



Humanity's legacies: historical geographies in the present

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INTRODUCTION

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‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’ wrote Spanish-American writer, George Santayana (1980 [1905]: 284), just over a century ago. A similar theme was taken up by Karl Marx (1979 [1852]: 103) in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, where he too reasons that history repeats itself but adds the important sequitur ‘first as tragedy, then as farce’ (cf. Žižek, 2009). In both Marx and Santayana we are reminded that to ignore or forget the past is to risk becoming a prisoner of it. The Irish novelist James Joyce also explored this theme, but gave it a slightly different spin. In his celebrated novel *Ulysses*, Joyce gave one of his central characters Stephen Dedalus – a character loosely based on Joyce himself – the memorable line that ‘history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’ (1922: 42). Writing at a time when his contemporaries were busy capturing the bewildering flux of modernity, Joyce depicted Dublin above all as a space of paralysis – a place where the past weighs heavily on the present (‘[e]very Friday buries a Thursday’, as Joyce creatively phrased it) and social relations are shaped, if never fully determined, by tidings from before (1922: 138). Yet, there is another important but less explored side to Joyce’s Dublin (cf. Kearns, 2006) that may be important in our present context. Perhaps more than any other modernist writer, Joyce celebrated the transformative effects of ordinary occurrences. Throughout *Ulysses*, hierarchy and authority are interrupted and undermined by the plurality, indeterminacy, and inchoate anarchy of everyday practices. Of course there is both ‘tragedy’ and ‘farce’ in Joyce – and plenty

of it – but there is also, we think, an unmistakable recognition of the *particular*, a celebration even of everyday events, and with it a profound appreciation that the thoughts and actions of ordinary people are never reducible to the frames of reference handed down to them from the past. Against the recurrent ‘nightmare of history’ Joyce positions the daydreams of ordinary people – their fears, desires, yearnings and hopes.

In this book we try to acknowledge the multiplicities of the past – but not in a manner that seeks to negate the deep asymmetries of both human history and historical representation. Rather these are core concerns we return to throughout. In the book we observe, on the one hand, how certain ideas, practices, modes of rule and configurations of authority are transposed in the present (Wacquant, 2009: 20). On the other hand, we are also acutely conscious of the need to avoid what E.P. Thompson (1991 [1963]: 12) termed the ‘enormous condescension of posterity’, which detects nothing meaningful in the actions of marginal groups who, having spent their lives on the fringes of mainstream society, are too often ignored in historical reflections. ‘Only the successful (in the sense of those whose aspirations anticipated subsequent evolution) are remembered’, continued Thompson (1991 [1963]: 12), ‘[t]he blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves are forgotten.’ Approaching the past from the ‘bottom up’ is an essential step towards restoring the ideas, perspectives and aspirations of those that fall on the ‘wrong side of history’. Their thoughts and deeds far from being obsolete remind us of the unassailable contingency of the present. ‘Only that historian’, wrote Walter Benjamin in his last major work *Theses in the Philosophy of History*, ‘will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past’

(1992: 247; cf. Kaye 2000). At a time when powerful interest groups and ideologues are claiming the 'end of history' and proffering dangerously reductive abstractions of geography (Kaplan, 2012), this sentiment has perhaps never been more important.

Thus an overarching methodological concern of this book is to ask geographical questions of the historical evidence that seek to situate meaning in context. 'Historically sensitive geographies', remarks Matt Sparke (2007: 346-347), can teach us much about our contemporary world; today's 'authoritarianism in the Middle East', for example, emerges as a legacy of 'global historical geographies of uneven connection, exploitation, and oppression'. For Sparke, insisting on such historical geographies enables us to both denaturalize 'geographies of dispossession' and see 'authoritarianism' as a product of western geopolitics rather than solely the result of 'native' character or 'tribal' geographies. Throughout this book, we endeavour to not only pay attention to 'historically sensitive geographies', but equally to 'geographically contextualized histories'. However, crucially, we wish to do so in a manner that reflects variously on our own positionalities, our own politics of historical representation. After all, as Felix Driver perceptively notes, historical scholarship cannot be detached 'from more worldly concerns with politics and ethics' (Driver, 2006: 1).

