

Geography, geopolitics and history: Considerations and conclusions

“The intellectual environment in which he (Gottmann) studied was one where academic boundaries of the time, in the English sense, were neither as clearly demarcated nor as closely guarded and cherished. Political science and philosophy were a pervasive part of the atmosphere; the frontiers between geography and history, for long rigid in the English-speaking world in the 19th and early 20th centuries, were practically non-existent in French universities. Gottmann’s Diplôme d’Etudes Supérieures, taken in 1934, and his Licencié ès Lettres, taken in 1937, were both in ‘Histoire et Géographie’.”

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Interdependence of geography and history

The object of geography is the description of the earth. History is the course of mankind’s life. Therefore we can say that the object of geography is “static,” the object of history “dynamic.” On the other hand, this distinction is relative. Geography analyzes the conditions offered to human groups by the environment. It explores the demographic and spatial evolution, the exploitation of agricultural land and mineral resources. It is subdivided into physical geography and human and economic geography. The “static” element in the frame of physical geography is stronger than in the frame of human and economic geography. The latter, by the nature of things, has a “dynamic” element. Human and economic geography and history are close together. But even in the field of physical geography the “dynamic” element is not quite non-existent. Geomorphology, climatology, hydrography and biogeography explore not only constants but also changes.

The distinction between the “static” element of geography and the “dynamic” element of history recalls the concept of iconography proposed by Jean Gottmann. Here, it should be emphasized that Gottmann was conscious of the interdependence of geography and history. John Patten has correctly re-

marked: “The intellectual environment in which he (Gottmann) studied was one where academic boundaries of the time, in the English sense, were neither as clearly demarcated nor as closely guarded and cherished. Political science and philosophy were a pervasive part of the atmosphere; the frontiers between geography and history, for long rigid in the English-speaking world in the 19th and early 20th centuries, were practically non-existent in French universities.” Gottmann’s Diplôme d’Etudes Supérieures, taken in 1934, and his Licencié ès Lettres, taken in 1937, were both in “Histoire et Géographie” (PATTEN, 1983, p. xiii). In the thought of Gottmann the iconography is indissociable from his vision of political geography. To explain the phenomenon of political partitioning of geographical space, Gottmann used the distinction between the movement factor and the iconography. Gottmann described the movement factor by its effects of displacement: “In the political order, it displaces people, armies and ideas; in the economic order, it displaces merchandise, techniques, capital and markets; in the cultural order, it displaces ideas, it shuffles people” (GOTTMANN, 1952, p. 215). This force of change, this “dynamic” element is limited by a second force, which Gottmann called iconography. Iconography is the sum of “icons” (symbols, ideas, images, beliefs, persuasions, etc.), to which the members of a community are profoundly attached.

Therefore, in the thought of Gottmann iconographies are links between peoples and “icons.” Iconographies lead to the definition of territories. They build partitions. Partitioning is in this sense a process taking place first in the minds and then on the ground. But, according to Gottmann, an iconography can differ from an ideology, because it can appeal to emotions rather than to the intellect. Iconographies are deeply rooted in traditions. In this sense iconography is of a conservative character. On the other hand, iconographies are not totally unchanging. They can change, but their transformation is not very fast.

The distinction between the "static" element (iconography) and the "dynamic" element (the movement factor) is relative. Gottmann's reflections confirm this observation.

Gottmann's urban geography, ecology and ekistics

Gottmann's concept of political geography is not deterministic. Iconography has a cultural dimension. But it is not based on cultural determinism. Samuel Huntington's concept of "the clash of civilizations" is inadmissible from the point of view of a serious historical approach. Besides, it is politically unacceptable, because it may lead to xenophobia.

Iconography has also a geopolitical dimension. But it is alien to that geopolitical approach that turns the human being into a "hostage to history." I make use here of the title of the book on Cyprus by Christopher Hitchens, a sharp-witted critic of Henry Kissinger's *Realpolitik* (HITCHENS, 1989). Kissinger writes in his memoirs: "Pragmatism without a moral element leads to random activism, brutality, or stagnation; moral conviction not tempered by a sense of reality leads to self-righteousness, fanaticism, and the erosion of all restraint. We must always be pragmatic about our national security. We cannot abandon national security in pursuit of virtue" (KISSINGER, 1999, p. 1076). On the Cyprus question Kissinger's "pragmatism" led to a catastrophe. I refer to my *History of the Republic of Cyprus* (TZERMIAS, 1998, pp. 443-444).

