

# The bag of tools for a new geopolitics of the world

Introduction by the Guest-Editor

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*The text on these pages is a brief introductory note by the guest-editor on the contents of Part 3 of the present issue.*

● The essay by **Alan Henrikson** deserves its place as an opening statement in this third part of the volume of *Ekistics* on “In the steps of Jean Gottmann” and there are reasons for this. There is no doubt that the USA appears today preoccupied with all the world chessboards. But the bond that links the USA and Europe appears solid despite the recent misunderstandings due to the war in Iraq. In contrast to the negative side, there are political-diplomatic relationships that lean on thousands and thousands of relationships that are woven between the two sides of the Atlantic and build increasing solidarities. As Alan Henrikson says, “Even to see the explanation of transatlantic comity and cooperation as lying primarily in the field of politics and diplomacy may not be the best way to achieve a basic understanding of what is, after all, an Atlantic community of sorts, a *de facto* entity if not a *de jure* one. The responsiveness of Europeans to Americans and, reciprocally (though, as we shall see, not always symmetrically), of Americans to Europeans, is clearly greater than that of any other comparable intercontinental pairing in the world. How can this be explained?”

Investigating the special relationships that link the USA and Europe, Henrikson develops a particularly meaningful role. He recalls, even if in summary, Jean Gottmann’s theory of political geography elaborated by the great teacher in 1952. And above all he finds that “rather than attempting to define ‘community’ itself, in an essentialist way, Gottmann seeks, in analytical fashion, to lay bare the structure of the *icons* of identity and the *circles* of activity that shape, and reshape, communities over time.” It is not easy to understand whether Gottmann considered that an Atlantic community existed: “What is clearly evident” continues Alan Henrikson “is that he believed that, at least in the particular realm of urban discourse, ‘there exists one vast transatlantic orbit in which all the main planning policies, technological innovations, and methods of management are exchanged, attempted, at least debated.’ There is “a *common lore*

of ideas and techniques, Gottmann observed, shared by all those involved in urban design on both sides of the Atlantic who ‘moved freely around within the transatlantic orbit.’ “Certainly the North Atlantic has been and remains” Gottmann wrote “the large portion of space on this planet most intensely criss-crossed by ships and airplanes, telephone connections and other telecommunications, people, goods, and messages,” even if “the results in terms of the evolution of cities are ... strikingly at variance, not only between Anglo-America on the one hand and continental Europe on the other, but even on the two sides of the Channel between England and France, or between Switzerland and Belgium ... This arresting description by Gottmann,” Henrikson concludes “of ‘one vast transatlantic orbit’ of ideological flow and human interaction, combined with recognition of the stubborn differences that continue to exist among at least the cities of the Atlantic, is consonant with the interpretation of American-European relations here offered as a plurality of transatlantic difference in ways of living.”

The big invention of Jean Gottmann, as George Prevelakis remembers in the essay that follows, consisted – in a time of crisis of French regional geography and of the German school in some measure caused by German geopolitics – of the theory according to which, on the parts of the earth inhabited and accessible to man, two big strengths coexist and operate. The first big strength is that of “circulation”, that is the movement of men and the exchange between men, of ideas, values, myths, inventions, techniques, money, raw material and products. In this sense “circulation” is the bearer of change and therefore innovating. The other strength is that of the values and the symbols (what Gottmann calls iconographies) in which every human group believes, due to the fact that humanity is organized socially – earlier than politically – in groups or communities that need identity. Iconography is potentially a stabilizing strength. But iconography – like circulation – can also be a destabilizing strength, in cases in which the single geographical individualities to which iconography gives origin do not come in coordinate structures of socio-politics able to found solidarity, as happens in the case of federal states, the USA and Switzerland above all.

With the support of this theory, Henrikson investigates if and what solidarity exists on the Atlantic between the USA and Europe. Elsewhere – as we have the opportunity to see from the essays which follow – the destabilizing tendency of the iconographies prevails instead. Of this continuous opposition and at the same time the whole effort to bring cohabitation from a conflicting position to a position of solidarity, the articles selected in this section testify to all the situations described. There results, often beyond the intentions of the authors themselves, a kind of perspective geopolitics of the world examined in the light of Gottmannian theory, a political picture of iconographies in construction or overcoming the opposition of which the iconography is the bearer when it aims to strengthen local identities above all, or to overcome the risk that such opposition brings with it, certainly the greatest of that introduced in the system on the strength of “circulation.” Part 3 on Political Geography is therefore a verification of the geographical theory of Gottmann, 50 years after its formulation, in the light of actual events, but often rising again to a history that is at least secular.

