

Memory Building in Geopolitics

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Abstract. "Places" and "landscape" are terms that belong to the geographer's toolbox along with "map" and "scale". This article will show how discussing memory is also a matter of geography and geopolitics. In geopolitics, actors which are contesting a territory use conflicting representations and look to the past for an opportunity to legitimize their control over the disputed territory. On one side, this legitimacy invokes the memory of tragic events. On the other, positive elements, such as individual and collective victories and achievements that are routinely remembered in celebrations, are identified in public space by specific monuments or urban decorations. This mode of narration is the theme of critical geopolitics. The article that follows highlights how in "practical" geopolitics globalization establishes new connections and especially new descriptions of the world.

Keywords: Critical geopolitics, Geography, Geopolitics, Memory, Nationalism.

Abstract. Luoghi e "paesaggio" sono termini che appartengono alla cassetta degli attrezzi del geografo insieme a "mappa" e "scala". In questo articolo si mostrerà come discutere di memoria sia anche una questione di geografia e di geopolitica. In geopolitica, gli attori che si contendono un territorio utilizzano rappresentazioni contrastanti e cercano nel passato un'opportunità per legittimare il loro controllo sul territorio conteso. Da un lato, questa legittimazione invoca il ricordo di eventi tragici. Dall'altro elementi positivi come vittorie e successi individuali e collettivi che vengono abitualmente ricordati nelle celebrazioni, identificate nello spazio pubblico da specifici monumenti o decorazioni urbane. Questa modalità di narrazione è il tema della geopolitica critica. L'articolo che segue evidenzia come nella geopolitica "pratica" la globalizzazione stabilisca nuove connessioni e soprattutto nuove descrizioni del mondo.

Parole chiave: Geopolitica critica, Geografia, Geopolitica, Memoria, Nazionalismo.

The concept of memory as a social construct is used in the historical reconstruction of events which also typify places, so much so that we talk about the "construction" of landscapes. "Places" and "landscape" are terms which belong in a geographer's toolbox along with "map" and "scale". In this piece, I will describe how discussing memory is both a matter of Geography and Geopolitics.

The growth of major movements of state and cultural sovereignty – also called "neo-identities" – gives us pause. These are socio-political movements which always make use of social constructs such as "identity" and "culture".

The European Union came together as a political entity to avoid further tragedies, wars, genocides – first among all, the Holocaust. Europe needed "places of memory to make people understand, forgive, forget" (den Boer, 1993).

The history of Europe encompasses many nations and states which contributed to building equally diverse memories. It is not easy to bring these memories within a shared historical interpretation, or in the construction of a shared memory. Let us think for example of the "Christian roots", that is, the cultural aspect which, according to different sources, either indicated the Greek cradle or the influence of the Christian experience (Di Giacomo, 2003).

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Why Geopolitics

Let's see what is meant by geography and geopolitics starting with the latter concept. A first definition is that of "relations between [...] countries, or to the politics of colonization of vast areas by world powers". This is the indication that John O'Loughlin (O'Loughlin, 1994) provides in his dictionary, where he draws a fairly comprehensive overview of geopolitics, but which objectively appears, as I will detail later, reductive compared to the quantity of interests actually covered by geopolitics. Overall, O'Loughlin's discourse centers on how geopolitics deals with political relations between states as they happen primarily, though not exclusively, on a global scale.

O'Loughlin defines three possible types of geopolitics:

- 1) The geographical scope of foreign policy, which splits the focus of geopolitics in: a) the study of the localization of peoples and the distribution of diversity (and in particular the study of the diversity of their localization). This study provides data collection for any type of foreign policy action; b) the implementation of actions necessary to achieve specific objectives;
- 2) The geopolitics of the various states (such as the United States, or Italy etc.) as a question of worldview from within one's own country as a starting point, as well as highlighting a country's own interests within the global political chessboard. From this perspective, obviously every geopolitics differs according to the eye of a beholding state, because the global reality will be read through the lenses of the national interests of each state;
- 3) A "critical geopolitics" which stems from the belief that geopolitics has always been linked to power as an instrument of support. Critical geopolitics simply interprets official positions to understand well what the goals of Power are, hence offering alternative readings and assessments.