Gottmann's concept of urban geography, especially his work on the role of capital cities and on urban growth as a social and political process, is connected with the cultural dimension of his thought. According to Calogero Muscarà this approach confirms the opinion expressed by C.A. Doxiadis that urban studies should not be confined within the limits of architecture and the physical analysis of the city, but should become more a science of man's relationship with space. I remind readers that Gottmann writes in his work *The Significance of Territory*: "The nature of economic power expresses itself in a definite spatial form; several distinct forms of economic power may coexist in the same space, but each has, at a given time, definite geographical boundaries. Political or spiritual power may rest on the psychology of people; economic power needs material expression. Economics was a word formed from the Greek root *oikos*, meaning 'house,' the original unit of man's organization of space. From the same root was formed the word ecology to describe the study of living organisms in relation to the natural conditions of their habitat; ecology is intertwined with geographical distribution. Recently, the Greek architect and planner, C.A. Doxiadis, coined the word ekistics to describe the study of human settlements" (GOTTMANN, 1973, pp. 53-54 and note 2).

It is characteristic of Gottmann's thought that he criticizes the doctrine expressed by Adam Smith and Karl Marx that the wealth of a nation is the labor of its people. "However, people and territory are not separable in the production of goods and services: production must occur somewhere, and the place or area is one of the conditioning factors of the economic process. The territory where the process develops must be under a political régime, within a given system of laws, and at a certain location with respect to means of transport and markets. The territory, being the habitat of the people, is the receptacle of its economic activities. It was only in the 17th century that economic and political thought in Europe began to realize this significance of territory" (GOTTMANN, 1973, p. 57).

In the third volume of *Das Kapital*, Marx emphasizes that the members of a society are not owners but only users of the earth and that they must use the earth like *boni patres familias* ("Selbst eine ganze Gesellschaft, eine Nation, ja alle gleichzeitigen Gesellschaften zusammengenommen sind nicht Eigentümer

der Erde. Sie sind nur ihre Besitzer, ihre Nutzniesser, und sie haben sie als *boni patres familias* den nachfolgenden Generationen verbessert zu hinterlassen") (KÖSSLER and WIENOLD, 2001, p. 159). But it would be exaggerated to see in this statement proof for a "Marx oecologicus."

Gottmann was conscious of the relevance of economic growth. And it was exactly for that reason that he wrote: "The more urbanization, industrialization, and affluence increase, the more regulation is needed for the environment and for the organization of society" (GOTTMANN, 1973, p. 119). Here, I see an ecological dimension of Gottmann's thought. Not without some satisfaction I would like to mention that in 1978 as Director of the European Cultural Centre at Delphi I initiated a symposium on "Architecture and Protection of Landscape." The conclusions of the symposium clearly show that the protection of nature and landscapes has reached a dynamic stage where it is essential that action be concerted with all the "users" affected (KAHN-ACKERMANN, 1980, p. 21). I am proud of the then initiative at Delphi, but unfortunately we are far away from a satisfactory solution of ecological problems. I think our top challenge in our day is to optimize not only our economic development in nations around the world, but the environmental quality in those nations as well. We are far away from the vision of a "Cité Fleurie" (CHAUVENET, 1980, pp. 110-116). We are far away from the vision of a "Landscape for Life" (MICHELL, 1980, pp. 39-44). The prominent Greek economist Xenophon Zolotas wrote in 1981: "Accelerated economic growth has caused grave damage to the ecosystem, a fast depletion of nonrenewable natural resources and a general decline in the quality of life" (ZOLOTAS, 1981, p. 1). This remark gains in even more importance in the "era of globalization."

Certainly, the interpenetration of economic, political and cultural relationships across existing borders and boundaries has the effect that the geographer David Harvey in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity* calls "the compression of time and space." In this sense geography has been pronounced dead (HOLTON, 1998, p. 1). But that is a figurative expression. Geography is not dead. And, of course, geopolitics is not dead either. According to John Agnew and Stewart Corbridge, there are indications that time-space compression has encouraged localism and nationalism rather than internationalism (AGNEW and CORBRIDGE, 1995, p. 217).

