

The COSMOPOLITANISATION Of CARTOGRAPHY

Raising the Specter of Legitimacy in Geography

Introduction

This work is about arguing that the maps of the world should be reconsidered in a global dialogue: in a process that opens the dispute of boundaries between union-states, regions, zones, or other similar geo-political terms. David Marquand, in his important opus *The End of the West* (2011) reminds us that West and East perhaps never existed and in the case wherein we are told that they do, have, and are: such are parochial and illegitimate claims.

We shall have to put the (Indian) inventors of Arabic numerals in our pantheon alongside the Greek inventors of geometry, and Ibn Rushd alongside Aristotle. We shall have to abandon our self-centred and patronizing belief that democracy and free discussion were exported to a backward "East" by a progressive "West," and reconstruct our mental

universe to take account of the indigenous Indian tradition of public reasoning and religious toleration that long antedated the "Western" presence in the subcontinent. More generally, we shall have to recognize that the familiar "Western" narrative of global history, in which uniquely precious and, in evolutionary terms, uniquely successful "Western" values moulded the modern world in our great-grandparents' image, is a parochial distortion of a far more complex truth. (Marquand, 2011: 176-77)

His argument, I feel, is important because it challenges what many in this world have come to take for granted. In the case of this paper, it is the maps we are familiar with, the design of the globe that we have on our desks or which are offered to our children, which are parochial and relics of imperial abuses. This discussion is a needed one, as we have for example, no clear indication as to where Europe stops and that indigenous peoples for example have not had the inclusive and legiti- ▶

mate chance to contest the territorial boundaries which often split their nations. It is an attempt to bring a democratic legitimacy to cartography which is patently lacking.

This will be done firstly by discussing in a broad and simple way why current maps are parochial and relics of imperial domination. We will then follow this argument up with another broad argument detailing how we could begin a global dialogue designed to spark debate over maps and to form a call for the democratic reform of cartography. Essentially, it argues that we must give people and groups a chance to define their boundaries and not have them imposed on us by those holding the Maxim Gun. Lastly, we will engage this discussion in relation to China's territorial claims.

Francis
Fukuyama



The Imperial History of Maps

Depending on climatic conditions, hunter-gatherer societies have a population density from 0.1 to 1 person per square kilometre, while the invention of agriculture permits densities to rise to 40-60 per square kilometre. Human beings were now in contact with one another on a much broader scale, and this required a very different form of social organization. – Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, 2011

A new work by Francis Fukuyama has established a logical understanding of the way in which human beings probably came to organize themselves politically through evolutionary terms. Should we consider Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau for example, their conceptions of the social contract began with the heuristic device of a “blank slate.” From this blank slate (or state of nature) human beings were theorised to have joined for a variety of reasons. Fukuyama takes the aforementioned evolutionary approach and argues rather that it is perhaps improbable to trace wherein we exactly developed our methods of socio-political organization (those parameters which even underpin hunter-gatherer humanoids). Rather, we were perhaps born into already established systems and contributed to them over millions of years.¹ Because of this potentiality, we perhaps never had a chance in our history to collectively decide in non-violent democratic processes not only how we should like to organize ourselves politically, or what our deepest desired long-term goals are, but also (for the purposes of this paper) how our union-states or nation-states are bounded territorially.

This discussion has a variety of comparative examples to support it. One of those can perhaps be the way in which nation-states were formed from the inception of the Treaty of Westphalia (or earlier during the Qin Dynasty in 221 BCE China, see Fukuyama 2011 for more). We need only ask if individuals and groups informing a variety of pre-modern ethnicities were present when not only Europe but parts of Asia and Africa were being

territorially defined in imperialist discussions. It is common knowledge at this stage that they were not.

When the union-states and, in much more limited circumstances, nation-states, in North America, Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Asia-Pacific, and so forth were territorially determined, this was not done in a manner that could be considered democratic or republican. There was little to no inclusion of local populations in this decision making and as commonly known, many indigenous nations had and continue to suffer because of this. Such is perhaps commonly seen with the difficulties Palestinians have in forming their own sovereign state: normatively and consistently blocked for the most part by a minority of individuals within the current and previous Israeli administrations. This might also be said in reference, but not limited, to the Kurdish Nation, the Welsh, Cornish, Scottish, Corsican, Aboriginal and Torres Straight indigenous and a wide variety of indigenous Americans.

It is, of course, an anachronism to expect that referenda, "town hall meetings," polling, and other such practices would have been held during the mapping of the world and other regions therein. From the Middle Ages onwards to perhaps even post-modern times (some argue this period began in post-war Europe) democracy and republicanism were not normative and might even be said to be in the practical minority today despite the amount of rhetoric these two bodies receive. Both *realpolitik* and soft-power were mechanisms by which empires expanded to try and perhaps fulfil the material and power desires of the autocratic polities and cultures found during those times (like Great Britannia, Imperial France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, the USA, China, Russia and so forth).

This discussion is purposefully broad to convey this message. Even a cursory glance at various bodies of literature dealing with the history of geo-politics will add robust evidence to this argument. The point is that in majority (at least to my paltry knowledge) this argument is not typically

made. Yes, certainly, we have a great deal of separatist contestations in many union-states by ethnic nations seeking recognition and some greater degree of sovereignty and or autonomy. But what we do not have are the much "higher" politics of individuals and groups throughout the world challenging the way in which the world is territorially depicted. Where, in fact, has our say been in the way our countries look on a map? If we are an oppressed peoples, like indigenous Americans,² or the Naga of India: where is our right to distinguish our boundaries in discussion with other citizens and not those with the Maxim Gun (e.g. sometimes violent state governments)?

