

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

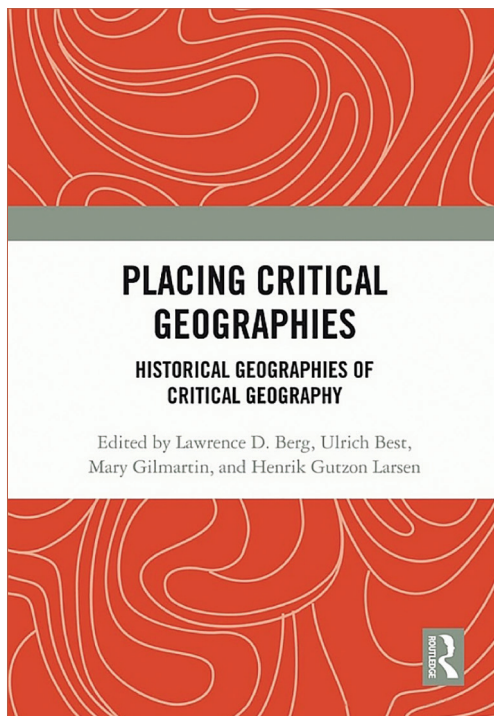
Berg, L.D., Best, U., Gilmartin, M. and Larsen, H.G. (eds.): *Placing Critical Geography. Historical Geographies of Critical Geography*. London and New York, Routledge, 2022. 331 p.

Placing Critical Geography is rather a thought-provoking and inspiring collection of geographically situated histories of critical geographies in various locations around the globe. The editors of the book aimed at grasping differences in the production of critical knowledge in a range of academic settings using Kirsten SIMONSEN's (1996) conceptualization as their starting point. Accordingly, in compiling the chapters, they adopted the "space as difference" and "space as social spatiality" approaches in order that the chapters can "capture the difference that space makes and the different social relations that lead to different conceptualizations and understanding of the spatial" (Lawrence D. BERG, Ulrich BEST, Mary GILMARTIN, and Henrik Gutzon LARSEN: Chapter 1, p. 4). All the 37 authors offer an insight into the evolvment and shaping of critical geography in mostly nation states and linguistic groups or regions typically as "insiders." Thus, they offer insight into the

following locations in the following order: Palestine (and beyond), South Africa, the USA and Anglo-Canada, Latin America, Japan, China, Francophone and German-speaking countries, Ireland, Italy, Nordic countries, Spain, the United Kingdom, Australia and Aotearoa New Zeland.

It is not only the large number and diversity of the chapters that I cannot undertake to summarize them in any way. The stories presented in the book are all specific and complex. I strongly believe that in order to be able to understand "how space matters," all the chapters, the changing economic, social, political and institutional contexts presented, and the personal stories selected by the authors must be studied carefully.

This review is not only partial but also subjective. Not only because of the characteristics of reviews in general, but also because it has a less common form of subjectivity. The (above-mentioned) concept of "space as social spatiality" is partly coming from Henri LEFEBVRE's interpretation of space (1991), according to which each mode of production leaves its footprint on the production of space. I believe that this alone can create a feeling of "something missing" in readers, namely that ex-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is not represented in the volume. That said, I am not going to be the one that voices criticism in connection with that. On the contrary. This book was still in the making well over a decade ago when I was invited to write a chapter on the critical geography of this region. At the time, however, I did not think I could provide information on any meaningful progress compared with the information on the absence of critical geography in Hungary I had shared earlier (TIMÁR, J. 2003). My conviction at the time, namely that the situation was not any different in the region either, was substantiated by a conference of the International Critical Geography Group (ICGG) held in Békéscsaba (Hungary) in 2002 as CEE researchers represented only a small proportion of the 180 participants from 40 countries (BŁALASIEWICZ, L. 2003). However, there has been some discernible change since then. Currently, a change of generations offering some hope and a social turn also reflected in the application of critical social theories are taking place, putting a final end to Soviet-type social geography. Therefore, seizing the opportunity provided by this review, in the conclusion, from among the major issues presented in the book I will cherry-pick specifically those that bear relevance to critical geography evolving in Hungary (hopefully elsewhere in CEE too). I hope such subjectivity will not divert attention from the book,



rather it will contribute to the realization of the goal of “placing critical geographies.”

