

Mapping worlds

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Social and cultural geographies are studied by scholars from around the world, focusing on the spatialities of issues such as social deprivation, health and welfare, housing, religion, territorial conflict, identity, the politics of difference (relating to race, gender, sexuality, disability), social justice, landscapes, cultural traditions, and popular and material culture. And yet, for various reasons, the research being undertaken, its nature and theoretical underpinnings, and the institutional and disciplinary context in which it takes place, is often little known by geographers working in different national traditions or languages. *Mapping Worlds* draws together for the first time into one volume reports of social and cultural geographical research undertaken in several countries from around the world. As such, it provides an important overview and comparison of the ideas and traditions employed by social and cultural geographers working within different national schools or wider regions, details on specific studies and research projects, and offers insights into the history of human geography more generally and the varying institutional context within which geographical research is practised.

The chapters have their origins in the Country Reports section of the journal *Social*

and Cultural Geography. The country report section was initiated as both an intellectual and political project. Intellectually, it aimed to bring into dialogue social and cultural geographers from around the world, acting as a conduit through which they could share empirical research, theory and knowledge. Politically, it sought to disrupt and destabilize the prevalent trend towards English-language and Anglo-American hegemony in the international production of geographic knowledge.

Internationalisation and challenging Anglo-American hegemony

For the editors of the journal, it was clear from our own experiences and from dealing with submitted manuscripts that, for reasons including language, tradition and conventions, or the power geometries that exist with regard to how universities, journals, publishing houses and conferences operate, that there is a very weak understanding amongst social and cultural geographers of what fellow scholars located outside of their own immediate networks are doing – what they are researching, how they are framing and performing their research, what they are discovering, and the

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institutional context in which social and cultural geographers are plying their trade. As a consequence, the opportunities to learn from each other are being circumscribed by ignorance created mainly through structural factors such as language and a lack of sustained dialogue and collaboration.

As many of the chapters in this collection reveal, along with other recent geographical scholarship (e.g., Berg and Kearns 1998; Gregson *et al.* 2003; Minca 2000; Gutiérrez and López-Nieva 2001; Short *et al.* 2001; Kitchin, 2003/2005; Garcia-Ramon, 2003; Paasi, 2005; Rodríguez-Pose, 2004, 2006; Aalbers and Rossi, in press), this ignorance is uneven in nature given the particular power geometries that are presently shaping academic knowledge production. There are three main, inter-related processes at play.

First, the forces of neo-liberalisation and globalisation have been applied to the academic sector leading to a restructuring of higher education so that universities are now competing globally for key resources such as students, staff and research monies and are seeking to evaluate their performance and standing internationally. Second, the English language has largely become the lingua franca of academia, with the effect that those scholars who have 'bought into' that hegemony are more likely to be read outside their own local context and to have academic capital in the global academic labour market. Others, who have chosen not to invest in English or are structurally limited to do so, are thus increasingly marginalized in the global exchange of ideas and labour. Third, the global consolidation of the publishing industry and the growing importance of English have led to an inflated importance for works predominately produced by Anglo-American publishers and societies and edited and contributed to by Anglo-American scholars.

In combination, what these processes mean is that publishing in English, in supposedly international journals, is becoming the benchmark by which scholars and institutions from around the world are increasingly being measured and judged. Given that these outlets are controlled predominately by Anglo-American gatekeepers, Anglo-American scholars are at a distinct advantage and their ignorance of other traditions and scholarship is of little consequence. On the other hand, such arrangements puts pressure on non-Anglo-American scholars to become familiar with the Anglo-American work against which their scholarship will be judged. Thus the hegemonic position of Anglo-American knowledge production is maintained and strengthened. Indeed, browsing through the geography journals that dominate the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) – an index that purports to document the most important and influential research from around the world¹ – one would quickly get the impression that human geography in general (including social and cultural geography) was overwhelmingly an Anglo-American pursuit; that there was little research beyond this centre that was worth wider acknowledgement and engagement. Such an inference is, as the chapters in this book testify, patently a falsehood, and one that perpetuates a geography of intellectual inequity.

Social and Cultural Geography wanted to challenge this hegemony by trying to create a journal that was as international as possible in scope, ethos and audience. The country reports provided one tactic amongst a number that have been adopted including the formation of an internationally diverse editorial board, the publication of all abstracts in French and Spanish, and actively trying to encourage paper submissions from beyond Anglo-American geography (see Kitchin 2003/

2005). These tactics are not tokenistic, but a genuine attempt to recognise the structural forces of Anglo-American hegemony at play in the academy and to seek ways to undermine and reconfigure them.

