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Much of late nineteenth and twentieth century geography is nothing less than the ideology of dominant social classes in disguise. To understand why this is so, there is a need for a historical evaluation of academic geography. Questions must be asked concerning the origins and aims of the discipline. More importantly, who become geographers and what did they achieve?

Geography as a discipline was institutionalised in the Victorian era. Previous to this, many scholars working in such fields as botany, natural history and zoology had interested themselves in geographic distributions of their subjects of study, but it was not until the great colonial expansion of the late 19th and 20th centuries that the value of the map and distributional information was realised. The colonial powers, realising how beneficial geographic work in their established and prospective colonies would be in enabling them to increase their exploitation of these countries, readily funded the emergent discipline of geography and encouraged their geographers to do research overseas. The role that geography played in the spread of colonialism cannot be underestimated. Mabogunje, writing in 1975, stated that "the geographical profession played a not inconsiderable role in directing national efforts and consciousness towards colonial expansion".

The work that geographers did in the colonies overseas was not intended as an examination of the effects of colonialism on the indigenous population, but to exploit them. These populations were regarded with contempt and this attitude pervaded Victorian school textbooks. Africans, for example, were portrayed as lazy and unintelligent and this was put down to the hot climate which slowed down their mental processes and thus, retarded the development of their civilisations! This was the Victorian geographers' attitude, which not only exposed their tendency to view the colonies through western eyes, judging them by western standards, but provided, perhaps unwittingly, an ideological justification of colonialism. Some probably sincerely felt that they were bringing progress and civilisation to the 'darkies'. Back home, however, nothing was done to improve the lot of the working classes, who worked long hours for little money and lived in squalor. Geography at this stage of its development was clearly not interested in benefitting all sections of humanity.

These attitudes arose among academics for two reasons:

1. Academia was an upper class preserve. Only wealthy people became geographers, botanists, chemists etc.
2. Darwin's idea of struggle and selection was in vogue at the time. This organic analogy was used in politics and economics to justify 'laissez-faire', though this was hardly Darwin's fault! The idea of 'lebenstraum', which the world came to understand most fully with Hitler's expansion across Europe and extermination of the Jews in World War II, was also derived directly from Darwin's theory of evolution. It is important to realise, however, that colonialism was 'lebenstraum' in a geographical context. Hitler did not invent it all by himself.

And so the aim of geography in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was to locate and map resources worthy of exploitation in the colonies, to advise on the building of infrastructures to aid in the extraction of these resources, and to map areas suitable for colonisation by Europeans. It was a descriptive geography and was notably lacking in its concern for people. It acknowledged no social responsibilities, and, unwittingly or otherwise, it provided an ideological justification for colonialism.

The 'new' geography of the post-war and contemporary period was hardly new at all. It merely shifted its focus. Instead of "how can we exploit the colonies to our best advantage?", the question was, "how best can we exploit our own people?", (not that they were not being exploited already). The emergent world economy made it necessary for industry to be highly competitive and geographers readily applied themselves to the concern of optimum location for industries. Yet again, it was the middle classes who were benefitting most from this. Little was done concerning the effect of this "mega" world economy on working people in the world over. A socialist revolution which turned into a farce, had come and gone, and although the wages and living standards of the working classes had improved in the western world at least, the same regime remained, and still persists. Not

only geographers, but also sociologists and other social scientists, helped maintain this status quo and trumpeted the ideology of the ruling social classes. While geographers neatly worked out cost-benefit analyses, sociologists drew up categories of social phenomena and allotted different people to each of these. The work done to actually improve the living conditions of those at the bottom of the economic scale was negligible.

Victorian attitudes still pervade school textbooks. There is a bias not only in what is taught, but also which countries are taught. Thus, British schoolchildren tend to be taught about former British colonies, while Americans are taught about Latin America (cf. Values, Relevance and Policy, Section III, unit 3, 1977). Also, the age at which this is taught is important. Children are usually taught about less developed countries first, and then about their own countries. This is because it is thought that non-western countries have simple and uncomplicated societies and, therefore, are easier to comprehend. These attitudes are based on two very serious misconceptions:

1. that there is no element of social change in L.D.C.'s, and
2. that people in L.D.C.'s have been carrying on in the same economic, social and cultural patterns since human life began on this planet.

