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Reappraising David Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition* From Complex Locations: More-Than-Contextual Historiographies

Abstract This article reflects on *The Geographical Tradition* through the lens of feminist and other critical historiographies of geography, linking therein to recent discussion on the relative merits of canonical status and the dilemmas and legacies of wide-ranging, selective, and partial histories. It argues for more inclusive, more-than-contextual, historiographies, and reflects upon what these mean epistemologically, methodological and in terms of the contemporary experience of the discipline.

Key words Feminist, Inclusive, Contextual, Historiography, Situated-Knowledge.

I remember discussing aspects of *The Geographical Tradition* with David Livingstone at conferences both during its preparation and after publication and it became a key reference for me as I completed my doctoral research in the early 1990s. The book offered an overarching account of Geography's relationship with scientific endeavour and related emerging European travel, cartographies and Empire, as well as associated discourses of race. It provided a much-needed international perspective on geographical knowledge and raised questions about selected social contexts, metaphysical assumptions, professional aspirations, ideological allegiances and the impact of a range of new theories.

Recent discussion of the relative merits of canonical status (in *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2012 and *Journal of Historical Geography* 2015) have highlighted the dilemmas and legacies of selective histories which are inevitably partial. However much the idea of a 'canon' *per se* might be contested, such a celebratory moment as this twenty five year review implies at least a degree of canonical status for *The Geographical Tradition*. So it is worth reiterating Tuite's warning that 'Canonicity breeds ahistoricity and an inescapable transhistoricity' (2002 2). As with all histories, *The Geographical Tradition* is neither ahistorical nor transhistorical; it was grounded in an epistemological frame of early 1990s contextual history, and 25 years on, we must likewise situate it in that context, both when praising its strengths and noting its lacunae: it represents a deep well of scholarship that has done a huge amount to enrich knowledge and understanding within and beyond geographical circles, but it was nonetheless a product of its time, underpinning sources and analytical frames. As Withers notes: as reflexive scholars, we

need to be sensitive to the ‘material and epistemological conditions that lie behind the making, shaping and consumption of texts’ (2012 320) - as well as other outputs which mobilise our sources, narrative and analysis *beyond* texts, into classrooms, magazines, artefacts and field trips.

Gillian Rose’s (1993) highly influential *Feminism and Geography* also shaped my thinking in the 1990s, and negotiating a dialogic relationship between these two near contemporaneous volumes as emblematic representatives of contextual history and feminist geographies, was central to my own emerging scholarship at that time. Rose’s (1995) subsequent response to *The Geographical Tradition* channelled wider feminist critiques of scientific and historic knowledge production (see Harding 1986 1991, Haraway 1989), which highlighted gendered epistemologies and history as patrilineal his-stories, including, more specifically in the case of geographies, how histories of the subject give the appearance that geographical knowledge was produced almost entirely by men through a certain territorially-bounded representation of ‘geography’ (Rose 1995), thereby rendering the work of women and other marginalized groups near invisible. This prompted Rose to call for a more inclusive, less dualistic approach to envisioning Geography, creating ‘a space through which the difference gender makes to the production of geographical knowledges can be recognized’ (1995 416). For me, contextual approaches are analytically inadequate to account for gendered social and cultural relations. Rather, wider theoretical frames were required to provide the analytical purchase necessary to evaluate the drivers behind, and impact of, intertwined contextual factors; likewise, broad contextual factors need to be evaluated in relation to individual lived biographical experience. For example, feminist concepts such as patriarchy were required to understand gendered discourses and women’s lack of access to university studies for most of the nineteenth century; and being attentive to biographical factors revealed how individual women’s access to formal education, and the sort of education they experienced, was further mediated by their class and the ethos of their particular families. This constitutes a *more-than-contextual* approach which expands the parameters of relevant contextual factors, which sheds light on the underpinnings of historical norms (and their legacies), including past and present definitions of ‘geography’ and ‘geographers’. This approach offers more nuanced understanding of the shared and varying factors and experiences shaping the production and reception of women’s geographical work (Maddrell 2009).

There have been numerous critical historiographical studies focusing on women's geographical work in the last 25 years (Domosh 1991, Garcia-Ramon 2004, Morin and Guelke 2004, Monk 2002, 2004, Keighren 2010), including my own efforts in *Complex Locations* and elsewhere (Maddrell 1997, 1998, 2009, 2015), which go some way to redressing this largely patriarchal narrative of ancestral lineage. This in turn is linked to other work highlighting the role of 'hidden' large and 'small' stories (Lorimer and Spedding 2002) and the implications of other forms of discrimination e.g. class, race, sexuality and how these intersect with gender. Collectively this body of work points to the ongoing need for historiographical work which is 'methodologically, theoretically and analytically sensitive to difference' in all its variety (Maddrell 2009 338).

