

Ramírez Velázquez, B. R. y L. López Levi (2015), *Espacio, paisaje, región, territorio y lugar: La diversidad en el pensamiento contemporáneo*, (Colección: Geografía para el siglo XXI, Serie: Textos Universitarios, núm. 17), Instituto de Geografía, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Xochimilco, México, 207 pp., ISBN 978-607-02-7615-6

What began for Mexican authors Blanca Rebeca Ramírez Velázquez and Liliana López Levi, who are both professors at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Xochimilco, as a lecture presented on the matter of space, landscape, region, territory and place in 2010, and then translated into the publication of a modest work entitled “Pensar el espacio: región, paisaje, territorio y lugar en las ciencias sociales” in 2012, grew in magnitude and evolved into the subject matter for a book. Thus resulting in the work entitled *Espacio, paisaje, región, territorio y lugar: la diversidad en el pensamiento contemporáneo* (Space, Landscape, Region, Territory and place: Diversity in Contemporary Thought) published by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, in Mexico City (2015).¹

The authors’ objective in the work is to address the concepts of space, landscape, region, territory and place and study how the use of these concepts has evolved historically and within academic disciplines. The authors expressed concern for the manner in which these concepts are utilized interchangeably and seek to call attention to the lack of accuracy in how the concepts are used in the study of geography and in other disciplines

that touch upon the study of space. The authors recognized there are certain limitations in the book, for one they admit the book has a strong inclination towards the social sciences, despite their aim having been to incorporate a diverse exemplification of the use of the concepts in multiple disciplines. Additionally they point out that the text and direction of the book is guided towards the subjects and themes that they study and work in. Lastly they acknowledge that this book is just an initial contribution to the study of the concepts and could be developed and deepened into more extensive works.

The book is compiled of five chapters, each one being dedicated to one of the concepts. Considering that the chapter on space was allotted a larger portion of the book and also the concept of space is the one upon which the authors build on to develop the other four concepts it seems only appropriate to begin with that concept. The chapter begins with a contextualization of the concept of space within the ambit of physics and natural sciences and goes on to describe how space originated as being seen as an entity that exists within itself and evolved to become a social construction as the utilization of the concept was absorbed into other disciplines. This idea of space as a social construct is revisited various times throughout the text, especially when it delves deeper into the use of the concept of space within the social sciences and expands to the concept of space becoming abstract. This notion of space as conceptual, as the authors pointed out, is particularly interesting when we think of the concept of space in the future, particularly pertaining to cyberspace. Another recurring idea that arises in the authors’ description of the evolution of the concept of space is the view of space as a container, be it of material things, nature or humanity. The authors explain how this view of space shifted through the work of philosopher Merleau Ponty, for who space

¹ This review was written within the context of the course “Teoria e Métodos da Geografia” of the Master’s População, Sociedade e Território of Instituto de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território (IGOT) – Universidade de Lisboa.

was not a container but a structure through which humans establish the relationship between objects, subjects and phenomena (p.41). These two points presented by the authors are relevant because they are ideas that are revisited throughout the text in reference to the other topics, particularly the second which signals at the shift of space being something that encloses and is beyond reach to being something tangible upon which human act and have effect on.

The effect of Marxism on the use of all of these concepts was also a topic that was commonly visited in the book. The authors present the notion that Marxism had redirected the discussion of space towards the social sciences in Chapter 1 (p.41) and they allude to a related idea in the Chapter 3 (p.109), the chapter dedicated to the concept of region. In fact, the effects of Marxism on each of the concepts was dedicated a section in each concepts' respective chapter or at least some mention of its influence on the use of the concept. In the case of space the authors imply that Marxism was used to approach the spatial dimension of the economic and political organization of societies. While Marxist ideology influenced the use of the concepts, the authors also point out the impact geographical thought had on Marxism. Inclusively, pertaining to the concept of region, the authors point out how Soviet and Marxist authors incorporated the work of geographer Vidal de la Blache in their regional studies (p.109). The authors then go on to refer to the incidences of Marxist influence on geographers of Anglo-Saxon thought; thus signaling towards the heavy impact that Marxist thought has had and continues to have in geography and the social sciences.

While this book is in many regards an etymological work of the evolution of the use of the concepts that relies heavily on the reporting and analyzing of the work of others authors, this by no manner means that there is an absence of the authors' opinions and critical views. What sets this book apart from any other book that may speak of the topics at hand is that it is heavily influenced by Latin American thought. The authors' choice of weighty use of authors such as Milton Santos, Rogério Haesbaert and the high frequency of Latin

American authors in their bibliography is a testament to that. Also there were often sections in the chapters dedicated to the Latin American vision. A clear sign of the authors' critical view was presented in Chapter 2, the chapter dedicated to landscape. As one of their final reflections in the chapter they place in question if the concept of landscape is not a Eurocentric concept, being that it has its base in European art and was then exported to Latin America by European artists. Another incident in which the euro centrality of a concept was expressed was in Chapter 4, in reference to the concept of territory. The authors argued that the predominance in the use of the concept in relation to the State and the political ambient is a Eurocentric use of the term. They go on defend that the cultural and symbolic dimension in the use of the word originates in Latin America (p.157). Now, in light of these two examples of critical analysis in regards to the euro centric influences on the concepts it should be noted that incidences of critique of this sort were infrequent in the book. There could have been more, particularly when referring to the evolution of the terms during colonial periods.

Another area where the book lacked was in the absence of any sort of feminist rhetoric when speaking of the concepts or in the very least pointing out the lack of women's voices in the development of these terms. This is surprising considering that both of the authors are female. It should be mentioned that there is already work being developed in the realm of feminism and geography, exploring the matter of how gender is central to the processes of how the world, cities, landscapes, places where we live and work is constructed (Staheli and Marin, 2000). This matter of gender would be an interesting aspect for the authors to incorporate in the future development of their work on the concepts.

Lastly, in a final observation it should be noted that while the authors did allude to the matter of the concepts having different meaning and historical contexts depending on the language and culture in which they are used in. I found that this is an area that could be further developed. While the aim of the book was to examine how the use and meaning of the concepts evolved over time in a format that was much more aimed towards

the social sciences, it must be recognized that this work in its foundation is a linguistic endeavor and more attention to the realm of language could be permitted.

Gloria Aguilar Dominguez
Instituto de Geografia e
Ordenamento Território
Universidade de Lisboa

REFERENCE

Staeheli, L., & Martin, P. (2000), Spaces for Feminism in Geography. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 571, 135-150. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049139>