In other words, the dynamism of the non-western countries is being denied. How easily the western world forgets about those symbols of civilisation, such as the pyramids in Egypt and the great cities of South America, and how the great Roman Empire of the western world eventually declined and fell. It is also worth pointing out here that a hunter-gatherer lifestyle is not necessarily inferior to a sedentary, materialistic lifestyle. Life for the Ertebolle people of Denmark (c. 6,600 - 5,300 B.P.) was quite comfortable and secure (cf. Peter Rowley-Conway, 1982), and the Kung bushmen in the Kalahari desert are a living example of this. They are living in an environment more hostile than that of Ethiopia, but because the Kalahari is a marginal environment, it has remained unscathed by imperialistic adventure. This is not the case in Ethiopia.

The 'new' geography still dominates today in the schools and universities of the western world. Since the '60's, however, a new group of geographers have been thinking along different lines. These 'radical' geographers, taking Marx and Kropotkin as their mentors, are declaring what geography ought to be and are actually acting by their words. They are attempting to free geography from the shackles of western middle-class ideology and give it to the people. While their cause is very admirable, it seems they are preaching to the already-converted. Sales of their journal, *Antipode*, dropped when it began to include more 'Marxist' articles, (cf. Peet, 1977). There is still hope for it, however. Peet's *Radical Geography* (1977) attests to the seriousness of their intent. In the introductory chapter, their position is made clear:

- They do not accept that science is value-free. All science, particularly social science, serves some political purpose, and
2. The conventional established society is served and sustained by conventional established science.

There are two problems with radical geography, however. Firstly, contrary to the Victorian bias on the physical landscape, radical geography has been concerned primarily with man. There is a need for the study of both man and the environment, for the former lives in the latter and cannot survive without it. Secondly, who are radical geographers? While not attempting to doubt their sincerity and commitment, it must be said that these geographers are still of a privileged class. While their own mentor would applaud their work and convictions, he also had this to say back in 1901: "besides, it must not be forgotten that men of science too, are human, and that most of them either belong by descent to the possessing classes and are steeped in the prejudices of their class, or else are in the actual service of the government. Not out of the universities, therefore, does anarchism come" (cf. *The Essential Kropotkin*, 1975). The problem is that education is not available to the masses. In the U.S. third level education is often paid for and is thus a luxury of the middle classes. The situation in Britain and Ireland is somewhat better, but the hidden curriculum of the primary and secondary schools tends to militate against a large number of working class people actually making it to third level education. The middle-classes have the monopoly on education as it has on the political, economic and ideological aspects of society. As the radical geographers have come from such a background, it is highly probable that they could get sucked back into the system.

Given that they are not, that they continue in their radicalism, can radical geography work? Anderson has defined ideologies as "systems of ideas which give distorted and partial accounts of reality, with the objective, and often unintended effect of serving the partial interests of a particular social group or class". (*Radical Geography*, Peet, 1977). If many geographers themselves are unaware of how their work is nothing more than an ideology that serves the ruling classes, how are the people en masse to know this? When their factory shuts down because it apparently was not profitable enough, they know something is wrong; but how to put their finger on why it did so is the question social scientists and radical geographers should be explaining to them.

Perhaps, if for the moment, radical geographers do nothing else but make their fellow unenlightened geographers aware of how they are serving a political purpose, some benefit will be gained. Geography itself will also have to revolutionise itself as a discipline. At present, it can hardly define itself. An introductory book to geography will give as many definitions of the subject as pages, and one is still left with the question — what is geography? Olavi Grano proposes problem orientation rather than disciplinary characteristics as the defining feature of geography today (cf. "External Influence and Internal Change in the Development of Geography"). Gregory (*Ideology, Science and Human Geography*, 1978) takes this a step further when he quotes Friere (1972); "a critical science cannot afford to let its problemisation be devalued through relying on a focalised view of problems rather than on seeing them as dimensions of a totality". This is calling for the abandonment of the traditional disciplines and the establishment of a new radical science which would transcend disciplinary barriers.

There is still hope for geography and other modern social sciences to redeem themselves. The radical geographers have taken a step; one that was obvious to Kropotkin at the turn of the century and obviously earlier still to Marx. It has to stop serving political and economic interests and serve the people. Only then will it cease to help maintain the imperialistic world economy and begin to serve humanity.

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