Social geography: new religions and ethnoburbs – contrasts with cultural geography

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In this, my third and final review of social geography, I want to return to the theme on which I started (Peach, 1999). There is a fundamental, but hopefully fruitful, tension between the ways in which social and cultural geography consider matters of common interest. One of the consequences of the fashion for postmodernism in human geography is that cultural geography, with its emphases on hybridity, in-betweenness and flexibility, has claimed the epithet of 'new' while social geography, with its engagement in the 'real' world, with numbers and census categories, seems to have become, by default, 'the old'. Social geography is criticized for its empiricism, its use of received categories and supposed political incorrectness. New cultural geography teaches that everything is nuanced, plastic and fluid, so that the analysis of census-given ethnic or racialized categories may be represented as static and empiricist. However, what social geography does is crucial if we are not to be complacent in the face of injustices. Sue Smith has written eloquently on this dilemma in Ron Johnston's *The challenge for geography* (Smith, 1993a: 54; Johnston, 1993).

I Ethnicity and social geography

'Ethnicity' and 'race' are dangerous topics to discuss in geography. Use them and you are in danger of denunciation by cultural geographers as an essentialist. Don't use them and you abandon the debate to the *Sun* on the one hand or cultural geography's fragmenting, reflexive self-obsession on the other (Valentine, 1998). David Livingstone's (1998) article on authenticity and representation seems to me to go to the heart of the question of making judgements in geography. Academic work depends

on being able to discriminate between good work and bad, on not accepting all judgements as being equally valid. New cultural geography is in danger of being all-accepting. Social geographers recognize that many of their categories are socially constructed. However, demonstrating that ethnic identities are social constructions, or that religion is the opium of the people, does not make the phenomena less potent. Social constructions are more difficult to explode than the Pruitt-Igoe projects (Wolfe, 1993: 81).

The Runnymede report on multi-ethnic Britain published in October 2000 was written very much in the style of the new cultural geography. It attempted to explode as well as deconstruct the vocabulary of ethnic relations. It received a predictable hostile response from much of the media. It deconstructed 'whiteness'; 'British' was declared to be a term with overtones of racism. 'Ethnic' was declared a politically incorrect term (despite the title of the report). Even 'minority' and 'majority' became politically anathematized (Runnymede, 2000: x): 'Such terms as "minority" and "majority" signify fixed blocs and obscure the fluidity and heterogeneity of real life. The term "ethnic group" traps the group concerned into its ethnicity, and suppresses both its multiple identity and its freedom of self-determination.' For a report which eschewed the trapping of ethnic groups into fixed blocs, its 2 million estimates of the Irish population of Britain in 1998 and its forecast for 2020 of 3 million (Runnymede, 2000: 275) must owe much to the fluidity of its definition of Irish. Even the 1998 figure is double the size of census-based definitions.

Social geography continues to deal with major issues of discrimination which affect racialized minority ethnic populations. In order to measure the extent of these inequalities, we collect data by racialized categories. Thereby we may be represented as reifying the categories that we seek to de-essentialize. Anti-racist legislation itself necessarily employs the categories which it is seeking to resist. Abolishing the categories, however, does not abolish the issues; the issues simply become more difficult to quantify. Compare the difficulties of working on French data, which do not recognize ethnicity (Condon and Ogden, 1991; Byron and Condon, 1996), with working on British and American data.

The literature on the social geography of ethnicity continues to thrive in Britain, continental Europe, North America and Australia, but its prominence is most marked in the Anglo world. Such research is valuable in the face of the continued rise of anti-immigrant and anti-minority political parties such as Hanson's One Nation Party in Australia and the xenophobia of Haider's Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria (Kohlbacher and Reeger, 1999). Ian Burnley in recent papers demonstrated, with regard to the different minority communities in Sydney, that there are no ghettos (Burnley, 1998; 1999). Poulsen and Johnston (2000) extend this view by applying Peach's 1996 ghetto model to 32 birthplace groups in the 12 largest Australian metropolitan areas.

Poulsen and Johnston's data show that there is little evidence for exclusive residential areas in Australian metropolitan areas. Kevin Dunn goes further and argues for the positive benefits which arise from concentrations of minority populations in ethnic enclaves in Sydney (Dunn, 1998). Poulsen and Johnston's data show, nevertheless, significant clusters for even old-established groups, such as the Italians. (Some light may be thrown on this phenomenon by the qualitative work of Mariastella Pulvirenti, 2000, on the cultural embedded desire of postwar Italian migrants for owner-occupation.)

Table 1 Percentage of the African-American population of Chicago PMSA, living in tracts of a given black percentage

Black percentage of tract	Black population living in such tracts	Percentage of the total black population of Chicago in such tracts
100%	111 804	8.4
99% or more	381 347	28.7
90% or more	884 725	66.5
50% or more	1 087 600	81.7
30% or more	1 163 969	87.5
Total black population	1 330 636	

Source: based on data from GeoLytics Census CD + Maps US Census 1990 data (www.GeoLytics.com).