Braudel's "geographical time"

The notion "geopolitics" probably was made up by the Swede Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922). Kjellén was at the same time a scientist and a politician. One of his books bore the title *Der Staat als Lebensform*. Some associate the field of geopolitics with the name of the German Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), the author of the book *Politische Geographie*. Others do not regard him as the father of geopolitics. In Germany in his day a main representative of the field was the military officer and geographer Karl Haushofer (1869-1946). The National Socialist Rudolf Hess was a student of his. Nazi propaganda adopted parts of the book *Politische Geographie* and used it as promotion of the life space theory. Obviously, Nazi exploitation of parts of the geopolitical ideas does not mean that any scientific research in the field of geopolitics is suspicious and to be condemned. Quite the reverse. The scientific attempts in this field may prove to be very useful – on condition of course that the factor man is not ignored or underestimated. The key problem for a human geopolitical approach is to articulate a vision of a world which rejects hegemonic politics and reclaims space for people, not expansion by either states or markets (AGNEW and CORBRIDGE, 1995, p. 227).

From the point of view of a historian, it can be said that there are several connections between geography and history. To

follow Fernand Braudel, history could be divided into three parts: a quasi-immobile history, a history of slow rhythm and a history formed by short, rapid and nervous oscillations. That would be a decomposition of history into areas situated over each other; a distinction between a geographical time, a social time and an individual time. The "presence" of geography in the framework of the first part is obvious. That is why Braudel speaks of a geographical time.

I quote a passage from Braudel's work *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*: "Ce livre se divise en trois parties, chacune étant en soi un essai d'explication d'ensemble. La première met en cause une histoire quasi immobile, celle de l'homme dans ses rapports avec le milieu qui l'entoure; une histoire lente à couler, à se transformer, faite souvent de retours insistants, de cycles sans cesse recommencés. Je n'ai pas voulu négliger cette histoire-là, presque hors du temps, au contact des choses inanimées, ni me contenter à son sujet, de ces traditionnelles introductions géographiques à l'histoire, inutilement placées au seuil de tant de livres, avec leurs paysages minéraux, leurs labours et leurs fleurs qu'on montre rapidement et dont ensuite il n'est plus jamais question, comme si les fleurs ne revenaient pas avec chaque printemps, comme si les troupeaux s'arrêtaient dans leurs déplacements, comme si les navires n'avaient pas à voguer sur une mer réelle, qui change avec les saisons." (BRAUDEL, 1990, pp. 16-17).

According to Braudel, in addition to this immobile or quasi-immobile history, there is the history which is formed slowly, a social history, that of groups and groupings. And, finally, the third part, the traditional history, the individual history, the history of events, the most passionate, the most human, also the most dangerous one. It must be pointed out that Braudel's conception is not doctrinaire. He affirms that his "plans étagés" want to be only a means of exposition. And he adds: "Mais à quoi bon plaider? Si l'on me reproche d'avoir mal assemblé les éléments de ce livre, j'espère qu'on trouvera les morceaux convenablement fabriqués, selon les bonnes règles de nos chantiers." (BRAUDEL, 1990, p. 18).

In the preface to the third edition of his book *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (BRAUDEL, 1976) he writes: "Ce qui change le plus, c'est la problématique de notre métier. Je ne vois plus la société, ou l'Etat, ou l'économie exactement comme hier. Le lecteur pourra s'en rendre compte en se reportant aux trois volumes de *Civilisation matérielle et Capitalisme*, de prompte parution, où j'ai pu mieux formuler mes points de vue et expliquer la survie, étonnante même à mes yeux, de la prospérité relative de la Méditerranée." (BRAUDEL, 1990, p. 23). Indeed, Braudel's work on material civilization, economics and capitalism, 15th-18th centuries, shows that the geographical factor should not be overestimated.

In any case, the quasi-immobile history, the geographical time and, quite simply, the relations of man who makes history with the geographical milieu, are of crucial importance under certain conditions. I have tried to show that in my books, for instance in my works *Land der Griechen* (1981) and *Neugriechische Geschichte* (1999). It would be rather difficult to find another region or country in Europe where the sea and the mainland are as closely interwoven as in Greece. The close interpenetration of the mainland (*steria*) and the sea (*thalassa*) does not allow one to draw a clear dividing line. This interpenetration is beautifully expressed in Odysseas Elytis' poem "Axion Esti."

Interpenetration of mainland and sea

Nevertheless, in spite of the clear interpenetration of the mainland and the sea, the contrast between *steria* and *thalassa* be-

longs to the distinguishing marks of the country's nature and the population structure. As *thalassa*, the sea represents one of the poles marking the main aspects of Greece; *steria*, the mainland represents the other pole which determines the country's "other face," which should not be neglected. In other words, the mentioned unity holds this antithetic element and reveals itself as being a unity in the diversity.