In researching and writing the worlds of the past, a key tradition that historical geography has developed over time is the ability to situate localized research in broader, comparative contexts. According to Brian Graham and Catherine Nash (2000: 1), historical geography possesses a particular strength in its dual concern for

paying heed to 'both the specificity of the local and the wider economic, cultural and political processes and institutional structures'. In addition, historical geography has long comprised a variety of (often implied) theoretical and thematic concerns (Baker, 1987; Heffernan, 1997). More recently, new areas of research and a range of innovative methodological approaches have resulted in an even more vibrant 'pluralistic culture of scholarship' emerging, which not only builds upon existing sub-disciplinary strengths but has also become a 'driving force in the development of many of the new agendas of contemporary geography' (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009; see also Gagen, Lorimer and Vasudevan, 2007). In this eclectic field of inquiry, it is vital of course that critical scholarship in historical geography does not become either diluted of politics or confined to merely textual analysis, but rather involves a *politics of scholarship* that engages broader concerns relating to the historical production of space and geographical knowledge (Lefebvre 1991; Smith 2003; Gregory 2005).

Our open reference to and insistence on politics as an irreducible part of the construction and uses of geographical knowledge mirrors a wider acknowledgement in the humanities over the last 30 years or more of the constructed nature of disciplinary knowledges (see Heffernan, 2013). From its inception, historical geography as a sub-discipline was at the forefront of broader empiricist practices that sought to justify their existence and continued proliferation through conscious engagements with *material* evidence of various kinds. Throughout the volume, we variously acknowledge the rich and manifold contributions made by this tradition. At the same time, however, we consciously situate our own modest endeavours in an additional set of theoretical and methodological practices aimed at locating historical

geography within wider currents across the humanities and social sciences. Thus, we do not wish to use material artefacts, documents or other forms of historical evidence in a manner that reductively views time as the ‘active’ and space as the ‘passive’ element in historical explanations – a point brilliantly underscored by Michel Foucault (2007) in his well-known interview with the editors of the French journal *Hérodote*. Rather, we endeavour to account for past spatial configurations, processes and practices in a manner that contextualizes the *production* of knowledge as much as the knowledge itself.

If a reliance on positivist empiricism was traditionally implicated in claims to knowledge in the sub-discipline, we consider it to be imperative today that historical geographers engage self-critically with their various theoretical underpinnings and develop them with rigour, cohesion and discursive transparency. It is in this manner that we hope any insights here can begin to resonate beyond the walls of the sub-discipline and inform knowledges across the humanities respecting a broad range of normative concerns of, for instance, memory (Alderman and Inwood 2013), resistance (Featherstone 2008) and justice (Schein 2011) – all of which can be fruitfully illuminated via critical historical geographical lenses.

Substantively, this book presents an overview of some of the most relevant and important concepts, practices and genealogies in the rich and vibrant field of historical geography. Our central aim has been to illuminate the relevancy of critical historical geography and of thinking in and across multiple temporal and spatial contexts. The final product of all historical geography is to (re)present some knowledge of the world

from the past, to tell its story. This is not of course a straight-forward exercise, as underlined throughout, but critically rendering visible the geographies of the past, accounting for their complexities and seeing their legacies can be a wonderfully rewarding and vitally important academic journey.

Section 1: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies

The 'Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies' section explores one of the most significant, extensive and lasting historical geographical phenomena of modern times: colonialism. The initial chapter sets out the ideologies and imaginings of colonialism by exploring the key concepts of *imperialism* and *colonial discourse*. Particular focus is placed on imperialism as a concept and system of power, geoeconomic ascendancy and cultural subordination, which relied on a networking of military, legal and (geo)political power. Attention is then turned to interrogating how imperialism was imagined and legitimized through colonial discourse by examining the dominant discursive registers that sought to normalize imperial mindsets and sustain the rights of colonial expansion. The chapter outlines how historical geographers, influenced by the important work of Edward Said, have been especially proficient in alerting us to the subtle mechanisms of differentiation and purposeful relations of power, race, gender and sexuality inherent in the colonial discourses of former imperial powers. Finally, the chapter points to the historical role of geography, geographical tools and geographers themselves in the advancement of imperialism. The subsequent chapter takes as its starting point the recognition of the import of *discourse* in the justification of colonialism but then moves to interrogating how discourse became operationalized