● To come back to the articles, while Henrikson aims to provide evidence that all strengths and initiatives between the two sides of the Atlantic are expressions of a most integrated reality that does not denounce the official demonstrations, **George Prevelakis** – who had already devoted one important international conference in Paris to the thought of Gottmann and the utility of his concepts in interpreting the political tendencies in action in Europe – faces the theme of European iconography. And he asks if “there can be a European iconography strong enough to overcome the influence of national iconographies in times of crisis and economic difficulty. Will the French or the Germans accept to sacrifice essential national or other interests for the European idea when no major outside threat is present? Or, for the sake of European unity, should a threat be invented?” If we think that the essay was written before difficulties emerged on the occasion of the war in Iraq we will realize the importance of the question and its timeliness. With the end of the Cold War, in fact, Europe wondered for what reason it had to continue to stay united, when there was really another question to put: How to behave in front of the equivocal situation of a widening of the Union to all the States that have shaken off the Soviet yoke? Because, if it comes to all the countries dominated previously by the Soviet Union applying to enter the Union, the risk is that the already fragile European iconography will become even more fragile. But if we exclude this widening, Europe will appear arrogant and selfish.

● A second burning dimension of the actual political geography is that of the Middle East to which **Giuseppe Campione** devotes his essay. “As Gottmann points out, seeing what is happening today, reality is not all that simple – he writes – ‘The old structures have been liberated from age-old threats to the promises of globalization – and this corresponds to a resurgence of nationalism, regionalism, local interests, age-old tribal instincts, parochialism. It is not the geography of matter that shapes the true compartmentalization of space. Nowadays in this field problems can be solved technologically and economically. It is in the hearts and minds that true blockages occur.’” And, strong in this belief, Campione questions the ways that it would be possible to contrive that the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean can cohabit side by side. “Indeed – he writes – it is the written word which is the strongest enforcer of identity and differences, above all in the Mediterranean, which is characterized by what can be called ‘hard-line regionalisms.’ Everything in the Mediterranean tends to be imbued with ‘exclusively local color.’ In order to foster development and peace in this sea of compartmentalization, it is necessary to solve a ‘puzzle’: the infinitely complex puzzle of ethnic groups and countries, of peoples and religions, with many opposing

factors, both structural and symbolic, acting as dividing lines – North-South, West-East, Europe-Arab World, Christianity-Islam. These are oppositions which also entail further divergences and asymmetries. Nonetheless, various psychological universes do attract each other in an intertwining of spatial dealings, relationships and connections. At the end of the day, these are the real issues involved in the complexity of the Mediterranean so strongly felt by Braudel.” And Campione goes on to review all the proposals and the attempts to reach this objective.

● The essay of Campione is followed by that of **Vladimir Kolossov**, who is also convinced of the validity of the thought of Jean Gottmann. “There exists,” he writes, “an inseparable connection between geopolitics, iconography and political identity. Jean Gottmann was the first who in the early 1950s considered the importance of iconography in the creation of national and political identity. National iconography is a result of a long historical development of the perception by state leaders, public opinion and the intellectual elite of the place of a country in the world, its geopolitical situation, national interests, external threats to national security.” Kolossov’s essay introduces the results of a recent investigation on the same theme conducted in Russia by the working group of which he is director: Russia today oscillates between the European world and the Asian even if the picture is not as simple as it would seem. Russia is not only engaged in a series of hard internal conflicts, of which that with Chechnya is the most fluorescent and tragic. It is also searching for a reaffirmation of the world role that it had acquired in the times of “real socialism” and the Cold War. It is not by chance that on the occasion of the war in Iraq Russia built an anti-American bridge with Germany and France.

