

DECONSTRUCTING THE CONSERVATIVE MAP. ON THE RENAISSANCE OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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The title of this article could suggest an extension of J.B. Harley's research into maps and cartography from a postmodern approach and this paper could indeed be understood in that sense though not exactly from the point of view of the ichnographic function of the map. This article shall endeavour to explore the idea of the map as a process, as a rhetorical and at once political instrument, and a metaphoric image of the spatial turn. The spatial turn (Soja, 2011) marks a return to spatial and political discussion in our world. But this return is made on the triumph of the «conservative map» as explained here. Brian Harley was the first researcher to propose a deconstruction of the map (Lladó, 2012) and to point out the extraordinary power of this action in disclosing its true meaning. A lot can be learnt from this action. But the question is what map is to be deconstructed? What is proposed here is an unmasking of the «conservative map». In 2009, Robert D. Kaplan published an article in *Foreign Policy* titled *The Revenge of Geography* (in 2012, he published a book with the same title, translated into Spanish in 2013 as *La venganza de la geografía*). His main thesis is that the recent neglect and disregard of this discipline has led many governments to take bad decisions on issues pertaining to space. It is true that the word «revenge» in English is usually translated in Spanish as *vengaza* (with the same sense in both languages), but one could also propose another meaning. It Spanish is can also be translated as *reivindicación* (vindication), so, in this regard, the *revenge* of Geography could also be a *vindication* of the role of something that has been unjustly reviled and forgotten. Kaplan's interpretation is close to both possibilities because he frequently writes in the former sense (nineteenth and twentieth century geopolitics, from Mackinder to Mahan, with their military and geostrategic consequences), but he also writes in the latter sense, reminding us that globalisation has reinforced the role of spatial studies. In his work, Kaplan affords a recipe for our times: to return to the map, to remember those thinkers who best knew the relationship between landscape, territory and politics and to update our theories to fit the new sense of «vindication/revenge» in geography today.

When talking about the «conservative map», we strive to go beyond the one-dimensional political sense of the expression. We wish to connote both an object itself and the vision behind it; in other words, the narrative frame of territorial processes and space. This twofold meaning of the idea of the «conservative map» (final product and rhetorical process) enables us to use the term «map» not only as an iconographic product (sign), but as a metaphor of the geographic discourse, in Spain and outside. To summarise our position we can explore a recent article comparing the approaches of Brian Harley and Franco Farinelli (Lladó, 2012). The position adopted in this article is closer to the Italian geographer Franco Farinelli because he analyses the map (or the spatial turn it represents) as a structuring element of the world, hence the importance of the struggle and the value of the possessor, but also as an instrument to legitimise policies.

For this reason, the qualifier «conservative» should not be understood here merely as a reference to the classic neoliberal ideology of Western society, but rather an attitude, a way of approaching the analysis of the real, spatial, social and economic fields. This expression also implies an uncompromising, scarcely daring, uninventive attitude in Human Geography. In this sense, the «conservative map» is both an ideological map as well as a civilian, academic and even scientific attitude. The «conservative map» is both the translation of an ideology and a reflection of an attitude. And the «conservative map» can be observed in geographical science when we fail to discuss the real problems of humankind. We have to participate, as geographers, in the debates on territorial disputes in Spain, on the model of infrastructures, the alternative vision to a radio-centric communications view, the inequality of the social and territorial process, the debate on water and the need for cooperative distribution, the demographic bomb, anti-immigration arguments, the role of future energies, new urban poverty, and the nationalist, federalist or recentralising discourses and practices in Spain and in Catalonia and Basque Country. If we do not participate in these debates, the «conservative map» will triumph.

And why should this «conservative map» be deconstructed? We have to read J.B. Harley when he tried to break the assumed link between reality and representation in cartographic thinking. As this author pointed out, deconstruction means reading maps between the lines and discovering their silences and contradictions. Moreover, this action is full of transformative agency and subversion. As the philosopher Frederic Jameson (2012) presciently noted, nothing is more subversive than making everyday things uncanny and distant. For this reason, it is not merely enough to replace the «conservative map»: it has to be unmasked. When someone takes everyday reality and transforms it into a historical concept, the door is opened to new experiences and alternative routes. The «conservative map» always works in favour of the continuance of conventions and the status quo. And it works in a double sense: first of all, the conservative map transforms the space of everyday life into an immutable, naturalised and unreformable absolute space (geography as a surface and distance, divested of values, ideology and relative positions). On the other hand, the conservative map chooses not to participate in social and political debates and adopts a neutral and technical stance (more quantitative methods, more computer-aided, more sophisticated instruments). For this reason, it is very important to deconstruct the map and its processes. This article discusses some examples of the «conservative map», especially in the Italian case (Silvio Berlusconi's use of cartographic rhetoric) and the Spanish case, both in the present time (discussions on

immigration and the concept of border, and in its comparison with debates on the process of peripheral nationalist practices in Spain) and in past time (with the review of the border dispute in colonial America between Spain and Portugal in the seventeenth century).

The ultimate aim of this paper is not to build, but rather to deconstruct. However, we can offer some reflections on an alternative to the «conservative map», based on some writings of Doreen Massey (1999, 2005) and Joe Painter (2008). First of all, we need to explore the possibilities of a new «map» based on anti-essentialist, plural and non-deterministic principles (Doreen Massey) and the exploration of a new management of different cultural, economic and governmental boundaries and their incongruousness (Joe Painter). The unmasking of the «conservative map» should lead to a distrust of the supposed «spatialist» visions of its supporters, which actually reveal a very poor territorial and geographical grasp of the contemporary world. We have to unmask the «hidden agenda» of this apparent triumph of space. Despite the apparent attachment to the space of the «conservative map» and its profusion of signs and symbols (speed, distance, map, freedom, flows, globalisation, modernisation, movement, high-speed trains...), we need to read between the lines of this enormous deployment of geographical rhetoric. The «conservative map» transforms space into time (as Doreen Massey reveals), so that globalisation becomes a simple temporal process by which all countries must adopt the same objective, model and *tempo*. But it also tries to manage space as a purely quantitative dimension: a surface we have to conquer and domesticate and it also tries to avoid a unifying spatial, temporal and historical analysis. The «conservative map» can analyse *only* space (geography as distance) or *only* time (history as a succession of events), but it will never permit a holistic spatial and temporal perspective because this approach would reveal, for instance, that the political forms of territorial and administrative organisation of human beings are actually «space-time events», which is to say changeable, alterable, reformable (even expendable) instruments in the long sequence of the construction of territorial and historical patterns.

Geography is back. Accepted, but this geographical turn without a process of deconstruction could lead to the production of unfair geographies, to borrow from the latest book by Edward Soja (2011), or the most inhuman of human geographies. Following Brian Harley, «by dismantling we build» and we can begin with the process of deconstructing the «conservative map». We must, as Harley wrote, re-register and relocate meanings, events and objects within broader movements and structures. We must generate a new spatial critical thinking at the service of the human being, his social dimension and global welfare.