

Topographies of Politics

Jeffrey C. Isaac

As we prepared this issue of *Perspectives* for publication in the summer of 2014, a series of interconnected violent political episodes captured international attention, from the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the bloody breakdown of political authority in Iraq and Libya, to the ongoing civil war in Syria and the fighting between Israel and Hamas that culminated in the protracted bombardment of Gaza. Each of these conflicts is a fight over power, wealth, and identity that is also a fight about space—about who controls space, who will occupy which spaces or be expelled from them, where the boundaries of political communities will be drawn, and how the spaces within them—which contain human beings and homes and neighborhoods and communities and organizations and land and infrastructure and “natural resources”—will be governed. Politically organized spaces can be sites of violence or civility, vulnerability or security, domination and degradation or decency or freedom. Typically they are sites of civility *and* violence, security *and* vulnerability, freedom *and* domination. Space is a condition of politics. At the same time, space is conditioned, and indeed constituted, by politics. While we were compiling this issue, it became clear that almost all of the articles and essays contained herein in one way or another deal with the spatial dimension of politics.

Our lead article, Bronwyn Leebaw’s “Scorched Earth: Environmental War Crimes, International Justice, and the Laws of War,” proceeds from a simple observation reinforced by this issue’s cover: “Images of wartime suffering are commonly set against scarred and ruined landscapes.” And yet, Leebaw observes, “war’s impact on the environment remains at the periphery of most contemporary debates on just war theory and humanitarian norms.” This article sets out to remedy this silence, by bringing to the fore the close connection between very live debates about the ethics of warfare and the ways that the natural and constructed environments are used and abused by war, to the detriment of “nature,” individuals, and societies. As Leebaw writes: “This article aims to bridge the divide between those concerned with evaluating crimes against humanity or human rights abuses and those concerned with environmental degradation and war’s impact on

environments. One reason for this divide, I suggest, has been that scholars in both arenas seem to frame efforts to conceptualize ‘environmental war crimes’ as a problem that is conceptually distinct from efforts to classify and analyze claims about the meaning of ‘humaneness’ and crimes against humanity in times of war.” Bringing into conversation scholarship in a range of scholarly subfields—environmental political theory, environmental justice, and environmental history, the laws and ethics of war and international criminal justice—Leebaw develops a conceptual analysis of four important ways that environmental abuse typically figures in political discussion: nature as property to be violated; nature as combatant/weapon; nature as a Pandora’s Box of unpredictable processes; and nature as a victim of wartime destruction. She then proceeds to suggest that greater sensitivity to these “different frames through which we view the nature/human nexus in war” can help to bridge “the divide between the work of official post-conflict institutions, such as truth commissions, trials, and restorative justice practices, and the work of post-conflict environmental assessments that are being carried out by UNEP and other various independent teams of scholars.”

Laura Valentini’s “No Global Demos, No Global Democracy: A Systematization and Critique” also analyzes the politics of space. Valentini proceeds from a constitutive tension at the heart of contemporary world politics: While in innumerable ways we now occupy a global social, economic, and political space that exceeds the borders of nation-states, there does not currently exist a commensurate form of global political order, and indeed the principle of democratic legitimacy that is at least claimed by most states is not taken seriously as a principle of global order. This tension is widely noted by scholars of international regimes and of the transnational politics of human rights and democratization. Valentini notes that “the idea of democracy beyond borders—involving the creation of transnational or supranational sites of democratic deliberation and decision-making—is the object of lively discussions in the growing field of international political theory.” And she proceeds to engage these discussions in the field of international theory. Working in the self-described vein of “analytic normative political

theory,” the paper systematizes “different types of objections against global democracy, thus bringing some clarity to an otherwise intricate debate” and offers a “robust but qualified defense of the global democratic ideal.” Bringing together a range of arguments within the sub-fields of political theory and international relations, the piece, in its author’s words, points “towards a fruitful, and somewhat under-explored, middle ground between global-democratic enthusiasts and skeptics.” (The importance of normative argument in politics, and thus in political inquiry, as well as the limits of exclusively ideational or normative arguments, is also discussed in Michael Goodhart’s review essay, “Recent Works on Dignity and Human Rights: A Road Not Taken.”)

