

Interactive comment on “The invented periphery: constructing Europe in debates about “Anglo hegemony” in geography” by U. Best

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Questions of Anglo-American hegemony in knowledge production in Geography have been discussed in the literature for more than a decade now. This literature shows that whilst many academics have been contesting such processes, Anglo-American hegemony has become more embedded as part of the ongoing neoliberalization of academic knowledge production systems. Neoliberalization of the academy has wrought forces of ‘creative destruction’ that both transforms and more deeply embeds Anglo-American hegemony in academic knowledge production.

This paper by Ulrich Best provides a critical review of (some of) this critical literature on Anglo hegemony in Geography (note that I use the term Anglo-American hegemony, whilst Best uses the term Anglo hegemony. The importance of these terms will

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hopefully become apparent later in my review). Best focuses his discussion here on a particularly problematic aspect of some of the key discussions of Anglo hegemony, namely the various (and often unproblematic) constructions of Europe as ‘periphery’. Best’s paper is thus worthy of eventual publication for two inter-related reasons: first, it provides us with a useful review of the Anglo hegemony literature in geography; and, second, it provides us with a useful critique of the way that this hegemony is conceptualized in spatialized terms of ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’. In terms of the criteria set out for peer reviewers of SGD papers, Best’s manuscript:

- addresses relevant scientific questions within the scope of SG (especially in that it provides a useful summary of the literature to date, and that it provides a critical analysis of the debate itself);

- presents novel concepts (in the way that it outlines a postcolonial critique of the Anglo hegemony debate in Geography);

- outlines substantial conclusions (namely that a specific ideological vision of Europe is produced in the Anglo hegemony debate); and, it

- uses valid methods and assumptions that are clearly outlined.

Notwithstanding the potential value of this manuscript, I believe it requires some important revisions before it can be published in final form.

In undertaking revisions, I think that the author needs to pay further attention to writers that have not explicitly drawn on the binary construction between Anglo and European geographies, but have nonetheless contributed to the critique of Anglo hegemony. Writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, Robin Kearns and I (Berg and Kearns, 1998) attempted to unsettle such binary thinking by drawing on feminist poststructuralist ideas of paradoxical space. Our objective was to deconstruct centre-periphery distinctions by illustrating the relational character of such binaries, and in particular how each was necessarily part of the other. In addition, we attempted to avoid claiming a

subject position as a marginalized Other, but instead noted how we were contradictorily positioned in Aotearoa/New Zealand as both colonized and colonizing. We thus argued:

"Our purpose in highlighting the elisions of [Anglo-American hegemony] is not, however, to claim a position of marginality for ourselves. Similarly, we are not suggesting that adding New Zealand geographies (and geographers) into 'the core' of geographic publishing would provide a solution to the kinds of marginalisation problems we outline. Indeed, any such approach is likely merely to reinforce the exclusionary binaries inherent in the already powerful production of centres and margins" (Berg and Kearns, 1998, p. 130).

Focus on the PARADOXICAL character of the hegemonic socio-spatial relations of knowledge production differs from the three approaches that Best argues characterise the Anglo hegemony debate (although it bears some resemblance to those postcolonial approaches that argue that we need to understand subject positions as hybrid). Most important, is the attempt to avoid reproducing binaries of margins and centres, and instead suggesting that we need to focus our attention to the specificities of place as produced in the work of geographers.

It may also be helpful for Best to more critically focus on some of the structural processes of academic accumulation strategies in order to better understand how individual academics get caught up in wider socio-spatial relations. In a more recent paper (Berg, 2004, p. 554), for example, I have argued that we should understand Anglo-american hegemony in academic knowledge production as a scalar politics that are "part of hegemonic socio-spatial relations in Geography – in particular the political economy and cultural politics of academic accumulation strategies."

Finally, I think that Best's paper could be improved with a more thoroughgoing critique of the way that writers have (under)theorized hegemony itself in these discussions. If I was to re-examine my own work, for example, I would want to make a distinc-

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tion between Anglo-American dominance and Anglo-American hegemony. Under the former, we see that Anglo-American geography journals literally dominate the publishing landscape, and even though academics from other geographic locales know it is problematic, they also know they have little choice but to publish in Anglo-American journals and according to Anglo-American conventions. Under the latter, some scholars are completely unaware of Anglo-American dominance in geographic publishing, and they simply reproduce this dominance willingly. In other words, I think that Best's analysis can be improved by applying a Gramscian analysis of hegemony itself to better understand how a hegemonic idea of Europe gets produced in the Anglo hegemony debate.

As I stated at the outset, I feel that this discussion paper is a very good start towards a very helpful analysis of the way that Europe is constituted in analyses of Anglo hegemony in geographic publishing. I think it needs to draw in other papers that do not focus on Europe specifically, but which have been important contributions to the understanding of Anglo hegemony in geographic knowledge production; in part because it is important to acknowledge these works, but also because bringing them into the discussion provides a different way of understanding some of these issues. Likewise, a more critical analysis of the way that the concept of hegemony is brought to these discussions might provide a stronger analytical critique of the issues in question.

I look forward to reading the revised essay in final form.

References

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