

3. GEOGRAPHY, CULTURE, VALUES AND EDUCATION

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The International Charter on Geographical Education adopted by the International Geographical Union (IGU, 1992) advocates that through their studies in geography students should develop *attitudes and values* conducive to appreciation for the beauty of the world (both physical and human), concern for the quality of the environment, respect for the rights of all people to equality, and dedication to seeking solutions to human problems (p. 6, emphasis added). Furthermore, they should understand 'the significance of *attitudes and values* in decision making' (*ibid*, 7, emphasis added). Moreover, the Charter claims that geographical education contributes strongly to international education by encouraging 'understanding and respect for all peoples, their *cultures*, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic *cultures* and cultures of other nations' (*ibid*, emphasis added). In a similar vein, the Working Group entrusted with the task of constructing a Geography National Curriculum for England in the early 1990s was of the view that geographical education should enable pupils to 'acquire the knowledge and develop the skills and understanding necessary to identify and investigate important *cultural*, social and political issues relating to place, space and environment, with sensitivity to the range of *attitudes and values* associated with such issues' (DES, 1989, emphasis added). From statements such as these, it is evident that 'culture' and 'values' are perceived as essential constituents of geography and geographical education. The intention of this chapter is, therefore, to explore the interface between 'geography', 'culture', 'values' and 'education'.

We need look no further than the concept of 'culture' to illustrate this point. It is, Raymond Williams (1976) suggests, 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'. For geographers too, it is 'a notoriously slippery concept' (McDowell, 1994) that 'resists simple definitions' (Mathewson, 1996, 97). In Barnett's (1998, 631) view, it functions as "compacted doctrine" (Empson, 1951, 39), a word which secretes a whole host of senses every time it is reiterated but is hardly ever in need of detailed conceptual clarification'. Even so, despite the complexity of the concept, there has been a burgeoning interest in 'culture' over the last twenty years or so across the spectrum of the humanities and the social sciences (Gregory, 1996; Mathewson, 1996) with a corresponding turn away from 'economy' (Ray and Sayer, 1999).

This so-called 'cultural turn' has brought about significant reconfigurations in the intellectual landscape of human geography. In North America, it gave rise to a 'new cultural geography' that sought to distance itself from Carl Sauer's 'Berkeley School' which

had set much of cultural geography's agenda since the 1920s (Mathewson, 1996). In what became a seminal paper, Duncan (1980) roundly criticised Sauerian cultural geography on the grounds that it had largely and uncritically accepted a superorganic view of culture as expounded by contemporary anthropologists such as Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie and Leslie White. He argued that the superorganic mode of explanation 'reifies the notion of culture assigning it ontological status and causative power' (*ibid*, 181). Culture is seen as a holistic, autonomous entity that 'functions and evolves according to its own internal logic and presumed set of laws' (Zelinsky, 1967, cited in *ibid*, 181), transcending and operating independently of the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups. It is, in the words of Lowie (1917, 17), 'a thing *sui generis* which can only be explained in terms of itself'. Moreover, there is an assumption that the values embedded in cultures are internalised by individuals causing them to behave in distinctive and predictable ways, thus implying a relatively 'passive and impotent' (Duncan, 1980, 190) view of human agency. Duncan not only considered this superorganic mode of explanation erroneous but suggested also that it impeded the construction of a more critical socio-cultural geography by masking many problematic social, economic and political relationships in explaining the interactions of humans with their various environments. Duncan, at the time, stated little of substance about alternative directions, other than to suggest a merger of the social and cultural sub-areas of geography. However, his paper, and the debate that ensued, provided the impetus for a fundamental 're-reading' of cultural geography in North America.