Unearthing 'hidden histories' (Driver and Jones 2009) can be hard work, methodologically and epistemologically challenging, but also highly rewarding and is ultimately more inclusive. To this end, in addition to the handful of Arab and female geographers referred to, *The Geographical Tradition* would have been richer for naming and engaging with the likes of the role of indigenous or colonial guides (Driver and Jones 2009); non-anglophone geographies (Garcia-Ramon 2004); the 'grey' literature of alternative scholar-activists (Norcup 2015); school curriculum and teacher education (Maddrell 1998, Monk 2007); popular geographies of Kinder Scout mass trespass (1932) and working class access to countryside. Reference to such research which postdates *The Geographical Tradition* may appear unfair, but it highlights a) that sources existed and b) these questions could be asked if any author is minded to do so. Focusing on geographical work deemed significant in the early twentieth century, I would highlight the following as highly pertinent but absent in *The Geographical Tradition*: Eva Taylor's work on Stuart, Tudor and Hanoverian navigation; the conceptual interventions by Marion Newbigin, e.g. her *Animal Geography* (1913); and Hilda Ormsby's regional studies, particularly *France. A Regional and Economic Geography* (1931), the leading (research-based) British textbook on the country for some forty years.

On the basis of his own acknowledged selectivity, Livingstone identified key themes within early twentieth century regional geographies, including natural science training of America and Europe's 'chief practitioners', and the related absence of the 'psychological' realm in regional approaches (Livingstone 1992 302-3). In relation to these points, Ormsby was one of the first British Geographers to be awarded a DSc Econ (1931, University of London) and discussed cultural practices and families' economic strategies such as intergenerational

seaweed harvesting on the Breton coast, in her regional geographical texts. Whilst Newbigin, Editor of the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, was a natural scientist by training (DSc 1898), she was nonetheless attentive to the particularities of regional gendered relations in her writing, for example in the Balkan conflicts, and in the deep sea fishing towns on the Norwegian coast where women fulfilled a wider range of public social and economic roles on shore than was typical elsewhere in Western Europe (under the now dated title *Man and His Conquest of Nature* Newbigin 1917). These points illustrate important insight and nuance gained from broadening the cast of ‘chief practitioners’.

It is my hope that contemporary histories of the discipline will not be able to disregard the geographical work of women in all its complexity and nuance (Maddrell 2009, Keighren 2017). This brings us back to being sensitive to the complex conceptual framing and ways of being attentive to intersectional differences, Othering and the non-human Other, including *ongoing* developments within theory and practice. As scholars and teachers, we have a responsibility to be reflexive regarding our own and others’ positionalities, methodologies and the varied analyses needed for ongoing critical engagements in the historiography of geography. ‘Such an approach can only enhance our appreciation of the intricacies of the detailed tapestry of the history of geography and geographical ideas’ (Maddrell 2009: 339). This includes analyses of the power relations implicated in the epistemologies of who and what is seen, heard and cited, celebrated or silenced, obscured and erased, and the implications of this within our discipline; for example, the false sense of women as relative newcomers to the production of geographical knowledge (Rose 1995) and persistent gender gap in tenured and promoted posts in university Geography (Maddrell et al 2016). I have highlighted the importance of attending to intersectional gender here, but ignoring gender as an analytical category is equally an epistemological-political act, in the same way as ignoring the effects of class or racism. Furthermore, the way we practice and frame our discipline shapes our understanding of the wider world we study and therefore the insights we provide to students, scholars and policy-makers.

More inclusive, more-than-contextual, situated and theoretically-informed historiographies, present rich opportunities for epistemological and methodological dialogue, in an always ongoing conversation. That *The Geographical Tradition* still has a central place in that dialogue is much to the credit of Livingstone’s scholarship. Livingstone acknowledges the ‘impossible aspirations’ of his book, covering some 500 years, and was careful to express contingency

when framing his claims, and the multiple and contested nature of *traditions* (rather than the eponymous single tradition) as well as encouraging readers to view traditions and histories as *evolving*. In the light of these caveats, awareness of the mediating role of the historian (Driver 1992), and the lacunae illuminated by contemporary (re)reading, surely Livingstone will not want *The Geographical Tradition*, or geographical traditions, to become ossified, yet alone canonized.

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