Importantly then, the country reports were explicitly designed and presented not as a means to bring the work of 'geographers at the margins' to the 'Anglo-American centre', so that their ideas could be surveyed and pillaged in some kind of imperialistic fashion. Nor were they designed to 'reel-in' non-Anglo-American geographers in order to co-opt them into Anglo-American ways of knowing, interpreting and writing. Indeed, to combat these charges we very deliberately commissioned reports concerning the work of Anglo-American scholars, rather than assuming that these occupied some privileged, universal centre, familiar to all social and cultural geographers and therefore beyond the need for summary and review. Rather, the reports were to be designed to demonstrate the full diversity of social and cultural geographies practised around the world and to provide a forum in which geographers can expand their knowledge and learn from one another. As a commitment to ensure the reports served different audiences, and as a political statement, every report has been published in English and the contributors' own first language (as demonstrated throughout this book). We are also investigating the possibilities of reprinting the reports in the authors' own national journals.

Despite these intentions, the extent to which *Social and Cultural Geography* has managed to achieve its aim of being a genuinely international journal is debatable. Summary data of submission rates and publication reveal that the journal is still dominated by Anglo-American researchers, although things are moving in the right direction (see Kitchin 2005). Undoubtedly, there are some deep

structural issues at work here that make the transition from Anglo-American to international journal a slow journey, such as the make-up of editors (to date all Anglo-American with one exception), as opposed to editorial board, and the requirement that the main body of articles is published in English (it is only abstracts and country reports that are translated and then only into French or Spanish in the case of abstracts, and the authors' own language with country reports).

This slow transition highlights that the project of internationalisation is work in progress, one to which the editorial team of *Social and Cultural Geography* is deeply committed. To that end, the process of commissioning country reports is on-going and forthcoming reports include Argentina, Czech Republic, China, Germany, Kenya, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the West Indies. It is hoped that over time areas of the world presently underrepresented such as Asia, Africa and South America will be added to ensure that as full a picture of social and cultural geography as practised, the research it produces, and the institutional context in which it operates, can be developed. It is also hoped that by engaging with social and cultural geographers from around the world, and reporting their work, that they might submit articles to the journal and help further erode its Anglo-American dominance and bias.

Social and cultural geography around the world

The chapters themselves provide fascinating insights into the social and cultural geographic research being practised within each country/region, although they vary slightly in their focus, content and style. All of the chapters document the work being undertaken – the

focus of such research, how it is performed and theorised, and how it differs, overlaps or mimics research practised elsewhere, particularly with respect to that practised in Anglo-American contexts. In addition, some try and elaborate how human geography *per se*, or social and cultural geography in particular, has developed within a country/region given specific institutional and political regimes (e.g., Netherlands, Mexico, South Africa, Israel, South East Asia, Greece), and/or discuss issues like Anglo-American hegemony and power relations in the production of geographic knowledges (e.g., Denmark, United Kingdom, Italy, Finland), address particular issues such as language, culture and politics that has led to different schools within a nation (e.g., France, Canada), and/or evaluate the extent to which a national school draws inspiration and influence from other schools/traditions (e.g., Denmark, Spain, Brazil, Estonia). Rather than trying to group the chapters under some kind of organisational logic, such as by continent or by the specific focus of the report, they are ordered in the sequence in which they first appeared in print. It should be acknowledged then that some of the earlier chapters are a little more dated than the latter, though this does not diminish their value.

What the chapters make clear is that there are a wide diversity of social and cultural geographies practised around the world, though not always labelled as such (for example, sometimes seen as a part of economic, political or urban geography – e.g., Greece, New Zealand – or with social geography and cultural geography being seen as discrete sub-disciplines – e.g., Brazil, France). This diversity is influenced by a variety of factors, but is predominately shaped by historical traditions and varying institutional and national contexts. For example,

Estonian geography was influenced first by Finnish geography, then by Russian ideology that restricted it to largely economic issues until the fall of the iron curtain. Similarly, Hungarian geography was influenced by German geography, then its foci restricted to mainly economic questions by a Russian influenced, totalitarian regime. Only recently have both national traditions been free to explore wider social questions and to develop their own theoretical tools and draw on theories and ideas from elsewhere. Danish geography, due its relatively small population and position, is influenced by German, French and Anglo-American traditions. Likewise, Brazilian, Mexican and Spanish geography have been strongly influenced by French traditions, only more recently becoming influenced by Anglophone sources, and Taiwanese geography has been influenced by Japanese traditions, and so on.