The image of the *steria*, of the mainland, is characterized by the country's mountainous nature. The population is – one would like to say – crammed into the relatively not numerous regions situated between the mountains consisting to a great part of sterile limestone. In spite of the length of its coasts, Greece is rather poor in natural harbors. And certain regions are hardly accessible, even from the sea. If maritime Greece is the quintessence of openness to the world and to exchanges, mainland Greece, mountainous without large plains and widely spread hills, conveys rather the impression of isolation.

The contrast between mainland Greece and maritime Greece is present almost everywhere in the country which is composed of islands and peninsulas. In geographical nomenclature or in administrative organization, this contrast is reflected in many uncertainties or ambiguities. Almost a third of the population, which amounts to 10 million in all, lives in the Athens-Piraeus agglomeration. Here is a concentration point not only of industry but also of maritime Greece; and this in spite of the fact that to a certain degree maritime Greece enjoys a certain autonomy from mainland Greece. With George Prevelakis one could say: "On voit ainsi se reproduire sur un plan sociologique et économique la vieille opposition régionale entre la façade maritime et l'intérieur continental, représentée par les deux images archétypales de l'Antiquité grecque: Athènes et Sparte." (PREVELAKIS, 1994, p. 121).

Without being subject to schematization or to misinterpretation, one could say that to a certain degree Roumeli (Sterea Ellada) and Morea (Peloponnese) have had a symbolic significance in designing the factor "mainland" during the evolution of modern Greece. The factor of the mainland, *steria*, is often linked to that of a mountainous country. The antithesis *steria-thalassa* is mingled from some point of view with the contrast of the plain and the mountain and, more widely, of the hinterland and the coast, of the town and the country. It is no coincidence that Greek popular poetry so often sings the praises of the happy mountain, "for it does not fear Charon," death.

During Turkish rule (1453-1821), the klephts (kleftes) took refuge in the mountain caves. In an obviously grotesque, but basically accurate way, the notion klephts means thieves as well as freedom fighters. The ambivalence of the notion translates the points of view of the Turkish oppressors and of the oppressed Greeks. For the Ottomans the kleftes were thieves and bandits. For the Greeks they were fighters of the "Eikossiena" (the War of Liberation of 1821); they were the yeast which let the dough rise. Souli, Mani, Sphakia – to mention only a few – could be seen as the representatives of this rebellious, mountainous, hardly accessible Greek country. In the 17th century, the inhabitants of Souli, a wild mountainous region in Epirus, were almost independent.

The call to revolt against the Ottomans launched in the form of a poem (Thurios) by Rhigas Velestinlis (Rhigas Pheraios) was addressed to the oppressed people of the *steria* as well as of the *thalassa*. Concerning Rhigas Pheraios see Woodhouse (1977), pp. 122, 126, 130, 175. There may be some justified scepticism about the influence of geography regarding the development of a country. Nevertheless, the close links between Greece's historical destiny and the sea cannot be negated. These links were already obvious at the time of the Minoan maritime supremacy. For the Greeks the sea was (and still is) a challenge full of dangers and hopes. Ulysses is not only the incarnation of ruse. He is the symbol of the joy of discovery as

well. He symbolizes the struggle against the sea which, at the same time, is also a search for an experience of life.

At the time of Venetian and afterwards Turkish rule, the Greeks of the Aegean Sea who knew the archipelago like the back of their hand displayed important activity in the fields of navigation, commerce and not seldom also piracy. The economic consequences of the activity of the seafarers became particularly evident in the second half of the 18th century. Besides the autonomous administration of the local authority areas, the peace treaty of Küçük-Kainardji (21 July, 1774) contributed a great deal to this development. This treaty, putting an end to the Russo-Turkish war (1768-1774) and conceding free navigation in the Black Sea to the Russians, the passage to the Mediterranean and important economic advantages, gave an impetus to the Greek maritime trade; all the more so, as French trade in the Mediterranean declined in the last decade of the 18th century because of the struggles of the Revolution. During the wars of Napoleon, Greek maritime trade experienced a new upswing. Not least Thessaloniki profited from this development.

During the Greek struggle for liberation (1821-1830), the islands of Hydra, Spetses and Psara were centers of activity of the "heroes of the sea." That was in the nature of things. Today, the Greek merchant fleet is one of the greatest worldwide. Its considerable potential can only be assessed exactly, if one adds all the ships sailing under foreign flags, partly under the so-called "flags of convenience." Greek readers who are greedy for expansion and eager to invest, when money for jam is in prospect, form "a separate world." Depending on the circumstances, they present themselves as passionate patriots or as convinced cosmopolitans. And the amazing thing is that they feel themselves to be the person they play. The Aegean Sea is too small for the readers. They dream of cargo vessels and tankers that cross the oceans.