John Agnew, although looking back to the most remote origins of the discipline, immediately brings us up to date with a second definition of geopolitics. Agnew recalls that the concept of geopolitics rose in the 19th century, simply as an allusion to the geographical representations in the field of international politics in the world. However, since the 1990s the constant and confusing use of the word "geopolitics" has led to its employment in issues of immigration, international relations, as well as electoral geography. This "expropriation" of the term allows for a thoughtful reflection on its meaning and on its implications. In this regard, Agnew tries to outline the first contours of geopolitics as the analysis of geographical hypotheses, designations and understandings that are part of "world politics" (Agnew, 1998). He directs our attention towards what we might call the first traces of geopolitics, particularly with respect to the politics of certain states in the 16th century. He says that in reality, beyond the exact rise of geopolitics, it has gained ground as a structural presence in the field of geography ever since the "world" was conceived as a whole unit. Agnew identifies four geopolitical scales in order of importance:

- 1) world, where it is conceived in its entirety;
- 2) international, which concerns relations between two or more states, though not always on a global level;
- 3) national, which is specific to each state;
- 4) regional, relating to the internal parts of the various states.

To date, French geographer Yves Lacoste (Lacoste, 1993) offers the most complex definition of geopolitics. According to him, any situation in which two or more political actors compete for a

specific territory is considered geopolitical. In this competition, the populations who inhabit the territory, or that are represented by sparring actors, must be involved in the dispute by the deployment of mass communication tools. I would like to focus on this definition to follow up on my explanation, and above all on Lacoste's concept of representation.

To Lacoste, representation denotes two specific things:

- 1) The drawing of a map. Geopolitics deals with antagonisms between actors for territorial issues, and therefore the geographical map is crucial for representation. A paper map is widely accepted as an objective instrument, however it's more like a subjective communication tool, because it never represents a territory accurately, rather it always represents a specific idea of territory. On the other hand, the map is still irreplaceable today since no other instrument can represent a territory in the same manner. Its subjectivity means that it is a tool in the hands of the actor who wants to make practical use of it, an ideal tool in the hands of power or counterpower. Even the geographical maps found in an ordinary atlas are subjective; they are a one-sided choice to show a world which, in any case, is impossible to see in its entirety. In other words, geographical maps function as a block in the construction of memory, as we will see later. The map of a territory which no longer exists or is no longer owned by its people becomes a nostalgic reference to something those people would like to re-possess. A classic case is Greater Hungary, a cartography which now features as a sticker on cars circulating in Budapest. Another is states which have been deprived in any way of their territory of reference such as Kurdistan.
- 2) A theatrical act. Truly, in a territorial actor's communication strategy for control, dramatization is a common practice, and the role of the media and images is fundamental. For example, photographs convey emotions which support the strategies we want to pursue.

Unlike historical research proper, discussing "memory", particularly if understood as collective and therefore shared, brings forward the concept of representation I just defined. In geopolitics, the actors contending for a territory use conflicting representations, and seek in the past an opportunity to legitimize their control over the disputed territory. On the one hand, this "historical" legitimacy invokes the remembrance of tragic events such as massacres, violence, the sacrifices of certain people, and on the other hand positive elements such as individual and collective victories and success which are habitually recalled in celebrations, identified in the public space by specific monuments or urban decoration. This mode of narrative, which we will return to later, is the topic of critical geopolitics.

Critical geopolitics is inspired by a famous work by Yves Lacoste, which led to a profound discussion about the role of geography and, by extension, of geopolitics. Ó Tuathail's work is particularly relevant in regard to the role he attributes to representation, which he calls discourse. The tie between geopolitics and discourse is extremely strong:

"It is only through discourse that the building up of a navy or the decision to invade a foreign country is made meaningful and justified. It is through discourse that leaders act " (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

This article highlights how in "practical" geopolitics, globalization establishes new connections, and especially new descriptions of the world. It is precisely this type of "description" which is interesting in this context because geography is above all a subjective description - and therefore a subjective interpretation - made by each of us.

Ó Tuathail returns directly to Yves Lacoste's work in an article that aims at rereading geopolitics through the lens of Derrida's contribution to deconstructionism. The construction of concepts such as East, West, Third World, etc. are all geographic concepts, and yet they're built to convey precise social meanings. Ó Tuathail's work shows how geography is a language as well as social knowledge

which does not only include "[...] academic studies but also mass-media-generated geographical clichés and images [...] Geography is taught not only in classrooms but also in films, newspapers and advertisements".

In the work of each of these scholars, any talk about geopolitics, and ultimately about geography, means mostly talking about “representation” as a description of the world, or of a specific disputed territory, where the construction of “discourse” means bringing this territory into existence, and present it as a social construct. From the media viewpoint, such a construct takes miscellaneous forms. I have already discussed the reference to Ó Tuathail’s “discourse” where, actually, no reference is made to a simple oral speech: “[...] It is not simply speech or written statements but the rules by which verbal speech and written statements are made meaningful. Discourses enable one to write, speak, listen and act meaningfully” (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992).