Democratising Maps

This is why I would like to call for a democratisation of maps using cosmopolitan theory. It is increasingly evident that union-states and whatever nation-states might be left are losing their terri-

Via international non-governmental organizations, indigenous organizations, national organizations, and supranational bodies, we might have the capacity to form an international movement of solidarity for the cosmopolitan democratisation of cartography in order to give legitimacy to what we see visually in geo-politics.

torial legitimacy. It makes greater sense to let ethnic nationalities determine if they wish to separate than to try and keep them within a bounded territory through violent means (see Chechnya for an example). For one, it may for the most part diminish or remove the impetus for violence. For two, it may add another sovereign trading partner and player on the international scene. And for three it *will* be a step supporting democracy over autocracy.

But how could we go about doing this? Is it not a bit dreamy? I reason that the answer lies in our budding international civil society. Via international non-governmental organizations, indige- ▶

nous organizations, national organizations, and supranational bodies, we might have the capacity to form an international movement of solidarity for the cosmopolitan democratisation of cartography in order to give legitimacy to what we see visually in geo-politics.

Another question concerns the solidarity of “what.” To contextualise the spectre of legitimacy we must throw our support and solidarity behind the premise that democracy is part of the human story. That it is not something that must be exported, but it is something that humans have had since arguably pre-modern (if not pre-human) times. For a great example of this I encourage the reader to investigate Fukuyama’s (2011) work *The Origins of Political Order*, or an interview I conducted with Benjamin Isakhan (2011) or his latest edited volume the *Secret History of Democracy* (2011). If we understand democracy as a pre-modern and post-modern probability and as something of a natural predisposition for social organization (a.k.a politics and governance) then the spectre

must be that of global or cosmopolitan democracy.

Addressing China³

With the aforementioned points made, we would do well to begin discussing cases. And in this instance, I should like to address China and formally challenge its claim to territorial sovereignty. This extends not only to Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong, and Tibet, but also to Inner Mongolia, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and all other regions within “mainland China”. For a country that maintains it is a socialist democracy, where in fact is the legitimacy of democracy in this State? Surely any boasted “victory” stemming from 1949 and the violence over the Chinese plurality that then ensued concerning the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution cannot convey legitimacy.

Those living within the “Greater China Region” must have the opportunity opened to them to discuss and decide if and how they want to be a part of the current PRC. In this regard, none of

what we see on the map has any meaning. Without legitimacy, the boundaries of China are emptied of significance. They in turn become symbols of illegitimacy and must come to be challenged. China’s territorial lines are a visual depiction of boundaries that were established through dynastic and ideological empire: one that secured not the consent of the plurality but rather the fear and bloodshed of a great number of individuals – further entrenching evolutionary autocracy.



People in Greater China, as well as those throughout this world, must come to think of their countries in this manner. We must come to terms with evolutionary autocracy and realize that rarely (if ever) in human history have we established periods wherein there was a complete and demonstrable process of pluralistic, transparent and accountable involvement of people concerning questions of “national” importance: in other words, deciding on a matter central to everyone in a manner that established a democratic legitimacy.

With this heuristic device employed, it is reasonable to say that the plurality of nations that have become absorbed by illegitimate imperialist Chinas (over time) have the right to reconsider their role in the union-state. Collectively, the Chinese plurality has the right to call into question the union-state itself as little if any of it is democratically legitimate. Will Tibet, Inner Mongolia and the Xinjian Autonomous Region want to be part of the PRC or will they wish to form (or rather reform) their own sovereign states as they come to recall the independence of their nations lost to violent absorption? Will this be mirrored by Macau, Hong Kong and the separate/inseparable Republic of China? It is hoped that we may one day come to answer these questions. And to be fair to those that hold the PRC near and dear, this argument can be made concerning any other union-state (not just China) and this article is not meant to lambast a geo-political space that has made many important and significant achievements through time and space. The PRC is but one example in a world filled with examples and we would all do well to start thinking of our geo-political spaces in this way.

Conclusion

The aforementioned will certainly take a great deal of time, but time is of course a necessary component of communication (which in itself is a parameter of democracy preferably designed to trump violence). I should like to ask for greater minds to comment on this paltry piece

which will undoubtedly allow me to create a much stronger call for solidarity and a more robust argument.

Notes:

* **Dr. Jean-Paul Gagnon** is a social and political theorist with a Ph.D. in political science. He completed his doctorate at the Queensland University of Technology under the aegis of Australia’s prestigious Endeavour Award.

1. This point forms the argument of “evolutionary autocracy.” We and our ancestors have, over millions of years, been born into already established systems wherein we (in most cases) did not have an equal voice to contest the telos of our times. Democratic legitimacy is a method to break this time-bound autocratic norm.
2. When “America” is used in this article, it is referring not to the USA but to the majority of the “Western” hemisphere.
3. Although I have taken China as a case for discussion, we may use this argument on any other union-state in this globe.

Works Cited

Fukuyama, Francis. 2011. *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Isakhan, Ben and Stephen Stockwell (eds). 2011. *The Secret History of Democracy*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Isakhan, Benjamin. Interviewed by: Jean-Paul Gagnon. 2011. “An Interview with Dr. Benjamin Isakhan: On the Alternative Histories of Democracy,” *Journal of Democratic Theory*, 1(1): 19-26.

Marquand, David. 2011. *The End of the West: The Once and Future Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