Such realization is not confined to a mere descriptive presentation of the individual, locally different trajectories of critical geography. The book can be deemed as a challenge to “the hegemonic history of critical geography” defined by the editors. This kind of history “reduces the multiple and complex histories of critical geographies around the world to a singular story that reinforces Anglo-American hegemony, where critical geography is understood to have originated in the United Kingdom and the United States and ‘diffused’ outward to the peripheries of academic knowledge production” (Chapter 1, p. 1).

One of the results of the approach disassociating itself from that kind of history is that the chronology of the chapters does not start with the end of the 1960s or the 1970s. Although this period is commonly regarded as a decisive moment in critical geography in most (groups) of the countries studied, the authors go back much earlier, in some cases even to the 19th century, to search for the roots. Linda PEAKE and Eric SHEPPARD, who discussed the USA and Anglo-Canada (Chapter 4), also break with earlier traditions. As a result, in addition to/instead of a few better-known predecessor geographers representing radical geography with its roots traced back to 1969 (the year of the publication of *Antipode*), they also present the activities of the forerunners overlooked before. Mary GILMARTIN (Chapter 10) raises the issue of a seemingly controversial position of Ireland. She is aware of the fact that if the definition of Anglo-American hegemony is language-based, due to English being used as a de facto first language, Ireland, too, must be considered a part of the core. However, this approach hides Ireland’s controversial colonial and postcolonial relations with Britain. GILMARTIN mostly reveals the role that these relations play in the production and circulation of critical geography. Koji NAKASHIMA, Tamami FUKUDA and Takeshi HARAGUCHI (Chapter 6) have adopted an analytical method as an alternative to the assessment of critical geography in Japan (MIZUOKA, F.T. *et al.* 2005) that has attracted considerable attention and that they also appreciate. One of the components of their alternative approach is a multi-linear history of social, cultural and other related studies instead of a focus on the history of economic geography. Ari LEHTINEN and Kirsten SIMONSEN (Chapter 12) present the in-between status of Nordic critical geography. It is not only between internationalization and situated knowledges, and representation and materiality that such in-betweenness exists. As a number of examples illustrate, in-betweenness also reflects the duality of Anglophone and continental European inspiration.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing here that probably the most comprehensive and consistent argument against “the hegemonic history of critical geography” is Wing-Shing TANG’s presentation of the history of critical geography in China (Chapter 7). In so doing, the author

introduces an alternative methodology called spatial story methodology where he is helped by the tradition of non-dualistic Chinese *tongbian* thinking, which emphasizes the mutual embeddedness of contradictions. He concludes that critical geography in China is not a “mere variegated version of its western counterpart” (p. 138). It is specific paths that can describe differences best. Challenging, among others, David HARVEY, he explains that there are spatio-historical paths other than those characterized by the logic of capital, strong private property rights and free markets. As he puts it: “Because of this, a benchmark of criticality for critical geography that is derived from western capitalism and then uncritically deployed to other contexts, such as China, is not particularly useful or insightful. The crux of the issue is not so much the mere identification and documentation of pluralisms or diversities alongside this benchmark, but rather the need to acknowledge the existence of many more distinctive criticalities that have been derived from disparate, but inter-connected, forces and processes.” (p. 138).

The origin of these criticalities is a fundamental question in each chapter. Critical social theories are inspiration, key sources and, at the same time, tools of critical geographical research aimed at understanding and changing the numerous forms of inequality, oppression, socio-spatial injustice, which is also reflected in the individual chapters. The importance of the spatiality of critical geography is reflected in the analyses of the situational embeddedness and travelling of these theories. An excellent argument against “the hegemonic history of critical geography” that would be strengthening Anglo-American hegemony is the fact that the career of Élisée RECLUS and his friend Pyotr KROPOTKIN, two anarchist geographers summarizing the theoretical approach of criticality, started in France and Russia, respectively. In addition to the international impact of their works from over 150 years ago that is still detectable, they also disseminated their knowledge while travelling, even if they did not always meet a receptive audience. KROPOTKIN, for instance, limited the channels of his professional discourses to his personal relationships with his British colleagues because his principles prevented him from becoming the member of any organization under royal patronage, thus that of the Royal Geographical Society, which offered him membership after his visit to London (Kye ASKINS, Kerry BURTON, Jo NORCUP, Joe PAINTER and James D. SIDAWAY: Chapter 14). For those who, for linguistic barriers, could not read Blanca RAMÍREZ’s (2007) study about this in the original, it would be interesting to learn that RECLUS visiting Colombia as an explorer could not earn fame despite his continuous discussions with FRANCISCO JAVIER VERGARA Y VELASCO, a famous local geographer. Fame only came to him in the 1970s, by which time the geographical profession had become receptive thanks to the French Marxists Pierre GEORGE and Yves LACOSTE, mainly in Colombia and Venezuela and, to a lesser extent, in Ecuador (David E. RAMÍREZ,