Representation

Discourse then is a social construct that may be conveyed by various means. However, a narrative is proposed, and in geopolitics, that narrative is one of many, in clear opposition to that of its adversaries.

As Lacoste himself says (Lacoste, 1993), representations are basically ideas. We are in possession of catalogs which attempt to organize large quantities of depictions - historical, geographic, cartographic - as well as representations proceeding from political and philosophical ideas (Loyer, 2019). Naturally, words and images play an important role. At first Loyer herself remembers how certain words are in themselves a representation; we often hear about “rights” or “people” with the geopolitical goal of affirming equity and power. Moreover, the term “population” is often connected to the concept of collective memory, however scholars take that very term for granted, given that it is used liberally to embody many distinct meanings.

A geopolitical concept which features prominently in the discipline is that of “nation”, and that is so mostly because it is difficult to define exactly what a nation is. In *Vive la Nation* (Lacoste, 1998), Lacoste tells us that it is a construct of collective imagination informed by a selection of precise historical facts which brings together various groups with the goal of making sense of a state which, ultimately, collects taxes, performs certain public services, etc. Understandably, this also requires the identification of a territory over which a given nation claims to have sovereignty.

This concept arouses great debates between experts for its complicated definition, but also for the desire of each community to create one nation, as if being individuals meant to partake of a community which must necessarily come together as a nation. Hence the search for those ingredients that we consider indispensable such as symbols, languages, cultural products, historical constructs, production of memories, and a territorial outline as a whole cartographic imaginary. Existence is built as a nation, and, in relation to that construct, a position is defined in relation to the planet: “I exist as an individual and therefore I am part of a nation on a territory regardless of whether I own and control this territory or not.”

In relation to identity formation within a given nation, discourses arise in relation to “others”, namely those who are *in* and those who are *out*; or in relation to which historical events are significant, such as which images, which symbolic places, which memories are built for the nation to be “boundless”. This concept of nation is perhaps the most geopolitical of concepts: a robust idea behind many territorial disputes precisely because the concept of nation is fluid. Yet antagonistic representations of the territory and its inhabitants are just as powerful and convincing. If we take the idea of an Italian nation for example, the notion of a territory that falls within the borders of the state is not enough sufficient. At the beginning of the Italian Unification, some believed that territories such as Corsica, Dalmatia and Istria, even Nice and Malta, were integral parts of the Italian nation,

even though the membership of these territorial areas in the Italian nation was questionable. Still today, many consider those territorial areas as “Italian”. Within the European Union, the concept of “nation” is up to those who use it, whether in opposition or in favor of a stronger EU.

Nation. People. Community. Ethnicity. These are social constructions under which leaders try to aggregate groups of people around certain ideologies, symbols, values and beliefs. To this end, historical elements are ascribed to the collective memory, as I mentioned above, often being inserted concretely in the public space: monuments or decorations for example, which range from the barely visible to the mastodonic, which are attacked and destroyed by those who deny their value of collective memory or cultural heritage for a community. The symbolic value of the public space is also contested in terms of which public has actual control over it.

Instead of dwelling on describing the types of representation, I would rather refer to the detailed explanation offered by Barbara Loyer (Loyer, 2019). Simply but crucially, representations are narrative and visual, such as the geographical map, the study of which appears endless (Harley, 1988) (Lacoste, *La Géographie ça sert d'abord à faire la Guerre*, 1976) (Wood, 1992) (Pickles, 2004).

Photography is another essential tool of representation, which contributes to a certain type of narration, present and past. Generally speaking, iconography i.e. the various symbols we use, participates in the construction of an imaginary building of memory. Photos offer a metaphorical vision of reality. Korzybsy reminds us that "a map is not the territory (Korzybski, 1998); by extension, photographs offer a representation of a reality which is first and foremost interpreted subjectively. If a map is a true representation of the earth as much as the cartographer's interpretation, similarly a photograph is primarily a representation of reality chosen by the photographer who, among other things, gives that image away so that it can become a representation of reality according to someone else's interpretation. Regardless, a representation is never the object represented nor can it ever replace the actual object. Unquestionably, images are very powerful devices for the affirmation of values. Many episodes confirm how often the use of photographs in geopolitics has led to wrong decisions. One of these goes back to the Second Iraq War (2003) when Colin Powell, who was then in charge of US diplomacy, brought forward photographs that “proved” that the Iraqi administration was in possession of weapons of mass destruction, or otherwise dangerous chemical weapons. These photographs were confusing and impossible to interpret and should have been explained by specialists. Still, they were taken as evidence that Saddam Hussein was in the possession of those weapons. Today we know that was not true, as Powell himself admitted later on. An image, then, legitimizes a discourse.