Differences also occur across Anglo-American countries. For example, the USA report highlights how, unlike the UK, social geography has largely failed to develop as a recognised label or sub-discipline, often subsumed with urban and political geography, with cultural geography seen as something quite distinct. And the reports for Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa, whilst all native English speaking countries and often seen as part of the Anglo-American geography, reveal distinct academic and publishing traditions and a sense of peripherality in comparison to what is seen as a dominant UK-USA centre (also see Berg and Kearns 1998). In the Canadian context, there is also the issue of French and English-speaking regions and geographical research, and in the Irish case the issue of a partitioned island.

In all cases, particular local and national issues shape the foci of research. For example, questions relating to post-iron curtain

regeneration come to the fore in East European countries, social justice and land ownership are important in post-Apartheid South Africa, postcolonialism and multiculturalism attract scrutiny in Australia, native land rights and transnational immigration are significant in Canada, territorial conflict is of concern in Israel, social welfare and land use a focus in The Netherlands, nationhood and nation building are central in South East Asia, and so on. In many cases, academic research within national schools is closely tied to social policy initiatives and projects for local and national government, with geographers undertaking applied case studies rather than more fundamental and philosophical analysis. This applied work leads to reports and policy documents (so-called grey literature) which often has a limited, usually local or national, distribution and is typically absent from 'international' journals.

In highlighting these differences, the chapters reveal the complex geographies of the production of geographic knowledge and of knowledge production *per se*. While social and cultural geography might be vibrant and flourishing in some locations (e.g., Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands), in others it is struggling to compete with other geographical sub-disciplines (e.g., Estonia, Italy, Spain, Taiwan), and elsewhere geography as a discipline as a whole is relatively weak in comparison to other social science disciplines (e.g., Greece, Mexico).

Taken together then the chapters provide an international comparison into the development of (sub)disciplinary knowledge and practices within varying contexts and highlight that learning from one another's traditions will significantly enrich our understanding of particular phenomena. What they make clear is that in researching and writing geographies of particular themes we need to be careful to

acknowledge and include evidence from different locales, to recognize that the theories and models developed in a limited number of contexts do not apply universally, and to acknowledge and stress the particular limitations of specific pieces of research. For example, too often accounts by Anglo-American geographers largely ignore the work and findings of everyone except other Anglo-American writers, even when the writing relates to other places (note, the same accusation can often be levelled at those in other traditions). Local voices are silenced and such selectivity is rarely acknowledged. And when Anglo-American writers do draw from non-Anglo sources, they are often not other geographers but rather social theorists (for example, much Anglo-American geography presently draws inspiration from French social theorists who ironically are little referred to by French geographers). This selectivity is partially an issue of language (and what kinds of work are translated into English, particularly as most Anglophone geographers work almost exclusively in English with a few exceptions) but, as noted, it is also an issue of myopia and ignorance.

Conclusion

My hope is that the chapters will be engaged with in the spirit in which they were commissioned and written – that is, open to understanding the diverse ways and institutional settings in which social and cultural geographies are practised around the world – and that the book promotes dialogue between scholars schooled in different traditions and national schools with respect to empirical research and theorisation. At the same time, I also hope that the book acts as a rallying call to address the political and ethical challenges posed by the

way academic knowledge is increasingly being produced, as described in this chapter and by several of the contributors.

There is no doubt that academics need to become wise to the diverse circuits of power that shape what constitutes useful and valuable research and to develop strategies that seek to undermine and reconfigure those circuits in ways that empower those marginalized within them (also see Kitchin and Sidaway 2006). This awareness is no easy task given the extent to which academic knowledge production has taken on hegemonic forms (such as the refereed article in an SSCI-indexed journal) underpinned by neo-liberal reforms of the higher education sector, the global consolidation of publishing companies, and the development of English as the lingua franca of academia. There are, however, as *Social and Cultural Geography* has endeavoured to show, tactics that can be adopted (see Kitchin 2003/2005). Indeed, as explained above, this book itself seeks to be such a strategic intervention using tactics such as publishing the chapters in the authors' own language and highlighting ethical issues in knowledge production. It is hopefully a small, if limited, step in the right direction.

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Notes

- 1 see <http://scientific.thomson.com/products/wos/>

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