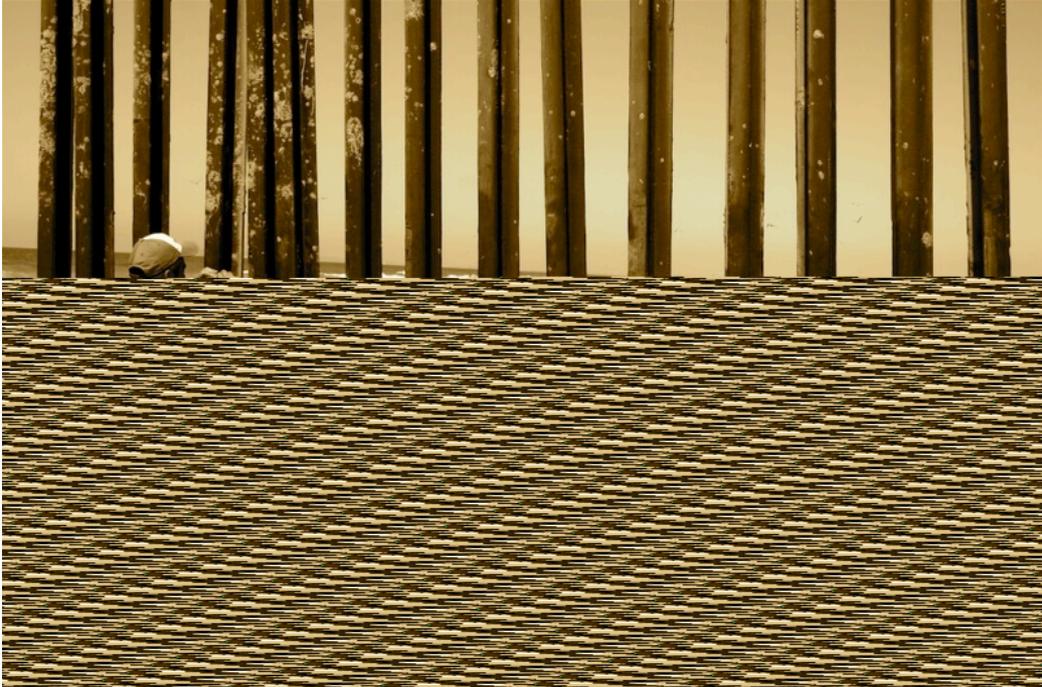


Part II

Space and Society



US/Mexico Border: Playas de Tijuana, Mexico. Photo and © by K. Flo Razowsky.

The relationship between space and society has, arguably, constituted the bulk of critical scholarship in geography. The chapters in Part II can only represent a modest selection of the vast range of topics and the variety of approaches pursued by critical geographers. The chapters also illustrate that critical geographies cannot be easily pigeonholed into singular themes. Hence, there is considerable overlap with the chapters in other parts of this book. Like the chapters in Part I, the chapters in Part II reflect the scholarly, political and material contexts of the times and places in which they were written. They range in method, style, approach and outlook, reflecting, for example, a tradition of detailed description and field observation characteristic of geographic research in the 19th Century, the political optimism of radical activism of

the 1970s, and the political momentum the feminist movement had gained in the 1980s.

The first chapter by Elisée Reclus (1830-1905) represents, to some extent, conventional geographical scholarship of the 19th Century, involving keen field observation of both the natural environment and human organization. On the other hand, Reclus also departed from conventions by expressly including society within nature, rather than separating the two. Politically, however, he was certainly far from the mainstream; he was reported to have said that “Yes, I am a geographer, but above all I am an anarchist” (Woodcock, 1988, 20, quoted in Clark, 2003, 88). This chapter represents an early stage in Reclus’ work, shaping his aversion to racism, commercial exploitation and other practices of oppression, and guiding his intellectual development towards a holistic perspective of the relationship between nature and humanity as a foundation for a vision of society that embraces the principles of “mutual aid, cooperation, solidarity, and compassion” (Clark, 2008, 89; but see Kearns, forthcoming, on the problematic civilization hierarchies in Reclus’ work).