A striking example of geopolitical representation is the photograph of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, a Kurdish child who perished on the Turkish shore in Bodrum on September 2, 2015. This image had a three-pronged effect:

1. it propelled Germany to drastically change its reception policy towards migrants
2. it detonated outrage all over Europe, which until then had remained relatively indifferent to anti-immigration policies
3. it began a profound discussion in various European countries which denounced that indifference.

That photo perhaps only meant to show the tragedy of a father who had lost his son on a coastline very close to our homes, and, what is more, a popular vacation spot. Instead, in the eye of the thousands of people who have seen it, it has become vested with a deeper meaning. Pierre Samson, illustrator and caricaturist for several French periodicals, came up with a variation of the sadly famous shot of Aylan Kurdi, he reproduced the photograph in every detail while also drawing runners' footprints around the body as if they were continuing to jog on undisturbed. This illustration

condemned the European widespread apathy to the tragedy of migrants. Another example of how an image can be viewed through an originally unintentional lens is the photograph portraying Mohammed Shohayet, a 16-month-old Rohingya child, drowned in mud while he fled Myanmar for Bangladesh with his mother and brothers to escape persecution by Myanmar military forces. Mohammed was called immediately "the Rohingya Aylan Kurdi" (Wright, 2017) by directly linking the two tragedies, albeit the reasons for escape were as dissimilar as the situations and places. The CNN headline was not enough, evidently, since other media have published the two photographs side by side so that the discourse summarized in the CNN headline produced an emotional impact without taking into account that these two events had actually taken place in two very distant parts of the world and two years apart from each other (AGI, 2017).¹

Manipulation of images therefore does imply digital changes (which are not exactly recent developments), though not exclusively. The main form of image manipulation is found in the discourse which accompanies the image, and including works of art. It is not uncommon for archeological ruins, which are only echoes of art, to be considered "works of art" because, as cultural reference, they symbolize the past and national identity. Several scholars have highlighted how monuments actually become "monuments to the history of art" (Riegl, 2017) to the point that attempting to distinguish between historical monument and artistic monument is arduous because the two become one along the way. On the other hand, we are well aware of how artistic heritage becomes historical heritage of a specific history which various political actors have contributed to building, an artistic / historic heritage made of symbols that have assembled the memory and identity of a community, ousting any detail the political actors themselves decide to oust. This is what Jacinto Lageira defines as "possessing plasticity and historicity at the same time" (Lageira, 2016); images of any kind fit nicely under this representational category because they are never neutral. The choice of images that we decide to bring forward, or the choice of monuments that we propose as the pillars of a given identity become a choice on which values we want to represent to understand which society we want to create, and consequently "which images from our history we want create and showcase" (Lageira, 2016, p. 14).

Memory and the landscape

In the geographical imaginary, landscapes are perhaps what comes to mind faster, and something which at the same time has caused loud debates for decades on the object they represent, and how to observe it. But why is this relevant to Geopolitics?

When Landscapes became the object of pictorial representation, they were perceived as something one may observe passively (Farinelli, 2020), thus objectifying the landscape as a portion of nature. This perception, then, includes a subject (the observer) who observes an object (the landscape) by a medium (the eyes); however, it makes several further assumptions: first of all, the landscape-object is seen as something we observe as a by-product of another "entity", that is, nature. However, this perception has changed, in fact nowadays the Landscape is no longer viewed as a derivative of nature, instead it is always "anthropized": it is humans who make the landscape, with their intervention on it. It is difficult to imagine a corner of the earth where humans have not become involved in this dynamic by simple actions or by expressly "preserving" the landscape. In many cases, landscape architects today intervene on a damaged terrain to bring it back to its previous conditions; consequently, buildings are torn down, or vegetation is uprooted because it may not be native to the "original" landscape they want to reproduce. Clearly this landscape "anthropization" acquires even

¹ For ethical reasons, we do not include photos of the two lifeless little bodies of Aylan Kurdi and Mohammed Shohaeyet on the seashore.

more relevance if we think of the territory where we live daily, which may be neither wild nor protected, instead it is the backdrop for socio-economic activities, which is clearly a human construction.