Rejection of geopolitical determinism

I could give further examples on the interdependence of geography and history, above all concerning the Mediterranean world. Among other things, I could explain the role of the straits, the isthmuses. I refer to my essay on the Straits of the Dardanelles as a characteristic point of intersection of history and geography (TZERMIAIS, 1996, pp. 69-86). The "static" element of history, "le temps géographique" of Braudel is obvious here. However we should not forget that history is made by man. Geopolitical determinism is wrong. I recall the rejection of historicism by Karl Raimund Popper: "Der Historizist sieht nicht, dass wir es sind, die die Tatsachen der Geschichte auswählen und ordnen, sondern er glaubt, dass 'die Geschichte selbst' oder 'die Geschichte der Menschheit' durch ihre inhärenten Gesetze uns, unsere Zukunft und sogar unseren Gesichtspunkt bestimmt" (POPPER, 1980, pp. 332-333).

Popper rejected any historicism, among other things Marxist historical analysis. He emphasized the "moral radicalism" of Karl Marx, but he criticized the Marxist "prophecy." Therefore, Popper's criticism was directed against so-called historical materialism (TZERMIAIS, 1982, p. 197): "Per comprendere la critica di Popper alla 'profezia storica' di Marx (quella dell'inevitabile vittoria del comunismo) occorre tener presente che quando si parla di marxismo ci si riferisce tra l'altro a quella dottrina che è divenuta nota sotto il nome di 'materialismo storico'." In several studies I have shown that the historical development cannot be rightly interpreted within the narrow scheme of a socio-economic determinism. The analysis of socio-economic factors is necessary and helpful. But socio-economic optics is not the only one. An example: Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant moral and

the spirit of capitalism shows that the monocausal Marxist concept of the "ökonomische Basis" and the "Überbau" underestimates the significance of other factors (here of religion).

In his book on the national and social consciousness in Greece in the years 1830-1909 the Greek Marxist historian Kostis Moskof makes very remarkable statements on the interdependence of geography and history. In the sensational economic ascent of the archipelago (Aegean Sea) at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, he sees the second pole of Greece's rebirth (the first pole was the industrial evolution). The influence that Braudel's doctrine on "le temps géographique" exerted on Moskof is evident (MOSKOF, 1974, pp. 9 and 47). However, Moskof talks of historical laws in a deterministic way which is not completely compatible with Braudel's concept. Jean Gottmann emphasized the necessity "de faire entrer la géographie régionale dans l'iconographie." And he wrote: "C'est ainsi que l'iconographie devient en géographie un môle de résistance au mouvement, un facteur de stabilisation politique" (GOTTMANN, 1952). But it is necessary to know as well that the iconographies often changed in the course of time. Great geopolitical upheavals cause ruptures.

In 1946 Braudel wrote: "C'est peut-être ce (i.e. la décomposition de l'homme en un cortège de personnages, author's note) que l'on me pardonnera de moins, même si j'affirme que les découpages traditionnels fractionnent, eux aussi, l'histoire vivante et foncièrement une, même si j'affirme contre Ranke ou Karl Brandi, que l'histoire-récit n'est pas une méthode ou la méthode objective par excellence, mais bien une philosophie de l'histoire elle aussi; même si j'affirme, et si je montre, par la suite, que ces plans ne veulent être que des moyens d'exposition, que je ne me suis pas interdit chemin faisant d'aller de l'un à l'autre ..." (BRAUDEL, 1990, I, p. 18). I quote Braudel's remarks in order to underline some contrasts between the "French school" (Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and others) and the "German school." Later, after the belated reception of Braudel's doctrine in Germany, these contrasts led to relations as well.

Often, the influence that the natural environment exerted on a people takes place through an ideology. Ideologies have also considerable influence as an element of national identity that rest on old iconographies. Frequently, the interdependence of geography, history and ideology leads to "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson), sometimes even to national mythologies. A classical example is the Titoist transformation of the geographical name Macedonia into a national notion (TZERMIAIS, 1994).

Conclusion

Certainly, for the historian, the geographical and geopolitical factor is of great importance. But geographical and geopolitical analysis is only a part of the historian's work. And the historical approach requires the distinction between description and judgment. Description, explication is not sufficient. Evaluation is necessary as well. The geopolitical approach should not lead to inhuman conclusions. I would like to close this paper in the words of Braudel: "Peut-il y avoir un humanisme actuel ... sans histoire ambitieuse, consciente de ses devoirs et de ses immenses pouvoirs?" (BRAUDEL, 1990, I, p. 18).

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