The papers by Burnley, Dunn and Poulsen and Johnston are important counterweights to the negative work of Jupp *et al.* (1990) Jupp *et al.* argued in a government report that ghettos are forming in Australian cities. In contrast, Shaw's (2000) interesting cultural geographical piece on the stigmatization and 'Harlemization' of Aboriginal Redfern does not produce any quantitative measure of whether Sydney has a Harlem, nor does he cite the works in the paragraphs above. The trouble with Jupp's use of 'ghetto' and Shaw's use of 'Harlemization' (even though the latter is criticizing its use) is that neither recognizes the chasm of difference that lies between the African-American degree of segregation and that of the rest of the world.

For the record, Table 1 shows the figures for the degree of African-American concentration in black areas of Chicago in 1990. The figures are calculated from a wonderful CD-ROM package by GeoLytics which gives the whole of the US census at any level of resolution from block to country and allows one to map each variable in a rapid and easy-to-use package. The table shows that two-thirds of the black population of Chicago was living in tracts that were 90% black. Over 80% of African-Americans were living in tracts where they formed the majority of the population. This is what Harlemization really means.

Australian data also illustrate the phenomenon of the new Chinese economic migration, on which I reported in my previous review (Peach, 2000a). Burnley shows that, in Sydney, economically advantaged Hong Kong, Malaysian and Taiwanese Chinese have formed moderate residential concentrations in high-status areas (1998: 67). Such settlements parallel those discussed in Vancouver by Ley and Smith (2000: 39). The old ecological associations between immigrants and deprivation no longer holds. Wei Li (1998) has even coined a new term for the instant Chinese suburbanization in Los Angeles: the *ethnoburb*. For those interested in the ethnic patterning of Los Angeles and whether the city conforms to the unpredictable, postmodern kaleidoscope of Dear and Flusty's (1998) account, I recommend Allen and Turner's (1997) atlas *cum* text, *The ethnic quilt*.

II   Social geography and religion

While the established field of ethnic segregation continues to gather strength, religion seems destined to become the new area for social geographical research in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Ironically, interest in the subject seems to be instrumental rather than religious. Religion is the new key to unravelling ethnic identity in the west. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the British discourse was about race. Non-European immigrants and minorities were compressed, willing or unwilling, into a 'black' category (Rex and Moore, 1967; Smith, 1976; Brown, 1984). In the 1990s, interest shifted from the outer skin of race to the inner onion of ethnicity (Modood *et al.*, 1997) thence to multi-ethnicity (Runnymede Trust, 2000) and now to religion.

In April 2001, the British census carried a question on religion for the first time since 1851 (Brierley, 2000: 657). I sat for two years on a committee of the Office for National Statistics which advised on the desirability of the question. Despite the committee's efforts, the census question was concerned hardly at all with Christianity. No distinction was made even between Protestants and Roman Catholics, let alone any other Christian denomination. The aim of the 2001 census question was to improve our knowledge of ethnicity. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi are proving to be inadequate guides to ethnic identity. Hindus, Sikhs and above all Muslims are the new source of interest.

Until recent years, the geography of religion has appeared neglected. There was Meinig's work on the Mormons (1965), papers by Sopher (1981), Levine (1986), Newman (1985) and Waterman and Kosmin (1986) on Jewish distribution in London and Peach's (1990) work on Muslim numbers, but, until Lily Kong's work (Kong, 1993a; 1993b), Claire Dwyer's (1993) work on Muslim identity and Chris Park's book (Park, 1994), religion seems to have dipped out of sight in mainstream geographical publications. However, as globalization has proceeded and the sources of migrants to the developed world have extended further into the developing world, the revolution in supply has not led simply to ethnic variety but to minority ethnic populations who sometimes conceive of themselves more in terms of their religion than of other ethnic markers.

This has been particularly true of Muslims, whose numbers in western Europe, North America and Australasia have expanded significantly. However, interest has also focused upon some of those rockpool communities left by the ebbing high tide of Turkish imperialism in Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria and Greece (Peach and Glebe, 1995; Vertovec and Peach, 1997). Curiously, there has been little work on the particular geographic phenomenon of ethnic cleansing. Some of the interest has been in the counting and measurements of distributions. For example, there has been considerable controversy over the numbers of Muslims in Britain, with estimates for 1991 running from the Muslim Parliament's top figure of 3 million through Mark Brown's 1.5 million (Brown, 2000) to a low of 1 million (Peach, 1990).

As yet, the literature on religion and geography is not fully developed and some of it exists in a kind of samizdat state as PhD theses, conference papers, working papers and CD-ROMs in which one can see the new area of research on Mosques, Sikh gurdwaras and Hindu temples. Dominic Medway and Debbie Phillips presented a paper on Hindu temples in Bradford at the RGS/IBG January 2000 meeting at the University of Sussex (Medway and Phillips, 2000). Their papers showed how caste distinctions continued to

operate in Bradford both in residential geography and in the operation of separate temples. A whole session of the Social and Cultural Study Group meeting at the RGS/IBG January 2000 annual conference was devoted to the geography of religion. An international and interdisciplinary conference was held at the Oxford School of Geography in September 2000 on the impact of new religions on the cultural landscape of the west. Diana Eck's Pluralism Project at Harvard has produced a CD-ROM 'On common ground', charting the geographical spread of buildings of the new religions in the United States. Eck, the keynote speaker at the Oxford conference, showed that in the past 30 years the religious landscape of the USA has changed radically. There are Islamic centres and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples and meditation centres in virtually every major American city. In Russia, too, the religious revival is making a dramatic impact on the cultural landscape (Sidorov, 2000).