Gustavo MONTAÑEZ, and Petra ZUSMAN: Chapter 5). It was also attributable mainly to LACOSTE that, after a long period of marginalization, RECLUS's rather diverse works written in the extremely critical spirit of an anarchist were re-discovered and thought further from the 1970s (Rodolphe DE KONINCK and Michel BRUNEAU: Chapter 8).

These events lead us to a period when Marxism facilitating critical geography started to gain ground, a fact mentioned by all the authors. This review allows us to highlight from among the analyses few examples (or persons) only. They all mention the impact of the most famous British and American Marxist geographers (in particular David HARVEY) that is detectable in nearly all the countries studied. It is sometimes the case that the concepts of the original theorists or Marxist philosophers like Henri LEFEBVRE reached geographers through their (re)interpretation. However, the book also presents facts like the one according to which a book on the geographical study of the mode of production and territorial structure written by Gerhard SCHMIDT-RENNER, an East German geographer in 1966 proved influential in Denmark quite early (LEHTINEN, A. and SIMONSEN, K.: Chapter 12). For instance, the influence of LACOSTE's works mentioned above was not limited to critical geography in Latin America. Making an observation in connection with the Spanish translation of one of his books, Abel ALBET and Maria-Dolors GARCÍA-RAMON (Chapter 13, p. 248) attributed LACOSTE's significant impact especially on university students to the fact that "he came from French geography, which was viewed as closer to Spanish geography than Anglo-American geography. (In fact, Anglo-American geography was until recently seen as a 'foreign' tradition.)"

Feminist and, to a smaller extent, queer theories are mentioned in the most consistent manner among critical social theories in the chapters. It is true that the authors do not always focus on the effects of these theories, rather they analyze the history and consequences of "gender geography." Differences in their approaches and narratives can encourage the continuation of international debates on whether (sometimes descriptive and apolitical) gender geography can be regarded as critical geography (e.g., LONGHURST, R. 2002). Chapter 13 on Spain definitely answers this question. While ALBET and GARCIA-RAMON make it clear that a number of Spanish geographers studying gender issues come from radical and Marxist geography, they also state unambiguously that gender geography is "a way of doing critical geography" (Chapter 13, p. 252). At the same time, the authors of the book point out delays in, or the absence of, the social acceptance of feminism and gender issues in a number of chapters.

The presence of anti-colonial/postcolonial/decolonial approaches inspiring critical geography is also context-dependent. I have only chosen three examples to illustrate its specific forms: the topics of critical geography in Palestine are provided by continuous responses to dispossession, denationalization and refusal of rights and

presence (Ghazi-Walid FALAH and Nadia ABU-ZAHRA: Chapter 2). The social and political environment created by apartheid is a major source of geography undergoing radicalization in South Africa (Brij MAHARAJ and Maano RAMUTSINDELA: Chapter 3). In Aotearoa New Zealand, regarding Maori geography, research in the context of colonialism opened up new possibilities for critical geography (Robyn DOWLING, Richard HOWITT, and Robyn LONGHURST: Chapter 15).

In addition to the theorists already mentioned, there are a number of critical geographers or their predecessors from other disciplines presented in the chapters whose theories/concepts enriched critical geography at an international scale. Without an aim of providing an exhaustive list, it is worth mentioning those to whom the authors of the book contribute a whole subchapter: Milton SANTOS, Mao ZEDONG, Claude RAFFESTIN, Lucio GAMBI, Massimo QUAINI, Giuseppe DEMATTEIS, Franco FARINELLI, and Gunnar OLSSON.

The diversity of the critical theories mentioned here characterizes critical geography in most of the places studied. It follows, therefore, that most cannot point out one single defined school of thought. Most accept this and even think that it is an advantage; however, ASKINS, K. *et al.* think further about this issue in Chapter 14: "If 'critical geography' is located at the overlap between geography and critical theory, then it is a very diffuse and loosely defined field, and perhaps too diffuse to be meaningful; if there is nothing much outside the category, then how is the category helpful? For many, activism of some kind (whether in the classroom, the academy or beyond) remains an essential component of critical geography, though this insistence may be tempered with a reluctance to exclude those who share similar political goals but don't consider activism to be their forte." (p. 275).