In European culture the concept of Landscape relies on three assumptions: it is a portion of a territory, it is perceived only visually, and it forms part of a duality where the subject is the observer, and the landscape is the object (Jullien, 2014). The first assumption already helps us to decipher the weight of choice on the portion of territory which we observe or present: which landscape would we like to propose as representative of something (an identity, a value, a culture)? The second assumption, according to Jullien, raises some doubts. Truly, if we reduce the landscape to something seen through the eyes and nothing more, it loses its “meaningfulness”. The landscape is a resource, especially in geopolitics, which becomes instrumentalized as a representation in the hands of the political actor to justify a vision and a strategy.

In his study, Jullien quotes Yves Lacoste’ thoughts on landscape as the backdrop for military action, which is to be observed as a reminder to remain vigilant, thus adding a tactical feature to the aesthetic qualities of Landscape. Lacoste is even more precise in his work as he reflects on his own geopolitical approach: “[...] Effectively looking at a landscape implements a conception of geography linked to action and it is also war people who first began to look carefully at the images of the landscapes” (Lacoste, *De la Géopolitique aux Paysages*. Dictionnaire de la géographie, 2009).

As for all things geographical, the landscape is always reliant on the interpretation of the viewer, which in turn is planted so firmly on subjective and individual values such as perceptions, emotions, the observer’ own identity. We may add to that a cultural perception, as members of a community to which we feel we belong, and with which we share many values.

This leads us to identify various characteristics, for example, how the landscape is portrayed in different parts of the world. For example, a thousand-year-old landscape painted in China varies considerably from a Renaissance landscape painted in Italy. In his study, Jullien underlines that the Landscape initially only fills the gaps of a painting, much like a backdrop would to the main subject of a picture. Only later will the landscape become an object of its own representation, in particular during romanticism and later in impressionism.

What must be remembered, after what has just been written, is how much the landscape as a geopolitical representation becomes tools for the construction of a collective memory, certain plant essences are often selected because, according to certain narratives, they would be the original elements of that particular territory. Certain architectures are often eliminated or revalued because they are considered part of the memory represented as "true". Religious buildings or certain architectural styles are either preserved or demolished.

The very characteristics of a landscape are identified as identity elements of a community. The Landscape portrays society and identity so much so that its contents are selected to compose an "ideal landscape" which best embodies the values of the political actor who wants to use it. A prime example are the posters used in French presidential elections, such as those of 1965 François Mitterrand’s campaign, and those from his winning campaign in 1981, when, for the first time in French history, a left-wing president took office. The election poster must summarize key campaign principles; in 1965, France was in the midst of the transition from agriculture to industry. For this reason, the candidate’s image does not rest on a background of rolling hills and villages, but next to an electricity pylon against a flat landscape, with industrial chimneys: “a modern France”, the poster reads. In other words, this Landscape connects to a land which may have been agricultural in the past, but which is becoming industrialized in the present. Today those chimneys would horrify any voter.