through colonial *practice* and governmentality. To this end, the key role that historical geography can play in studies of colonialism by locating analyses in necessarily grounded and differentiated ways is underlined. In examining practices of colonialism on the ground and highlighting the new geographies forged and contested as a result, focus is also placed on the political, economic and cultural practices of *anti-colonialism* that ensured the materialization of complex new spaces emerging under the shadow of colonialism. Historical accounts of the practices and spaces of colonial violence and anti-colonial resistance are shown to illuminate the echoes of the colonial past in the *colonial present*. The section is concluded with a chapter on *development* that seeks to demonstrate the imperial and colonial legacies of contemporary western interventionism under the guise of development. It argues how at its core the concept of development internalises what Wolfgang Sachs (2010: x) calls the need for ‘backward peoples’ to catch-up with the ‘pacemakers [of history] who are supposed to represent the forefront of social evolution’. It shows how the age of empire channelled these ideals overseas where the ‘will to improve’ became an alibi for a ‘humanitarian’ mode of empire. It concludes by indicating how contemporary development, though now rooted in the language of technical and scientific innovation, still tends to formulate ‘social evolution’ in quintessentially western terms.

Section 2: Nation-Building and Geopolitics

The ‘Nation-Building and Geopolitics’ section combines a number of important critiques of the role of geographical imagination, territoriality and spatiality in the historical construction of national identities and expansionism of nation-states through

geopolitical calculation. In the opening chapter on 'Territory and Place', the key notion of *territoriality* is explored; a term that historical geographers have used to describe the strategies used by people, groups or organisations to exercise power and control over a particular place and its component parts. The chapter concludes with a case study of the hotly contested and deeply segregated nature of territory in the north of Ireland, and examines some of the symbolic expressions of territoriality that prevail in such crucibles of conflict. In the subsequent chapter on 'Identity and the Nation', geography is shown to have played a central role in the historical *construction, performance and reproduction* of national identity throughout the world. Using diverse examples, attention is initially focused on the import of any nation's *public space* as a vital canvass through which to narrate and perform prioritized and selective metanarratives of national identity. The chapter's key concern then shifts to problematizing reductive nationalist historical representations that mask key nuances from the geographical worlds of the past. In stressing how essentialist models of national identity promulgated *Otherness*, attention is especially drawn to the spatial mechanisms that facilitated exclusionary social practices and political and cultural hegemony. Finally, in underlining the historical social construction of all national identities, emphasis is placed on the selectivity of prioritized metanarratives, and the importance of recognizing the historical relativism of all forms of absolute senses of identity whose endgame is so frequently racism, discrimination and conflict. The final chapter, 'Imaginative Geographies and Geopolitics', builds on this last point by examining the historical context of the use of *imaginative geographies* in the envisioning and representation of geopolitics, enmity and war. It uses the example of the current war on terrorism to reveal how *geopolitical calculation* involves the

mobilization of *affective* imaginative geographies that serve to bury historical injustice, prior western intervention and contemporary *geo-economic interests* under a prevailing discourse of terror and threat. The argument is then made that historical geographers can play a vital role in historicizing and (geo)graphing abstracted places and events. Emphasis is placed especially on how critical historical work in geopolitics can effectively challenge the legitimization and operation of contemporary western geopolitical power/knowledge, and offer more nuanced *counter geographies* that insist on the spatiality and materiality of historical and contemporary spaces.

Section 3: Historical Hierarchies

Taken together the chapters in this section advance three core claims about the historical geographies of identity making. Firstly, it is argued that race, class and gender are best seen as concepts that take their meaning from their conjunction with other tropes and motifs and from the specific historical conditions under which they are deployed. In other words, it is crucial to appreciate the historical emergence of different ‘epistemologies of difference’ and to explain how they very often feed off and reinforce one another. The idea of race, for example, takes on different meanings and allusions depending on where, when, and how it is deployed; like class and gender it is a concept that can be said to develop temporally and spatially. Secondly, the chapters show how these three ‘epistemologies of difference’ have influenced the field of human geography and more specifically the sub-field of historical geography. For instance, the traditional idea of geography as a male enterprise – and the prevailing notion of fieldwork as ‘man’s work’ – has been roundly critiqued by feminist historical geographers. In challenging the myth of the active and autonomous