In Britain, Claire Dwyer has been active in the field researching, among other topics, the struggle to found Muslim schools (1993) and examining questions of identity for young British women (1999). Steven Vertovec, an anthropologist, who, as the director of the ESRC's Transnational Communities Programme, has been active in geographical circles, has also collaborated with geographers in writing on Muslim matters (Vertovec and Rogers, 1998; Vertovec and Peach, 1997). Islam is a highly contested religion in the west, not least in relation to mosque construction. Kevin Dunn (1999) has produced innovative work in the struggle for planning permission for mosques in Sydney. Parallel pioneering work in Britain has been carried out on planning permission in Leicester by Anderson and Gale (1999).

The arrival of new religions in the west has been made apparent in the cultural landscape. Britain, for example, has over 1000 Muslim mosques, Sikh gurdwars and Hindu mandirs registered as places as worship (Peach, 2000b). About a fifth of these are purpose-built and some, like the Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden, are of cathedral scale. I pointed out in a paper in 1992 that, despite their number and dramatic architecture, non-Christian places of worship were cartographically invisible (Peach, 1992). The Ordnance Survey, for the first time, began to record non-Christian places of worship on their 1:50 000 maps in 1995. This is an area of geography of religion which deals with the contested, material expression of religious affiliation, and seems to offer the most fruitful confluence of the interest of social and cultural geographers. It offers a rapprochement of social and cultural geography.

III   Social geography and cultural geography

As indicated at the beginning of this report, I have been reflecting on the relationship between new cultural geography, old cultural geography and social geography. My thoughts on the new cultural geography were prompted by the reissue of *Inventing places* (partly revised and now called *Cultural geographies*; Anderson and Gale, 1992; 1999). Nearly 40 years earlier, Wagner and Mikesell (1962) had published *Readings in cultural geography*, which became the standard text, explaining and exemplifying the Berkeley School of cultural geography. The Anderson and Gale volume both represents and encompasses the revolution which has changed cultural geography.

Thinking of Wagner and Mikesell's volume led me to chart the difference between the old and new cultural geographies. What is apparent, looking at the new cultural

geography, is a narrowing of scale, from region to street (Anderson, 1993) to bar to zoo (Anderson, 1995); a move from the physical space to the abstract (Davidson, 2000). What is also apparent in the new cultural geography is a progressive distancing from the analysis of place to the analysis of the representation and meaning of place.

The old cultural geography of Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School was interested in the human imprint on the natural landscape; the new cultural geography is interested in the redevelopment of Spitalfields markets on the pioneering fringe of metropolitan capitalism (Jacobs, 1999). The Berkeley School came to be identified with superorganic concepts of culture and with the physical artifacts of largely rural life (Duncan, 1980; 1998; Shurmer-Smith, 1998; Mathewson, 1998). New cultural geography is concerned with deconstruction, multiple identities and de-essentializing (Hubbard, 2000). Old cultural geography was interested in history; new cultural geography is interested in the history of the shopping mall (Goss, 1993). Old cultural geography was interested in people and place; new cultural geography is interested in sex and shopping. Old cultural geography was concerned with observation of the physical; new cultural geography is interested in observing the observers (Jackson, 1999; Kinsman, 1995). Old cultural geography was interested in what was seen; new cultural geography is interested in what is unseen (Chouinard and Grant, 1995), in what is removed (Jackson, 1999), in what is heard (Smith, 1994), or what smells (Rodaway, 1994: 61–81). Old cultural geography is held to have been artifactual; new cultural geography is interested in performance and parade (Ley and Olds, 1999; Smith, 1993b; Jackson, 1992). Old cultural geography reified culture; new cultural geography is concerned with the contested nature of meaning. Old cultural geography believes that culture is something that we have; new cultural geography believes that it is something that we do (Duncan, 1999). Old cultural geography was concerned with man's role in changing the face of the earth; new cultural geography is concerned with geography's role in changing the face of gender (McDowell, 2000; Hubbard, 2000).

Old cultural geography examined the control of territory; new cultural geography examines the ownership of the gaze (Jackson, 1999). The gaze has changed from seeing the thing to seeing the representation of the thing, from seeing to seeing through. New cultural geography has moved beyond contemplation of the navel to contemplation of navel-piercing (Pile and Thrift, 1995: 149–51). The new cultural geography, it seems, is more interested in culture than in geography.

Against this reflexive situationality and multipositionality (Rose, 1997), social geography sometimes appears rather clumsy and gauche. Yet social geography works in an area where many more than the cognoscenti can understand what is written. As the results of the 2001 British census become available and we learn to cope with the creation of the virtual people (created to compensate for undercounting) in the one-number census, and as the results of the new ethnic question and the new question on religion come on stream, it is going to be a wonderful time to be a social geographer.

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