

Proposal for a set of *Political Geography* “Interventions”

Interventions between Affect and Religious Geopolitics

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We propose a set of “interventions” on the topic of religious geopolitics (see Dittmer and Sturm 2010; Megoran 2010). The contribution intervenes in recent literature on religious geopolitics by opening up a space for considering theories of affect (e.g., Pile 2011; Bondi and Davidson 2011). While much of geography has had sustained engagement with theories of affect (and, more generally, “non-representational” theory), as suggested by the nascent journal, *Emotion, Space, and Society*, political geography generally has been slow to contribute with few exceptions (Thrift 2000; Carter and McCommack 2006; Barnett 2008; Curti 2008; Pain 2009; Sharp 2009). A sustained discussion beginning with current issues in religious geopolitics makes sense, especially within the analytical category of “popular geopolitics,” because of the affective power of religion and enchantment in producing, assembling, and maintaining, for example, the motivation and commitment to geopolitical violence.

As an embodied process that troubles individualization and socialization, affect has the potential to underwrite resistance to the seemingly irresistible forces of capitalism and colonialism (Massumi 2007). Of course, affect also has the potential to fuel equally problematic political forces (Barnett 2008). Therefore, as an ontology of transitional quality that might be beyond representation and ideological capture, affect implies a capacity for both resistance and oppression.

In the last half decade, religion and cultural studies has developed a sophisticated debate in relation to religion and affect, although largely ignored within geography (see, Williams 1977; Jameson 1991; Massumi 2002; Corrigan 2004; Fuller 2006; Clough with Halley 2007; McAlister 2008; Pellegrini and Puar 2009). However, geographers have been more eager to follow the nascent interest in enchantment and affect in religion and cultural studies (Holloway 2006; Smith, Davidson, and Henderson 2012). Political geography, however, has most likely not explored affect because of the sub-discipline’s focus on how geographical representations help “make sense” of war and difference. Similar to this logic, religion has often been argued to have played a functional (and an epiphenomenal) role by giving meaning to otherwise “rational” calculations of violence at a macro-scale rather than seeing religion and enchantment as affective at an individual and embodied scale (Hyndman 2004).

Moreover, this proposal has navigated away from normative religious geopolitical themes like Christianity and the apocalypse by developing a more varied theoretical space that stimulates debate around the logic of affect. This intervention seeks to represent a more diverse and emergent set of scholars interested in religious geopolitics with broader concerns and themes. Where empirical examples are provided, we have sought authors with non-Christian research interests.

This intervention, therefore seeks to expand the theoretical tools for scholars and students of geopolitics. The theoretical debate is set up between Julian Holloway & Jason Dittmer’s paper (who argue that a sustained research agenda is a necessary and overlooked logic of geopolitics) and Justin Wilford & Tristan Sturm’s paper (who argue that affect falls short in explaining the meaning religion provides for geopolitical

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imaginings). This debate is then illustrated by a more empirical paper by Christopher Limburg who shows how Buddhist practices of healing can act as powerful resistance to geopolitics.

In the introduction we draw a distinction between “the geopolitics of religion” and “religious geopolitics,” in which the former refers to conflicts between actors who are clearly and rather unproblematically concerned with theologically inspired representations of how the world should be divided. The latter refers to plainly secular geopolitical discourse and action that nevertheless can be seen to employ political-theological vocabularies, symbols, and action. Here we draw on the well known formulation of the German political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”

We hope to provide a much needed intervention that will be pivotal for future research within political geography, by contributing to a nascent theoretical interest within the discipline of geography generally.

The set of 4 papers (see abstracts below) will be due to *Political Geography* no later than 1 March 2012. We propose a 1,000 word introduction that sets the stage for the interventions as well as offering a concise review of recent literature. The body of the Intervention will include 4 short essays at 2,500 words each for a total word count of no longer than 11,000 words plus references.