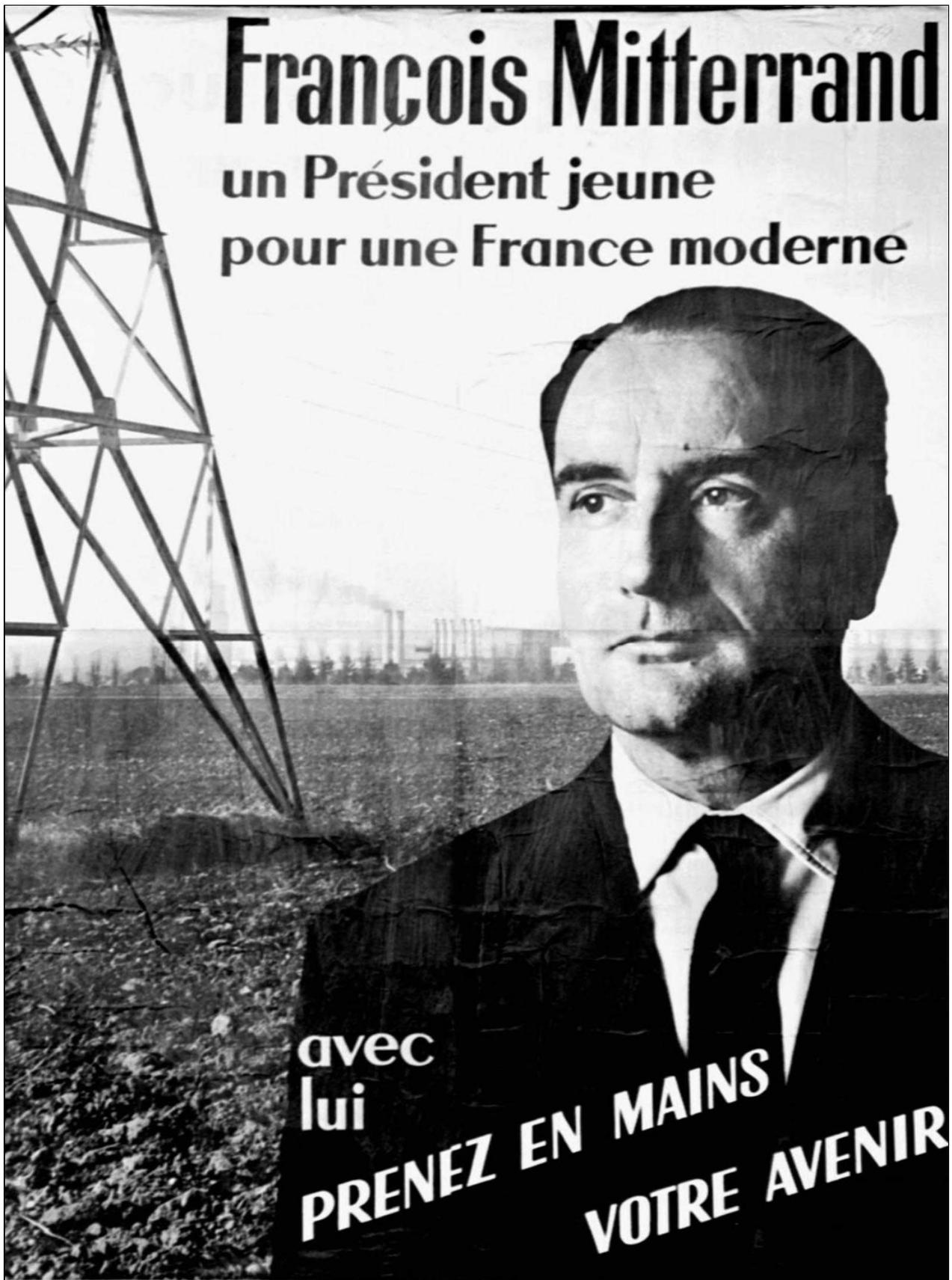


Figure 1. Election poster for the 1965 French presidential campaign used by candidate François Mitterrand. Note the rural but industrialized landscape, with intensive agriculture, high voltage pylons, and a factory landscape in the background.



Figure 2. Election poster for the 1981 French presidential campaign used by candidate François Mitterrand. Note the rural landscape: this time, unlike in 1965, concerns the typical French village with a church in the foreground but from which the cross is cancelled, as was decided by the left alliance that supported Mitterrand, with a rural but laicized of the landscape.

The 1981 poster is remarkably dissimilar. In the French imagination, their country is not Paris but small villages, a bucolic landscape with a small church as the community’s meeting point: a peaceful strength.

The fact that a leftist president, also supported by members of the French communist party, could come to power, should not have frightened. The 1981 campaign poster was reassuring towards those who sought symbols of the French identity. On the bell tower of the church there should actually have been a cross, of course, but the Mitterrand campaign committee, with the participation of the Communists too, found it “too Catholic”, too religious-looking for the secular principles of the Republic. So, it was decided to delete it. Ultimately and practically, the symbolic landscape is adapted to the representation one wants to give.

In photography and in painting, then, the landscape is not only a product to be studied as the fruit of human work on a given territory, it also becomes a representation of a given vision by the same society. What makes Landscape a symbol of a society is its “fixed” perception as given in nature to permanently inscribe the “sign” of a given community; on the other hand, we know well that Landscape, like culture, like language, is evolutionary, the result of the changes caused by the interaction between strata of society, and with the territory they inhabit.

Another example is that of mosques, which in Italy have always been hidden in urban landscapes, very rarely do they present visibly distinctive signs. For example, architect Paolo Portoghesi’s Mosque in Rome is never featured in images of the city’s urban landscapes despite its location in Acqua Acetosa, in the Parioli district, between Villa Ada and the Tiber. The Mosque is never featured either in fictitious landscapes which compose images of contemporary heritage, which instead always showcase the Auditorium by Renzo Piano.

The Mosque of Rome is the largest in the western world, and its location in the capital of Catholicism is of great symbolic value.

