

## REFERENCE

Inglehart R. (1977) *The Silent Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

*Eran Feitelson*

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

THE MIDDLE EAST, GEOGRAPHY AND GEOPOLITICS by Ewan W. Anderson. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Above all, Anderson's book reflects changes that have taken place in the regional geography paradigm in recent years. In essence, it is based on W.B. Fisher's book *The Middle East*, for many years the most outstanding book in the field. The seventh edition of Fisher's, which saw light in 1978, follows the traditional approach to regional geography (Taaffe, 1974). Anderson's book, however, adopts the regional geographical methodology that has developed over the past score years. This considers geographical regions as part of a global arrangement in which there are a variety of activities and movements, rather than a relatively closed system on the growth and progress of which its surroundings have no influence. It also deals with the compression of space and time (Schnell, 1999). Hence it focuses on spatial structuring and restructuring, which is a consequence of the different reactions of man and society both to specific local conditions and to regional and global processes and is influenced by a series of environmental, spatial, social, cultural and political factors; the State, too, still plays a central role in this complicated, multidimensional process, even though its importance and status have diminished in recent years.

Under this light, the first part of Anderson's book describes and reviews a series of factors whose role is influential in the context of the Middle East region as a whole. Its basis is the concept of the state as an arena in which processes of regional structuring take place. The second part of the book expresses this in the discussion devoted separately to each of the nineteen Middle Eastern countries, including the Palestinian authority. The state is a functional geographical region in which 'the geography as such is the stage and influences the performance on it but does not provide the script' (p. 201). The decision-makers at the level of government write the most significant part of the script, which includes both guidelines for structuring the region and a description of its goals. The fact that these environmental and other factors both sustain and influence this decision-making process creates a set of relations, which is the subject of political geography. Under the influence of current ideas in this field, the chapter dealing with the state outlines an individual political geographical 'portrait' of each, based on the relevant factors that influence both the decisions of the heads of government and the patterns of the state's activities. This is according to the realistic school of thought in the theory of international relations exclusively, which claims that those relations are anarchic and the proceedings of the

state are aggressive. It disregards the existence of an alternative pattern of activity that, according to the liberal institutionalism school of thought, makes possible a system of partnership relations between countries. There is no fault in preferring one school of thought over the others, if this preference is not merely a partisan one but achieves unchallenged empirical support. Conversely, closing the eyes to other approaches that have sound empirical foundations is certainly not valid. There seems to be a deliberate tendency in this book to neglect important, relevant and undeniable information that does not fit in with the author's preconceptions. His complete disregard of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel and the water agreement between these two states is an example. Relying on the approach of the realistic school of thought, Anderson chooses to analyze only those factors that affect the development of a country's power, which are: 1. location (the significance of geographical position relative to other states); 2. recent history (events of relatively long-lasting significance); 3. area (size and main physical elements); 4. population (size and literacy); 5. economic strength (GDP, resources and external debt); 6. military strength (defense budget, size and quality of the military); 7. external support; and 8. individual influence.

The realistic school of thought in the theory of international relations is the academic foundation on which the author develops the basic claim of the book. In essence, this claim asserts that there is a latent potential for a very serious armed conflict to flare up in the Middle East, even though the conclusion of the cold war opened up enormous possibilities for international cooperation and limited the chances of global war breaking out. The last chapter of the book devotes a separate political geographical analysis to this assertion, which imputes the responsibility largely to Israel. According to Anderson, Israel is one of the most dangerously aggressive countries in the world. He brings much ostensible evidence of this but the most conspicuous is Israel's possession of nuclear weapons, which, in his opinion, generates instability not only in the Middle East but also throughout the whole world. Ignoring Pakistan's nuclear arming and the reasons for it, Anderson asserts, 'the resulting potential for the construction of an 'Islamic bomb' must be blamed in part upon Israel' (p. 277).

It is generally accepted that regional characteristics are no more than human interpretations that geographers ascribe to reality on the basis of their individual perceptions. They also have similar freedom in selecting the features of their research that will best serve the purposes of their analysis. However, the question arises whether such freedom of action can justify dispensing with the rules for presenting information that are accepted in the academic community of the democratic west. Research, including political geographical research that conceals or deliberately ignores obviously essential details of information is neither scientific nor defensible and must be rejected out off hand; nor can any validity be attached to the claim that the area of interpretation and freedom of choice of the researcher can justify such behavior. Anderson does not appear to advocate this imperative. One cannot help thinking that he tends towards post-modern relativism, according to which

everything is no more than a matter of personal outlook and therefore the importance of facts is negligible. For this reason, apparently, he completely conceals the existence of a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel and raises the claim that the occupation of the West Bank is of extreme importance for Israel because it receives eighty percent of its water from that area. This erroneous statement is all the more amazing in the light of the author's own unfounded assertion that, 'the West Bank is a region which is predominantly dry upland...' (p. 241). It would seem that this methodology is also the reason that the book hardly mentions the issue of 'virtual water' (that is, a hidden source of water contained in agricultural products (Allan, 1998), although it is an important source of water in some countries of the Middle East and has far-reaching consequences for their development and their political and social stability.

In addition, there is his portrayal of the relatively minor border disagreement between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as one of the most complicated international conflicts, which, nevertheless, was resolved a year later (p. 262); the fragile nature of relations between neighboring Israel and Egypt (p. 216); and the marginal importance of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism (p. 302). These illustrations of ungrounded assessments and interpretations suggest inconsistency with regard to the rule that demands the presentation of fundamental, familiar and agreed facts as the basis for interpretation as well as the introduction of a political outlook in place of profound and balanced scientific analysis. Any of these features alone and particularly their combined existence in one book casts a dark shadow on its reliability and, more importantly, on its scientific credibility.

## REFERENCES

- Allan, J.A. (1998) Middle East water: local and global issues. Website: <http://endjinn.soas.ac.uk/Geography/Waterissues/Papers/9508ta>.
- Schnell, I. (1999) Geography as an Educational Challenge. Department of Geography, Tel Aviv University (Unpublished manuscript).
- Taafe, E.Y. (1974) The Spatial View in Context. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 64:1–16.

*Amnon Kartin*  
Tel Aviv University

TIMESPACE: GEOGRAPHIES OF TEMPORALITY edited by Jon May and Nigel Thrift. London and New York: Routledge, 2001

The relationships between space (geography) and time (history) have been one of the central issues in geographical discourse from its early steps as a modern discipline. During the 1970s, new concepts of space were developed in human and social geography, and the relationships between time and space(s) were re-examined.