The subsequent five chapters reflect a historical context when radical thought was beginning to reshape the discipline of Geography in North America. A catalytic role in this “revolution” was played by the journal *Antipode*, which was founded in 1969 (and still publishes rigorously) and from which these five chapters are taken. One of the pioneers of radical geography was James Blaut (1927-2000), a theorist of anti-imperialism. In his chapter, Blaut uses the term “ethnoscience” to suggest that Western science, far from revealing objective truths, is deeply implicated in imperialism and neo-colonialism. Brian Hudson goes further and considers the entire discipline of Geography as an irredeemably colonial endeavor. Unlike Blaut who spent a career in pursuit of radical scholarship, Hudson, in the words of another prominent frontrunner of the radical revolution in Geography, “disappeared after that one superb piece.” Nevertheless, this piece offers a powerful and lasting account of Geography’s role in serving colonialism, militarism, economic exploitation and cultural subordination. Some of the material presented in Part IV along with other geographical work (e.g. Hewitt, 2001) illustrates how Geography has continued to embrace this disgraceful role. The Egyptian author Anouar Abdel-Malek offers yet another perspective on imperialism by discussing the ways in which geopolitical alignments and national liberation movements mutually shape each other. This perspective is situated in the historical context of the Cold War and the revolutions that had occurred in countries such as China and Cuba.

Today, the topic of revolution is rarely seriously considered in academic scholarship and teaching (see Smith, 2007) – unless in an uncritical technical sense, for example, as in “digital” revolution. Some contemporary critical geographers may look back with envy to early radical geography for its vibrant optimism and confidence in making a difference. David Harvey, for example, seeks a “revolutionary” theory (resonating with Karl Marx’ 3rd Thesis on Feuerbach that we discuss in the Introduction) that is powerful enough to “bringing about a humanizing social change.”

An even more forceful example of the spirit of early radical geography is Richard Peet's outline of a "Geography of Human Liberation", which envisions a model of human existence that arises from the synthesis of two theories of revolution that are still often viewed as mutually exclusive.

In the 1980s, feminist geography emerged as a driving force in the theorization of the relationship between space and society. Writing in 1984, also in the journal *Antipode*, Suzanne MacKenzie (1950-1998) argued in her chapter that gender research has pursued particular politics and a socialist perspective, which shares important features with the perspectives developed earlier by radical geographers but which did not focus on gender relations. Her argument that gender is an essential factor structuring human-environment relations resonates with some of the chapters in Part III, illustrating again how integrated various themes in critical geography truly are. The chapter by Linda McDowell and Doreen Massey presents another approach to critical feminist scholarship. Through rigorous empirical and historical analyses, they demonstrate how gender relations are materially grounded in capitalist development and how the lives of women are affected by these developments in a place-specific manner. Janice Monk and Cindi Katz deploy yet another set of methods, including personal testimony and demographic analysis, to argue for a life-course perspective that situates gender in the context of the life cycle and that challenges the universal applicability of 'Western' ideas of gender relations.

Kim England also assumes a feminist perspective to reflect on research practices, scrutinize data collection and interpretation conventions, and explore the pitfalls and limits of critical scholarship. By questioning the very process in which scholars are "making geography", England penetrates the very core of what the term "critical geographies" represents (see Introduction and the chapters in Part I). Katharyne Mitchell's chapter also assumed an inward looking perspective and warns her fellow geographers not to celebrate prematurely concepts and ideas as transformative, when these concepts and ideas may indeed reproduce hegemonic processes of capital accumulation. To ensure that academic concepts, such as "hybridity", are not appropriated by profit-making interests, Mitchell suggests that such concepts should always be grounded in a historical and geographical context. The final chapter in Part II, by Bobby Wilson, accomplishes precisely such a historical and geographical contextualization by exposing the geographical variability of racism in the making of places, such as in Birmingham (US) and Johannesburg (South Africa).

The widely differing emphases and concerns in the chapters in Part II show both the great diversity within critical geography and the importance of geographical and historical contexts in the making of critical geographers' arguments and perspectives. Understanding the context of intellectual currents (their social and political embeddedness) enables the very recognition of subjectivity and self-reflexivity that are fundamental to developing critical approaches. For instance, the centrality of gender relations in the making of places was not appreciated until after feminist geography rose to greater prominence following considerable institutional

struggle. Wider political processes created conditions for the development of feminist approaches in geography and for feminist critiques of radical geography as it stood in the 1970s. These chapters can therefore be viewed both as a series of snapshots of the multi-directional and meandering paths of critical thought in the geographic discipline and as representations of major historical changes in critical geography through internal and reflexive critiques.

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