● The essay in which the opposition between the different ways of looking at the political and military order of the world in the light of new geopolitics is examined, is that of the Australian geographer **Dennis Rumley**, perhaps the only one of our collaborators who does not call Jean Gottmann and his thought in support. Yet, despite this absence, the thought of Gottmann emerges on more than one occasion from the reading of this interesting article. They are the same conclusions of the article according to which the world is divided between the vision of President Bush and the scholar of politics Samuel Huntington on one side and on the other that of the countries of the Third World which aspire to free themselves from the ties with the western World and to reaffirm their own political and geographical individuality that confirm the full validity and utility of Gottmannian thought. It is a greater confirmation because Rumley does not call Gottmann in support. Of course, Rumley’s article is also useful as an introduction to the problems of Asia (with some reference to the Middle East and black Africa) because it gives a correct perspective to the articles that follow which are devoted to India, China, Southeast Asia and, finally, Japan.

● **Sanjay Chaturvedi** writes: “Jean Gottmann once remarked that ‘the geographer must keep the past in mind if he wants to understand the whys behind the present problems and the present landscapes.’ In agreement with such insight, his paper argues that Indian geopolitics is best understood in its historical and discursive context of theorizing and practices ... If geopolitics can be critically conceptualized as a ‘way of seeing’ whereby groups and individuals, political elites, and the institutions and intellectuals of statecraft, attempt to spatialize politics by implanting maps of meaning, relevance and order onto the highly complex and dynamic political universe they inhabit, observe, try to understand, and sometimes even desire to dominate, then, undoubtedly there is a long lineage of geopolitical thought, theorizing and practices on the subcontinent.” He continues, proposing the question of the title: “Indian” geopolitics:

Unity in diversity or diversity of unity?: “Whereas the concluding parts of the essay critically examine the nature and implications of an increasingly influential geopolitics of ‘Hindutva’ or ‘Hindu nationalism’ and attempt to deconstruct the geopolitical reasoning deployed by the Hindu nationalists to carve out a homogenous and monolithic ‘Hindu’ identity from a remarkably different and eclectic cultural tradition on the subcontinent. The question raised above is now recast in accordance with the tone and tenor of Hindu nationalist discourse: what are the key geopolitical idioms, myths and representational practices employed by the Hindu nationalists to inscribe something called India and endow that entity with a Hindu content, a Hindu history, a Hindu meaning, a Hindu trajectory and a Hindu *unity*?”

● **Fabrizio Eva** devotes his article to China. For him too Gottmann’s thought remains valid, although he does not see all the implications that we have remembered. His great interest is in understanding the Chinese world. “With the notion of iconography, [Jean Gottmann] demonstrates that spatial identity, nationalism, and the resistance of places can develop a power comparable to that of material forces. Within geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics, self-regard and self-esteem play an important role, since one’s self-image is the image one wants to ‘export’ and display in relations with others. Self-image also determines how people understand others, and it therefore influences strategic decisions. Like Gottmann, I would define these factors as ‘iconographic.’” For Eva, who supports his thought by recalling a vast international literature, the geopolitical role of China today takes nourishment from the following factors: “the political make-up of the country must reflect the behavior of its citizens within a society with long historical traditions and that groups together one-fifth of the world’s population. ... China’s leaders have their own particular way of acting both domestically and internationally. This is the product of a millennia-old tradition and undoubtedly represents an iconographic point of resistance.” But there are other determining factors and that is “a vision of one’s self based on an ongoing relationship with the territory, established over time through historical events and iconographically fixed within a national identity made up of the ‘representation’ of the country’s past and a conviction that the Chinese are superior” and “a way of relating to ‘others’ based on a particular view of life and the nature of social relationships that are traditionally shared.” “China conducts itself – Eva concludes – in an extremely pragmatic fashion; it clearly defines its goals and strategies, and can identify the right moment to act. The title of a recent Chinese film, which also met with success in the West, ideally encapsulates China’s current, and possibly future, geopolitical role: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. China’s aim? To (again) become the epicenter of the world.”

● **Elena dell’Agnese** faces the burning theme of the Asian Southeast: “As in many other geographical representations – is the thought of Elena dell’Agnese reading Lewis and Wigen – regional labeling is a spatial construct; a form of geo-power deeply embedded in a historical and cultural context, a conceptual formation generally presuming some form of correspondence in space between physical landmasses and human cultural features. Yet, it is also a very adaptable form of geographical representation, which can modify its spatial coverage over time, perambulate around its original site, or even reverse its symbolic meaning, departing from the system of cultural references in which it was initially coined whilst still remaining tied to its own place.” Of course, a lot of circumstances enter into the game and between them the creation of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) has had certain weight, even if “it is still disputable whether its emerging iconographies (which include an official anthem and a logo) are powerful enough to make ASEAN something more than a ‘security community’ of states.” The question stays open as the title of the article sug-

gests: “‘One Southeast Asia’: Emerging iconographies in the making of a region,” although Southeast Asia, made even more fragile by the powerful pressures of Communism on one side, and Islam on the other, appears in a phase of transition between a striking ethnic diversity – which Fisher (1962) described as “The Balkans of the Orient” – and the emergence of a new icon that tries to overcome the simple military reasons for the birth of the label.