male Self – the inimitable agent in the production of scientific knowledge who invariably prevails over the dependent and passive female Other imagined as the object of geographical inquiry – feminist scholars have shown how a theoretically informed study of geography’s past(s) is a vital precondition for renewing the subject and for generating more inclusive geographies. The study of race, class, and gender has contributed enormously to the study of how space is made, but equally and importantly it has profoundly shaped how geographers have themselves understood this enterprise. Finally the chapters in this section actively explore how contemporary framings of difference rest upon, and are validated by, historical patterns of thought. Here it is claimed that historical hierarchies not only intersect and overlap, but also continue to inflect contemporary politics in very significant ways. Drawing attention to ‘the historical geographies of the present’ (Johnson 2000), these chapters, like the volume itself, represent an attempt to show how supposedly ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’ claims are in fact historically produced worldviews to which there have always been alternatives. In this sense forgotten, repressed and subaltern histories can provide a resource to think the present anew.

Section 4: The Built Environment

The relationship between people and space is the subject of scrutiny in section four. The opening chapter on ‘Nature and the Environment’ examines the ways in which nature has become a topic of inquiry in historical geography, and explicitly addresses the shift that has taken place towards the natural world. In particular, this chapter conceptualizes *nature* as a product which is enmeshed in a wide range of contexts, from the gendering of social relations to the construction of both colonial and post-

colonial identities. The remaining two chapters shift the emphasis towards the urban domain and focus attention on historical geographers' attempts to explore the complexity of urban spaces. These chapters place particular emphasis on the attempts that have been made to model *urban space* and document *urban morphology*. The chapter entitled 'Making Sense of Urban Settlement' reflects further on the processes and patterns that characterize urbanisation, as well as on some of the trajectories that research has taken when it comes to making sense of one of the chief by-products of urbanisation, namely the city and the townscape. The different ways in which geographers, sociologists and scholars from allied disciplines have attempted to make sense of cities are examined here, with particular emphasis on the seminal models of urban land use. The final chapter in this section considers one particular approach to the study of the urban landscape that was introduced to English-speaking urban historical geography by M.R.G. Conzen in the 1960s. 'Geographies of Urban Morphology' reviews Conzen's morphological method and privileges a more specific concern with the built fabric and the urban morphology or form of the city. The chapter foregrounds the important concepts and methodological techniques developed by Conzen and which continue to aid historical geographers in their work on the geographical character of towns and cities.

Section 5: Place and Meaning

In section five of the book, a wide range of issues relating to place and meaning come into view. In particular, the concepts treated here address some of the ways in which geographers operating at the boundaries between cultural and historical geography have conceptualized landscape, memory and heritage. Using a range of case studies,

this section begins with an account of *landscape* and outlines some of the ways in which it has been studied over time. As well as reflecting on the development of the landscape concept in human geography, this chapter considers the approaches to landscape study that developed out of the ‘new cultural geography’ in the 1990s. In particular, it examines the symbolic geography of the cultural landscape and the rich nexus of inquiry that has coalesced around landscape, memory and identity. The political, economic and cultural uses of the past are also examined in the chapter on *heritage* that follows. This chapter asks what do we really mean when we talk about heritage, and goes on to explore some of the ways in which it has been conceptualized. As well as reviewing the political, economic and social dimensions of the heritage discourse, the chapter pays particular attention to a case study of Irish famine heritage in order to probe further the pivotal role of heritage in shaping narratives of diasporic identity. This section concludes with a chapter on ‘Performance, Spectacle and Power’, which interrogates the historical geographies of spectacles, parades and public performances and reviews some of the ways in which historical geographers have studied the role of public parades as rituals of remembrance, as well as choreographed expressions of power. The chapter foregrounds the multi-faceted impact of public parades and *performance*, and traces the ways in which this impact is mediated materially and militarily through the skilful appropriation of aspects of the past, as well as through pageantry, illuminations, fanfare and music. This chapter concludes with a brief reading of one such public spectacle, the much contested visit of Queen Victoria to Ireland in 1900.