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Abstracts and Authors:

Affect, religion, and geopolitics

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In this intervention, we revisit the literature on religious geopolitics with an eye to its aporias and absences. Despite frequent reference to William Connolly’s ‘capitalist-evangelical resonance machine’ thesis (2008), we note that this literature rarely aligns itself with the theoretical underpinnings of Connolly’s thesis, which lie in affect and other aspects of non-representational theory. While it can be said that the broader literature in critical geopolitics has itself only engaged half-heartedly with non-representational theory (see Carter and McCormack 2006), this absence is all the more interesting in the literature of religious geopolitics, given the popular framing of millennial movements as emotional and irrational, and therefore of the body. Therefore we argue for a ‘more-than-representational’ (Lorimer 2005) research agenda that highlights the importance of enchantment in the production of motivated, ‘moved and moving’ bodies that are committed to action, and considers faith as a sensibility of and towards geopolitics that is organized through pulses and charges of affect that are differently brought together in different places and around different geopolitical issues.

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The geopolitics of meaning: representation between religion and geopolitics

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If geopolitics is about the spatial designation of world politics, and critical geopolitics is about unveiling the geographical assumptions subtending geopolitics, then focusing on the geopolitics of religion or religious geopolitics bounds us, though each in a different

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way, to questions of representation—the visual, discursive, and performative elements that make, maintain, and contest meaning. We argue that non-representational theories do little in the way to explain these practices of meaning. The central concerns of non-representational theory are with moments of experiential surplus, that is, with affect, embodiment, and the precognitive. These “events” lie just before or beyond representational meaning but they do not enter into the world of geopolitics without representational meaning. Nowhere is this more evident than in spaces produced by a geopolitics of religion and religious geopolitics. And, hence, any adequate analysis of these must begin to pull apart the various elements of representation and re-presentation.

A Critical Geopolitics of Coexistence: religious non-violence in ‘Of Gods And Men’.

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Although widely critiqued, Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis still carries considerable cultural currency. It is, in part, predicated upon the idea that religious co-existence is an impossibility, and that, as such, conflict between different religious groups is an inevitable feature of future global politics. Whilst there has been a recent resurgence in political geography in conceptualizing ‘peace’, most notably in a series of papers arguing for a reformulation of geopolitics as variously ‘progressive’ (Kearns 2008), ‘pacific’ (Megoran 2010), ‘sub-altern’ (Sharp 2011) or ‘alter’ (Koopman 2011), the notion of ‘co-existence’ has been largely absent from these debates. In this paper I draw on some of the recent work in International Relations on co-existence (Odysseos 2007, for example) in analyzing the 2010 French film ‘Of Gods and Monsters’.

Set during the Algerian civil war, the film tells the true story of a group of trappist Monks living and working in rural Algeria. As the violence of the civil war moves ever closer, and as the Monks are threatened by local Islamists, the film centres on their deliberations and discussions on how to appropriately respond. In refusing to accede either to the demands of the Islamists to leave, or to the military to be protected, the choice taken by the Monks to remain living alongside the villagers whom they ‘serve’, can be understood as a meditation on the possibilities of what we might call ‘coexistence’. Furthermore, critically reflecting on the film in such a way might allow for a wider discussion in popular geopolitics on the affective potentialities of film in regard of ‘pacific’ and ‘alter’ geopolitics.

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Subtle resistance and popular geopolitics: tantric Buddhism in and out of the Himalaya

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This paper will argue that popular geopolitics can be read at subtler levels through “religious” practice. Specifically, it will take the case of contemporary conceptions among Yolmo, a Himalayan lineage tree of tantric Buddhists. In their third generation of globalized diaspora, people from Yolmo engage the forces of capital and empire in ways that have transformed and evacuated their homes and made tenuous long-standing practiced continuities. The paper will take an ambivalent stance on the category of “religion,” opting instead to think in terms of practice. The case of tantric practice gives us a handle on approaching the kinds of affects produced when intentional, faith-driven modification of subtle bodies is undertaken. In such practice, we can see two things: 1. the depths of resistance to pathologies that undergird capital and empire and 2. an example of structural approaches to modification of human individuals. Like popular geopolitics, affective faculties are exploited--molded towards an ideal form. Unlike the cynical colonization of emotional bodies undertaken by capital, tantric Buddhism is built on a reiterative affect of healing. Powerful resistance to popular geopolitics can then be carved out of the imperially proscribed affects of debt and consumption--fear and desire--by an already existing lineage of transformative practice. This paper will examine the messy realities of such practices as well as their context among the Yolmo diaspora.