What is certain is that chapters bring activism of this kind into a sharp focus. This is no coincidence because it was mainly (groups of) university students and their campaigns that gave an impetus to the evolvment or even an explosion-like emergence of critical geographies. ('Opening events' often meant the launch of new journals. *Antipode* in the USA was indeed a key source of inspiration. However, as, e.g., the link between *Herodote* in France and *Hérodote/Italia*, its Italian version reveals, it was not only the 'center-periphery' relations that worked in this respect, either [Elena DELL'AGNESE, Claudio MINCA, and Marcella SCHMIDT DI FRIEDBERG: Chapter 11]). Comprising interviews conducted with persons who participated in the events of the day as well, an analysis of critical geography in West Germany provides the most detailed account of the particularly important role of the young generation (Bernd BELINA, Ulrich BEST, Matthias NAUMANN, and Anke STRÜVER: Chapter 9). A story taking place in Rome and leading the reader to the present is an excellent example of connecting theory with practice. Campaigns against the neo-

liberalisation of universities took the form of occupying the roofs of universities, which was also fuelled by Angelo Turco's conceptualizations of the processes of territorialization (DELL'AGNESE, E. *et al.*: Chapter 11). Critical pedagogy, action research and cooperation with progressive social movements illustrate relations outside the academia. However, self-criticism was also voiced in connection with this when results were summarised or thoughts about the future were formulated. During this becoming "people's geography" (PEAKE, L. and SHEPPARD, E.: Chapter 4) and using produced knowledge to serve disadvantaged and marginalized groups (FALAH, G. and ABU-ZAHRA, N.: Chapter 2; MAHARAJ, B. and RAMUTSINDELA, M.: Chapter 3) remain an important goal.

Similar and other (e.g., academic) practices of critical geography (launch of new journals, seminars, conferences, regional or wider networks of researchers) seem to take on an increasingly international scale. As this book also proves, there are continuous efforts to put into practice the principles on "internationalism" adopted in Vancouver by approximately 300 geographers and activists, who launched the International Critical Geography Group 25 years ago (SMITH, N. and DESBIENS, C. 1999).

Finally, in keeping with the promise at the beginning of the review, reading this book from a Hungarian/CEE perspective, based on the lessons I find especially relevant and important, I would like to raise two issues for discussion.

One is related to historical analyses, the circumstances in which critical geographies evolved. As the chapter on China (by TANG, W.) makes it clear, even experience long considered to be a cornerstone or a shared characteristic such as "Marxism can give a significant impetus to the development of critical geography" does not necessarily hold true everywhere. Sovietization, which can also be interpreted within the context of the postcolonial and decolonial theories listed in a number of chapters (STENNING, A. and HÖRSCHELMANN, K. 2008; GYÖRI, R. and GYURIS, F. 2012), produced the opposite result in Hungary (TIMÁR, J. 2003). Similar to the situation presented in the chapter on Germany (by BELINA, B. *et al.*), i.e., when Marxism and Leninism became a state ideology, it was used to paralyze the essence of criticism. Therefore, I do not think that critical theories and/or practices can be expected to become an integral part of the differing contexts of critical geographies as long as we allow any hegemonic knowledge production to prevail.

The other issue is related to challenges that critical geographers face currently. One of the most thought-provoking lessons of the book is that the neoliberalization, internationalization and "publish or perish" approach of universities in the 21st century also launched conflicting changes. As opposed to the numerous adverse impacts of these processes that many pointed out (e.g., the recent reinforcing of Anglocentrism [LEHTINEN, A. and SIMONSEN, K.: Chapter 12]), the authors assessing

the situation in Germany present the evolvement of a paradox situation. They find that thanks to the international relations of critical geographers, this process also generated reputation for them (BELINA, B. *et al.*: Chapter 9). However, as a result of a conservative shift, governments in Hungary and a few other countries condemn social research with gender or political content of any kind as undesirable or ideology, i.e., something not scientific (TIMÁR, J. 2019). Therefore, the time does seem to have come for internationalism and coordinated actions as advocated by critical geography. I believe that this book provides knowledge for us that can serve as an excellent tool for the realization of this goal.

JUDIT TIMÁR¹

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