● To close with Asia and its oscillating between the emergence of competitive regionalisms and new geopolitical identities comes the essay of **Juri Yamashita** on Japan that refers expressly in its title to Gottmann: “Influence of Jean Gottmann’s thoughts on national development plans in Japan.” As the introduction of the article also says: “the purpose of the present paper is to identify the influence of Gottmann’s thoughts on national land plans in Japan.” Really, the essay goes well beyond a simple examination of the relationship of the urban thought of Jean Gottmann to interpret the present geography of Japan. Above all it examines the different plans in Japan in the time that followed the end of the Second World War, the reconstruction and the Westernization, where the author puts the history and the economic geography of Japan in that international context which has made it the protagonist of post-colonial Asia and the post-Cold War. In this sense also the article confirms the great theoretical contribution that Gottmann’s thesis of the two strengths that operate in geographical space anticipated.

● “In his famous work” **Alessia Turco** writes “Jean Gottmann said that: ‘... national politics is built not only upon what exists or doesn’t exist inside the border of a country, but upon what is found or not found in other countries whom the former has relationships with. ...’ In the context we are analyzing, we are talking about a continent, Africa, that is trying to rebuild these relationships on a new basis, in order to get out of its geopolitical and economic isolation and identify its role in the international scene.” And to make this examination, the researcher examines carefully the *New Partnership for Africa’s Development* (NEPAD), the programmatic document introduced by some important leaders of a second generation, sensitive to the necessity that Africa expresses it itself through the choice of the proper destiny and of the tools and conditions to reach it. From the examination of the document – approved and sustained at the G8 meetings in Genoa firstly and “later re-elaborated before being newly discussed during the last G8 meetings in Canada” – Turco draws the belief of being in the presence of a political effort that addresses Africa along the lines of an African “regionalism” that tries to overcome the local splitting up and whatever remains of the colonial period: “a real project of economic development ‘of Africa for Africa’.” But it is a regionalism that is aware of the necessity to be framed in the global context. Therefore it recognizes that the States involved must become democratic States and must accept to pursue a sustainable objective either in terms of defense of resources or in those of social justice. These new States must defend themselves from the risk of giving support to terrorism and must introduce an “important change in the way of conceiving the relationship between North and South, going from a logic of support, that characterized the development cooperation in the last 40 years, to a logic of partnership that can create advantages for both parties.”

● The picture of Latin America is different, but the intent of the two authors is clear. “The main geographic and political question is,” **Monica Gangas-Geisse** and **Hernán Santis-Arenas** write, “What is the political nature of territorial entities?” The answer comes from the studies of the great Teacher: “In an article on ‘The political partitioning of our world’, Jean Gottmann states and affirms that a strong belief based on some religious creed,

certainly a social point of view, or a pattern of political memories, can help to establish some notions on the origin of the political fragmentation on the surface of the planet; but more frequently, he argues, this origin resides in a combination of the three. In this sense, Gottmann thinks that every regionalism has some 'iconography' as its base."

The iconographic expressions of the political societies – the political "territory" – at least in the case of the Latin American

countries, clarify the value of the notions of Jean Gottmann. The advances in terms of investigation and reflection find their proper explanation in the theoretical thinking of the geographer that we are evoking. They demonstrate the logic and validity of his thinking, and render his schemes and proposals a theoretical explanation worth considering for the present and the future, in spite of the fact that more than half a century has elapsed since these notions were first presented.

## Jean Gottmann, President of the WSE 1971-1973



Jean Gottmann, President of the World Society for Ekistics, chairing a meeting of the WSE Executive Council and other members on the future program of action of the Society in the amphitheater of the Athens Center of Ekistics, September 1973.



Jean Gottmann (second from the right) following C.A. Doxiadis' presentation at the same meeting.