Section 6: Modernity and Modernisation

A key concept in any analysis of the recent past, the notion of 'modernity' and its accompanying adjective have arguably long held pride of place among geographical research and scholarship devoted to historically resonating themes. Even though the term lacks both precision and a priori content, its contextual allure continues to entice and will be the centre of this section's attention. In its wake, the chapter will analyse the construction of historical geographies attaching to some of the material and ideal transformations customarily thought to fill 'modernity' with meaning. Of these, processes associated with and characterised by capitalism will be the first to be accorded scrutiny, allowing us to stress the extended historical trajectory and geographical specificities attaching to this seminal development in the historical geography of humankind. In a similar vein, the chapter will focus on the industrial revolution and urbanisation as inter-related processes that warrant historico-geographical analyses. Subsequent chapters move the focus from productionist processes anchored in real economies to those associated with knowledge and science, acknowledging that these, too, contribute centrally to the ongoing history of modernity. Here we set out to question widely used notions such as the 'scientific revolution', 'the enlightenment' or the deployment of teleological modes of reasoning more generally within contemporary accounts of modernity. A central tenant in these accounts has become the work accomplished through 'networks' of various kinds, rendering the many possible connections between writing, the imagination and economic practices, as well as the sites and technologies through which they are established, objects of geographical curiosity. The final chapter of the section turns its attention to the accompanying normative project attached to notions of modernity, summarised succinctly underneath the rubrics of 'democracy' and of the 'public

sphere'. Arguing for a broadening of the concept of modernity in terms of practical work and research being carried out, this chapter seeks to establish more cogent linkages between space, place, sites and the construction of specifically 'modern' forms of legitimacy.

Section 7: Beyond the Border

The penultimate section of the book addresses 'big picture' themes in historical geographical research. The first chapter on globalisation begins with the vexed question of periodization: when does globalization begin and how do we define its stages of evolution? These are questions that have exercised historical geographers (and other social scientists) for a long time and while there is no established consensus, we argue along with Arjun Appadurai (1996), that contemporary globalisation has significant 'precursors' and 'sources' in the past and it is only through a deeper understanding of such historical precedents that we can begin to come to terms with the nature and dynamic of these global-scale changes in the present. If globalisation marks a longstanding concern of historical geographers, the theme of the next chapter in this section, 'governmentality,' addresses a more recent concern of historical geographers. Drawing on the work of French thinker Michel Foucault, historical geographers have turned their attention to analysing what has been described as the 'spatial ontology' of power (Philo 2000: 218). Foucault is unusual among European philosophers for insisting that space is not the stage on which social relations 'play out', but is actually constitutive of those self-same relations. This chapter shows how historical geographers have developed this core idea through a range of empirical case studies. The final chapter focuses on 'social

nature' and considers how the material world has been modulated and changed over time. This concern runs to the core of the discipline of geography, but it is of central importance to historical geographers who add to the 'cultural' reading of landscapes, and the 'political' reading of ecology, an historical framing of nature that is at once alive and sensitive to the transformations pressed on the world by human and nonhuman actors.

Section 8: The Production of Historical Geographical Knowledge

The final section of the book consciously adopts what could be called a 'meta-theoretical' position to investigate the conditions of possibility for historical geographical scholarship to emerge. Given the title and remit of the book, the first target of such an undertaking must surely be the very notion (as well as the associated practices) of historical geography itself. As sub-disciplines go, this one is a fairly eclectic and broad one; even so, it defines what it is through practices of inclusion and exclusion, in the process naturalizing the pursuit of certain forms of knowledge. In this section, we focus on the epistemological coining of concepts informing the production of knowledge in historical geography, while also contextualizing and deconstructing some of its key techniques, discourses and manners of thinking more generally. Not surprisingly, the notion of 'evidence' is central to this endeavour – and it bears analysing in detail how evidence is variously constructed and theoretically informed. The section thus considers questions of fieldwork, sources and cartography, for example, in the context of a broader set of ordering practices within the discipline of geography. The emphasis on visual methodological practices is not accidental given their centrality in the annals of historical geography. The sub-discipline has

long used and critiqued 'the visual' as a means of communication. Finally, the section variously considers the broader import of historical geographical critique. Given both its temporal and spatial concerns, historical geography is perhaps uniquely poised to expound critical contextualized analyses of the worlds of the past and, in doing so, to offer important readings too of the legacies of those worlds in the present.

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