Joshua Simon’s “The Americas’ More Perfect Unions: New Institutional Insights from Comparative Political Theory” deals with the geographical and political space of “America” or “the Americas,” and with how this space was historically constituted in the early modern period. Simon’s piece centers on a comparison between the United States of America that was established and then successfully expanded in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, and the Federal Republic of Central America that eventually succumbed to secession and civil war. As Simon neatly summarizes: “I compare arguments offered in support of unification by the founders of the United States, the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata (comprising present-day Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia), Gran Colombia (comprising present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama), and Mexico (originally comprising present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the western United States) . . . [showing] that influential political thinkers and actors in each of these polities understood the direct developmental advantages to be gained from uniting former colonies under common governments, and also outlined plans to employ the political authority newly at their disposal to abolish the stifling institutional legacies of European rule.” By analyzing the history of argumentation during this period, Simon seeks to contribute to debates among “new institutionalists” and “historical institutionalists” in comparative politics about the sources of the historic divergence between North and South America, and why federative schemes failed in the South but powered the development of the U.S. as a continental nation-state. (The theme of historical legacies is also taken up in the Critical Dialogue between Jeffrey Davis’s *Seeking Human Rights Justice in Latin America: Truth, Extra-Territorial Courts, and the Process of Justice* and Omar G. Encarnación’s *Democracy Without Justice in Spain: The Politics of Forgetting*. Meanwhile the strengths and limits of institutionalist accounts are explored in our symposium on John S. Alquist and Margaret Levi’s *In the Interest of Others: Organizations and Social Activism*).

In doing so, Simon also underscores the important role that the genre of “comparative political theory” can play in historical inquiry. As he writes: “Unlike other forms of empirical evidence, political ideas provide a record of institutional alternatives that were seriously considered but never established, conveying a sense not only what *did* happen, but also what *could have* happened at consequential historical conjunctures. The preserved books, articles, letters, and speeches of political thinkers, especially those actively involved in the political events of their time, offer uniquely direct testimony on the possible outcomes of the critical junctures they observed. By comparing the ideas contained in these artifacts, we can learn exactly which counterfactuals are relevant to explaining phenomena attributable to institutional variations, like the developmental divergence of the Americas.”

Simon’s article explicitly addresses a theme that lies in the background of the articles by Leebaw and Valentini: the politics of empire, and the enduring legacies of empire for the structuring of world politics, the dynamics of war and peace, and the political development of post-colonial states (these themes are also discussed in two of this issue’s Critical Dialogues: One between Jeanne Morefield’s *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*, and Richard Ned Lebow and Simon Reich’s *Goodbye Hegemony! Power and Influence in the Global System*; and the other between Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl’s *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present* and Piki Ish-Shalom’s *Democratic Peace: A Political Biography*).

Simon focuses on the sources of divergence of the United States from the experience of Southern or “Latin” America. At the same time, the consolidation and westward expansion of the United States made possible not only the development of a continental nation-state, but also the emergent dominance of the United States in the Western hemisphere, and what the late Andre Gunder Frank called the “development of underdevelopment” in the South. These developments have played an important role in shaping Latin American social theory (“dependency theory”) and the politics of the anti-imperialist left. And recent debates on the Latin American left have echoed some of the historical arguments and traditions of argumentation explored by Simon. The most obvious example is the “Bolivarian revolution” against neoliberalism proclaimed by the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (see Scott Mainwaring’s review essay on Chavez in our December 2012 issue). But even among the more social democratic left, new policy experiments have been accompanied by a revival of early modern civic republican themes (see Archon Fung’s “Reinventing Democracy in Latin America” in our December 2011 issue).