The selection of the contents of a Landscape participates in the rewriting of history and in the construction of memory. At the end of World War II the Japanese attempted to recompose their history going beyond the first half of the 1900s and eliminating events related to war, colonization, enslavement and invasions.

The 1995 Paradise Lost exhibition at the Yokohama Museum critiqued the identity that the right-wing Japanese culture was trying to reconstitute. Julia Adenay Thomas (Adenay Thomas, 2012) shows how something harmless may become an instrument of resistance with careful interpretation. Adenay Thomas brings up several examples, such as *Landscape with an eye*, a painting by Aimatsu, and *South-Facing House* by O Chi-ho, both mixing separate visions. O Chi-ho, a Korean artist trained in Japan, highlights the limits of the national identity which extremists of the Japanese right were working on. The Yokohama Museum exhibition showcased paintings by many artists, some of whom were impressionists, like the Japanese Aimatsu, who for Adenay Thomas represented "[...] a challenge to identity, synthesizing international surrealism with Japan's indigenous traditions" (Adenay Thomas, 2012, p. 338).

Identity, in its various possible definitions, stands at the center of the representation that is made in a landscape, whether photographic or pictorial. In the late 80s and early 90s, Japan was torn between an apologetic government for the aggressions they had committed in the past, and an extremist right wing who did not tolerate this vision and did not believe they had to disavow any past action; identity was really the object of dispute. Adenay Thomas uses the term "revelatory" in connection with the "identity logic" strategy by right-wing government officials and extremist associations (Adenay Thomas, 2012, p. 340). This is particularly pertinent because it proves the landscape's dual function as both commemorative and historical, as a document of a specific past, and therefore a sort of mediation between memory and history.

Another fundamental aspect of geopolitics and of representation is communication. The paintings used in Paradise Lost are artistic objects which communicate a specific vision. The exhibit expressed an ideology which clearly opposed the right-wing's by pushing beyond the borders of national Japan, as if to better integrate it within the history of the entire regional area.

Here, both the museum and the exhibition brought forward a geopolitical representational ideology. Similarly in Africa, where many museums were established to strengthen the role of one ethnic group at the expense of another, possession rights over a river have been affirmed with collections of objects representing a specific ethnicity; but when this ethnic group became a minority, the majority erased the traces of the previous ethnic group inside the museum for their own benefit (Bondaz, 2014).

Memory and public space: *placemories*

We have seen up to now how much the landscape is based on a vision of a certain portion of the territory.

At this point it seems useful to introduce other elements of reflection which have appeared in the literature of cultural geography linked to studies on memory, as well as in current case studies on this topic. What appears more and more evident is that places of memory are not simply elements of urban decor or monuments, in public spaces, they're symbols of memory.

"Memorial sites do not exist per se because a memory community once produced them in the past. But they are real if they are adapted in constant updates to the specific experiences of the present. Thereby, they are produced again and again in new ways" (Hubner & Dirksmeier, 2022, p. 104).

Accessibility and composition are elements closely connected to current events, to the historical moment in which an event or a symbol is not placed but perceived in the present moment.

Examples in this regard are numerous and concern national holidays, public places and monuments. For example, the holiday of November 4, which is National Unity and Armed Forces Day. This day is the only national holiday which has outlived all historical phases in Italy from the

Unification to today, various disputes (60s and 70s) then decline (years 1980s e 1990s) notwithstanding to find vitality again under Carlo Azeglio Ciampi.

During his presidency of the Republic (1999-2006), Ciampi revitalized the word “homeland” with all its symbols, especially the visual ones. Ciampi was known to immediately have the slightest damaged tricolor flag replaced. Obviously, the flag was also abundantly displayed in key national holidays, starting with those of June 2nd (Republic Day) and November 4th. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi was probably the most important example of that phenomenon called "constitutional patriotism" (Rossi, 2006), which focuses on the Constitution in an extremely delicate historical moment which had seen the end of bipartisanship, the end of party legitimacy that emerged from the Second World War, and an ever stronger localism which found its loudest representative in the Northern League, in a moment in which national identity seemed to be extremely fragile.

Ciampi undoubtedly spearheaded the revival of the word “homeland” and the specific culture which came after it. This episode comes with precise geographical references as exemplified by the Piave river. In 2004, two small towns on either banks of the river Piave, Nervesa della Battaglia and Moriago della Battaglia, obtained the Gold Medal of Civil Merit for the war events of 1917-18. Here we have a classic example of “divided memory” between President Ciampi’s will to position these towns as symbols of the valor of the Italian fighters who with that battle contributed not only to victory, but also offered an example of unity (Ceschin, 2010, p. 275). On the other hand, Luca Zaia, a Northern League member who was also president of the Province of Treviso at the time, opposed this vision which clashed against stories of civilians who did not want to fight that war and, according to his own account, they were tied to cannons, forced to fight (Ceschin, 2010, p. 276). Zaia later changed his story, curbing or eliminating details altogether, and instead praised that page of homeland history as an example of Italian unity (Ceschin, 2010, p. 277).



