitically contextualizing authors, perspectives and themes, this in fact is the central tenet of the book. And a history of PG seems the best guarantee to avoid it. The etymology of the word “context”, from the Latin ‘weaving together’, and the Sanskrit *taksati* ‘he/she fashions, constructs’, suggests that a critically informed history of PG can also help us avoid drastically deconstructing our field due to either preference for a recycled neo-determinism (we have been there before), excessive self-defense of perceived disciplinary identity, or ignorance of how much the field has already engaged with concerns and perspectives that neophytes or outsiders think they are developing from scratch.

Decade after decade, generation after generation, PG, now in its second century, keeps recording scholars, papers, books, libraries, knowledge, etc. A contextualized history of PG is a recipe to deal with this increasing complexity and reduce entropy in the subfield. As power shifts in the geopolitical context, so does within PG too, though not necessarily mechanically. Within “theoretical diversity” and “inter-disciplinarity”, a history of geographical thought perspective on PG is as indispensable as the use of “mixed methods”. Bio-bibliographic approaches to authors may even reveal their (evolving) methods’ internal order, just as reflecting on the pertinent contexts does help us seeing our own biases.

Response to Critics

John Agnew

Thanks to all the participants in the session at the Los Angeles AAG Meeting for reading the second edition of *Making Political Geography* and contributing to a lively discussion about this book in particular and the role of textbooks in relation to the field of political geography in general. My co-author has pointed out that the second edition is the fruit of a collaboration between us based not so much in providing an alternative to the basic framework of the first edition as in building on it for a new post-Cold War geopolitical era and expanding the geographical basis to its approach and empirical examples beyond the Anglo-American world of academic political geography privileged first time round. I would like to reiterate a few points about the book in both editions that have been lost in most of the commentaries that as a result of the nature of the encounter in an “authors-meet-critics session” tend to pick up on particular issues and not always note their insignificance or lack of relevance to the overall project that the book reflects.

Most importantly, rather than build a textbook around a currently favored theory or methodology or a provide a manual based on some arbitrary conventions about what goes for political geography, this book is committed to the idea explicit in the title that political geography as a field of academic study has been and is made by its exponents. The discussion about intellectual freedom in Chapter 5 is not simply incidental to the book. For potential students, then, the book issues an invitation to participate in the field’s historically informed reworking rather than provide a recipe of currently fashionable themes and theories for their passive consumption. Necessarily the book separates out a field from the broader disciplinary and university settings in which it has developed since the late nineteenth century. Political geography has had a canon (from Ratzel and Mackinder to Gottmann and so on), even as the wider field of “geography” arguably has hostages itself increasingly to theoretical and methodological fashion (Agnew 2012). Even though at various times environmental determinist and economic theories have tended to prevail within the field, the field has historically always emphasized a focus on the political in the sense of the centrality of struggles for power and influence to geographical outcomes of all sorts (wars, pooling of wealth, distributional and patronage politics, etc.). The conceit of relating the book in the Preface to the political argument implicit in Lorenzetti’s famous Sieneese fresco of “Effects of

Good and Bad Government in City and Country” should alert the reader to this framing. The core of the book in Chapters 4 and 5 surveys how the political has been addressed in the field using a heuristic division of theoretical perspectives, once environmental determinism and its various associated doctrines were largely eclipsed, of the spatial analytic, political-economic and postmodernist. This is a simplification of a much wider continuum of theoretical perspectives but one defensible, we believe, in terms of how most self-described political geographers have tended to see the development of the field since the 1950s at least. That the “triad” is now breaking down is part of the burden of the argument of Chapter 5.

That said, the making of political geography has been profoundly affected by the material and ideological circumstances of the times in which people have been engaged in making it. The idea of “geopolitical context” is how we choose to frame this. Obviously, the logic of the historical periods we use and the geopolitical themes (including the main geopolitical protagonists) we identify as crucial to those periods are subject to dispute. Contexts, as Peter Burke (2002,172) reminds us: “are not found but selected or even constructed, sometimes, consciously, by a process of abstracting from situations and isolating certain phenomena in order to understand them better. What counts as context depends on what one wishes to explain.” The dilemma is that in trying to avoid both “the assumption of eternal wisdom to be found in American political science and Great Books programs” (Burke 2002, 170) and an internalist account of political geography as a succession of paradigms or Great Men (the typical alternatives) we can “imprison” all ideas in their contexts not just those that had the closest “fit” with the times. To try to avoid doing so is why we expend so much energy identifying ideas that either remained largely marginalized in their time (e.g. from Kropotkin to the Sprouts) or that arise in times of geopolitical transition out of the merging of previously distinctive perspectives. The focus on historical-geopolitical contexts, then, and the reason why we spend so many pages discussing them before moving into the particulars of political geography during those periods, is vital in providing us with summaries of the very materials that political geography has always tried to understand. Of course, a positivist or law-seeking conception of the field would fit uneasily with this historicist approach. All I would say is that if that’s your thing then this isn’t your book. Those

obsessed with the present in terms of either what they've been reading recently or in regarding the historical development of political geography as "bunk" to be jettisoned will also probably best give this book a miss.

There is a necessary tension in a book that tries to depart from the nostrums of the typical textbook and yet still appeal to a student audience. It's hard to tell a student with this book what exactly will be on a test. The material does not lend itself to multiple-choice questions. The vignettes in Chapters 1 and 2 are included partly to inductively introduce novice students to what political geography is possibly all about before diving into the history of the field. But this only works if the teacher/lecturer sympathizes with the idea that a textbook can be about trying to induct a student into what political geography has been and how they can contribute to what it might be. It would be hard to use this book in a MOOC that regards students simply as consumers of information rather than as fellow potential researchers/scholars. Personally, I find that praiseworthy.

I think that it is the open-ended nature of this book that makes it difficult to classify as a typical textbook. It invites dispute and argument. We have got used to thinking of textbooks as ways of settling accounts or enshrining theoretical perspectives. In the end, what anyone makes of this book will reflect their sense of knowledge creation and circulation. Is knowledge (about anything) always in reformulation and recasting or is it set in stone as laid down in a founding epoch or by particular authorities?

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Note

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