In Britain, the 'cultural turn' in geography, had its own antecedents and has subsequently followed a somewhat different trajectory to that in North America. With a few notable exceptions, British cultural geographers have shown little interest in the work of their anthropologically oriented North American counterparts (Duncan, 1994). Their inspiration has come in the main from the highly influential Marxist oriented Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. Thus, it was predominantly from a perspective of cultural materialism that Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) added further fuel to the criticism of Sauerian cultural geography. It was, they argued, overly concerned with the material elements of culture, as opposed to its symbolic forms. Its concerns, they claimed, were 'dominantly rural and antiquarian, narrowly focused on *physical artefacts* (log cabins, fences and field boundaries)' (*ibid*, p. 96) produced by stable, unitary cultural groups. They envisaged a new cultural geography that too would 'assert the centrality of culture in human affairs' (*ibid*, p.96). But culture for them is not a transcendental object that exists independent of social actors. Rather, 'it is the very medium through which social change is experienced, contested and constituted' (*ibid*, p. 95).

Jackson (1989) went on to argue for a revitalised cultural geography based on a reformulation of the concepts of 'culture' and 'geography' and a convergence with social geography. He rejected a unitary and elitist view of culture, focusing instead on 'the plurality of cultural forms through which dominant meanings are contested' (p. 177). Culture for him 'involves relations of power, reflected in patterns of dominance and subordination' (*ibid*, pp 2-3). From this standpoint, he applied a range of ideas from cultural studies to the study of popular culture, gender, sexuality, race and the politics of

language, focusing in each case on the spatial constitution and territorial expression of these phenomena. In doing so, he opened up new vistas for geographical research and scholarship which others have been quick to exploit. Subsequently, we have witnessed the emergence of a new breed of social/cultural geographers who draw eclectically on a variety of methodological and theoretical orientations, most notably feminism, postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, in their engagement with a plethora of topics and themes relevant to the study of culture in all its manifestations. Their endeavours are, to say the least, impressive and include geographies of sexualities (Bell and Valentine, 1995); food consumption (Bell and Valentine, 1997); youth cultures (Skelton and Valentine, 1998); illness, impairment and disability (Butler and Parr, 1999); children's playing, living and learning (Holloway and Valentine, 2000); and human-animal relations (Philo and Wilbert, 2000).

Reflecting on Anglo-American developments in cultural geography, Johnson (1997) argues that the 'cultural turn' lacks a core, 'being rather a series of sometimes interwoven strands coming out of previous approaches'. He identifies four such strands concerning postmodernism; feminism; positionality, difference and identity politics; and language, texts and discourse. Likewise for Cook *et al.* (2000), 'there has been less a *cultural turn* than a series of cultural insights, turns, multiple circuits'. Their book, *Cultural Turns/Geographical Turns*, which 'breaks the boundaries of geography itself and overlaps with work in anthropology, cultural studies, sociology and the humanities', (*ibid*) captures the breadth, diversity and flavour of the new cultural geography in four sections dealing with 'Popular Culture and cultural texts', 'Culture and political economy', 'Nature and society' and 'Spaces and subjectivities'.

There are good grounds for claiming that the fusion and revitalisation of the 'social' and 'cultural' in geography has contributed significantly to what is now identified as a 'moral turn' (Smith, 1997). This 'turn' was clearly discernable in the endeavours in the early 1900s of the Social and Cultural Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers 'to establish the geography of everyday moralities given by the different moral assumptions and supporting arguments that particular peoples in particular places make about 'good' and 'bad'/'right' and 'wrong'/'just' and 'unjust'/'worthy' and unworthy' (Philo, 1991, p. 16). This venture, however, was not entirely new but, rather, built on the interest shown in a range of normative issues by humanistic and radical geographers from the 1970s onwards.

No one would seriously dispute that the subject of geography, at whatever level taught, is capable of engaging students with a range of issues which are of fundamental moral concern - poverty, pollution, resource depletion, deforestation, genetic farming, urban decay - and in debates as to how these issues might be addressed. It is therefore surprising that it is only in recent years that we have witnessed forays by academic geographers into the realm of ethics, the branch of philosophy that 'involves systematic intellectual reflection on morality in general or specific moral concerns in particular' (Proctor, 1998). Smith (2000, p. viii), for example, claims that his book *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference* 'is the first integrated text to explore the interface of geography and ethics'.



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