Wendy Hunter and Natasha Borges Sugiyama’s “Transforming Subjects into Citizens: Insights from

Brazil's Bolsa Família" presents a careful account of *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant), the conditional cash transfer program instituted by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) in 2006 as part of the reformist agenda of his Worker's Party. As the authors observe: "Conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs), which feature means testing and behavioral requirements, have swept Latin America in the past two decades. CCTs were introduced in seventeen Latin American countries between 1989 and 2010. They are diffusing rapidly elsewhere in the developing world, with the support of leading international organizations like the World Bank, which depicts them 'at the forefront of a new thinking on social protection, which reexamines the presumed trade-off between equity and efficiency.' CCTs are also hailed as 'one of the most significant developments in global social policy since the expansion of social security in industrialized countries. Despite the dramatic unfolding of CCTs, few analysts have investigated their full political consequences." Hunter and Sugiyama thus researched the effects of the program in Northeast Brazil, combining focus group and survey research into beneficiary perceptions, with interviews of program coordinators, social workers, health professionals, and educators.

They acknowledge that such social policies represent a contentious departure from conventional left approaches: "Tensions thus exist between the social democratic ideal of welfare states that feature universalism and no recipient co-responsibilities and the targeting and conditionalities mandated by economic and political constraints in contemporary Latin America and other developing world regions. Conflicts also exist between the historic focus of the Latin American left on redistributive structural reforms and the more moderate contemporary Latin American left's acquiescence to work within existing fiscal and political boundaries. The latter's concern for economic efficiency and acceptance of individual entitlements rather than insistence on collective class gains marks a departure from the past. Targeted social policy, once highly criticized in left circles as meager compensation for neoliberal restructuring, has become an integral part of the left's social policy package." At the same time, they find that the Bolsa Família gives voice to welfare beneficiaries, and promotes a sense of inclusion, dignity, and citizenship. And they conclude: "Critics of the left's renovation in Latin America should take note. Although conditional cash transfers like the Bolsa Família represent an 'add on' rather than a deep structural reform that significantly redistributes wealth and power, they can indeed be far more than a 'hand out' to placate the poor. If designed and implemented well, they can contribute to legitimating electoral democracy in countries where ordinary people have shown relative indifference to regime type. And through furthering the growth of a more confident and efficacious citizenry, they may well reshape the

political context in ways that deepen the reform impulse itself."

On the topic of conditional cash transfers for economically dependent groups—I am being serious here, not tongue in cheek—I would like to do something I often do in these pages, and recognize the extraordinary work of this journal's Editorial Assistants. All of them are political science graduate students at Indiana University who are preparing for careers as professional political scientists in an increasingly precarious job market, and whose terrific work for our profession is the source of their graduate stipends and thus their support as young people committed to a life of learning and teaching. I am very proud to report that our journal is very deliberate about providing these wonderful young scholars with an intellectually supportive environment and with financial support so that the entire staff can attend APSA and MPSA meetings. This support pales in comparison to the support that these editorial workers offer to the political science profession. I would like to thank these people for their past and present work for the profession and with me: Laura Bucci, Adrian Florea, Rachel Gears, Pete Giordano, Rafael Khachaturian, Fathima Musthaq, Katie Scofield, Katey Stauffer, and Brendon Westler. This summer Adrian completed his Ph.D. and left our staff for a teaching position at Oberlin College; he remains on the masthead of this issue because he contributed greatly to its production. He will be missed. Also this summer Fathima and Katey joined our staff, and Katie returned to our staff after spending a year doing fieldwork on her dissertation. This fall Rafael shifts into a new role as our journal's social media coordinator, and Laura leaves our payroll to take a position teaching graduate statistics. But both Rafael and Laura continue to participate in our weekly staff lunch meetings, and to offer invaluable insight and perspective based on their experience on the staff, and both still remain on our masthead.

I am also pleased to announce that last year an APSA Ad Hoc Committee appointed by President John Aldrich recommended that I be reappointed to an additional two-year term, and the Council approved this recommendation. I will thus continue to serve as *Perspectives's* editor in chief until June 2017. This also means that James Moskowitz will continue to do his extraordinary work as this journal's Managing Editor through this time, and our stellar Editorial Board will also remain. We love the work that we do, and look forward to doing much more work in the coming years.