Figure 3. The monumental staircase of Redipuglia where we can read the word "presente", typical of the fascist liturgy to refer to the comrades who died in their service for fascism. Except that these dead are soldiers who died during the First World War, therefore not for fascism and not even during fascism. Here they are appropriated by the fascist regime, decades later, as if to represent a preparation for the coming of fascism.

Of all places of divisive memory, the Foibe is the best known. Hushed for decades, the Foibe massacre is set on 10 February as a day of remembrance in memory of the victims, the Julian-Dalmatian exodus, the events of the eastern border, and a recognition of the infoibati's families (law of 30/03/2004 n°92).

The Foibe are located in a geographical area which has been the backdrop of the deportation of Italians from Istria and Dalmatia to Trieste, which has always been a disputed territory by at least three unrelated actors (Austria, the former Yugoslavia and Italy), and where a community of Slovenian-speaking Italians are often at odds in local politics. The commemoration of the Foibe tragedy is a piece of memory which is portrayed differently according to who remembers it, often even incorrectly. It remains as evidence of how many pages of history are used to build a memory that we would like to share but which continues to divide us.

These examples lead to a better understanding of *placememory*. In the cases I list earlier, a place is used in a construction of memory which is unrelated to the original historical moment, however it functions as a political tool to compare the past with the present in a context where the left and the right wings seek to propose the same memory from opposing viewpoints. A comparable example is the struggle for the abatement of racist monuments in public spaces following the murder of George Floyd. Another is the defacement with red paint of David D'Angers' statue of David de Pury, a wealthy donor to his birthplace Neuchâtel, a particularly symbolic gesture because this statue, portraying a 18th century personality, was made in 1844 by a sculptor who saw in his work a "sign art" at the service of "future memory" (Tillier, 2023). In this case, the commission which was established to reconcile dissenting voices around a memory which was more divisive than ever, resolved to build four temporary monuments in the same city square to explain why a slaveholder was celebrated in a public space. The end result was actually more complex and debated, however it matters to emphasize how impactful the Black Lives Matters movement has been to raise questions and overthrow assumptions around the organization and management of public spaces and which historical figures and episodes we celebrate in those places. The integration of representational elements within the landscape seeks to celebrate episodes in history, however those same elements do not make "history", rather they build a "memory" at the disposal of the current political forces on opposing fronts.

The Redipuglia shrine commemorates the Italian victims of World War I events which occurred before the rise of fascism. The shrine, the largest in Italy, was inaugurated in 1938 by Benito Mussolini. On the colossal steps which climb towards the top of Mount Sei Busi, one can read the numerous inscriptions "presente!", a fascist affirmation in memory of the fallen. This monument was built to connect the victims of WWI and those of Fascism, which would come within a few years, almost as if their deaths were somehow an omen of Mussolini's regime. Once again, a piece of history was appropriated to build collective memory, inscribed within the Landscape of a specific territory, visible from miles away.

Conclusions

Geopolitics, as a discipline which studies the dissent between political actors on the evolution of a given territory, is made above all of communication.

In this article, I aimed to show contrasting examples of construction of memory through images, building and destruction of monuments, and landscape elements

The term "representation" is essential in geopolitics, and the various examples, that I gave, highlight its connection to the construction of both cultural identities and "memory". The case of

Mitterand's electoral posters and their references to divergent landscape elements according to the historical context of each electoral campaign. Representation applies also to divisive memory items such as the symbols of World War I, fascism, the *Foibe*, slavery. The symbols in the Landscape, be it urban decor or monuments, deploy an evocative power. Adeany Thomas has called this evocative force "between memory and history". In this manner, images of landscapes are chosen based on what it represents, possibly eliminating what should not be shown or simply changing the frame.

The symbols of memory in public spaces are elements of great importance within a historical context, not only for what they recall from the past. The symbols of memory are "terminals" that link pages of the past to a current situation that wounds and divides a community in extreme ways. The objective of this work was to show this link, to underline its importance and, methodologically, to show the point that these "memorial elements" should be considered collectively, underlining myriad sensitivities to avoid endangering democratic communal living.

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