I close by noting that in a few short years our journal has gone from being unranked to being ranked #10 to being ranked #2 in the Thomson-Reuters impact rankings. I would like to thank everyone—including staff, editors, reviewers, contributors, and readers—who has contributed to our success. Kudos to our sister publication,

the *APSR*, which is ranked #1. Many readers will know that for decades Avis Rental Car was the #2 ranked U.S. car rental company, and its slogan was “Avis, We Try Harder.” In 2012 the company changed its slogan to “Avis, It’s Your Space.” CMO Jeannine Hass offered this explanation in *Advertising Age*: “[The new tagline] is reflective of [Avis’] ongoing mission to be a customer-led, service-driven company, and presents the brand in

terms of the customer experience and the advantages inherent in renting from Avis . . . [Yet] we firmly believe that after nearly five decades, ‘We Try Harder’ is fully embedded in the Avis DNA, and defines the spirit our employees embody to deliver superior customer service.” *Perspectives on Politics* aims to be a rich and inviting *political science public sphere*. It’s your space. At the same time, we continue to try harder.

The Centrality of Books to Political Science and to *Perspectives on Politics*

By Jeffrey C. Isaac, Editor in Chief

Almost half of every issue of *Perspectives* is dedicated to our Review section. This structure of the journal is something that we inherited, for when *Perspectives* was created, it was decided to move the APSA book reviews, which had previously been published in the *APSR*, to *Perspectives*, and to open up the new journal to a range of writing formats.

We inherited this structure, but we also embraced it.

Indeed, I assumed the position of Editor in Chief of the entire journal after having served for four years as the Book Review Editor under the editorship of my predecessor, Jim Johnson. During my tenure as Book Review Editor we made a conscious decision to innovate with this section, by creating new formats—Critical Dialogues, Book Symposia, different kinds of thematic review essays, and Review Editor Introductions highlighting common themes—and trying to make the “back end” of *Perspectives* a space for lively conversation across conventional subfield and methodological divides in the discipline. These innovations were announced and explained in my inaugural editorial statement, “A Statement from the Book Review Editor” (*Perspectives on Politics*, March 2006, pp. 3–4), and the approach to the journal’s treatment of books has remained true to the perspective outlined in that public text.

When I was offered the editorship of the entire journal in 2009, I agreed to accept this position on the basis of a clearly defined vision that was grounded in our experience with the Review section, and I was committed to editing the entire journal as a whole. My reason was straightforward: I believed that the journal was a unique and precious intellectual resource, and I was—and am—deeply committed to placing it on the strongest possible footing as a venue that features a wide range of political science perspectives and formats in a genuinely integrated way. It is surely possible for the two “ends” of the journal to be edited by separate individuals, working together in a collaborative fashion. But I was and am strongly committed to the idea that the two ends can and should be integrated into a single whole; that each “end” should in fact have diverse formats, so that in fact the journal would be much more complicated and interesting than a simplistic oppo-

sition of “articles” and “reviews” implies; and that these formats should speak to one another.

This vision was endorsed by the APSA officials—the search committee chaired by Rogers Smith, APSA President Peter Katzenstein, and the APSA Council—who unanimously supported my appointment.

When my editorial team took over the entire journal in 2009, we “branded” the journal as “A Political Science Public Sphere,” and worked hard to nurture synergies between the research articles and essays published in the journal’s “front end” and the reviews and book discussions published in its “back end” (this vision was announced in “*Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere*,” my editorial statement published in the March 2010 issue, and now printed at the beginning of each issue). My staff and I have devoted enormous energy to this approach to the journal, with the strong support of our dedicated Editorial Board and with the support of the APSA Council. These efforts were recognized by the 2011 Performance Review Committee that recommended the extension of our editorial tenure. But in my view the most important “recognition” of this approach is the fact that we continue to enjoy the enthusiastic participation of many hundreds of authors and reviewers every year, and to produce a publication that includes a wide range of excellent contributions across a range of formats.

At the heart of the journal as it has come to be structured, read, and appreciated within the profession, is the deliberate effort of our editorial team to discern, nurture, and publicize complementarities, synergies, and broad thematic interests that might otherwise be insufficiently recognized by our increasingly specialized academic life. Our entire range of formats is dedicated to this end. We have nurtured the production of research articles that are rigorous, rigorously peer-reviewed, and at the same time are written and framed more broadly than conventional research articles. We have nurtured a range of conversations about political science books, and promoted conversations between our articles and our book reviews and essays. These connections have been essential to our vision of “a political science public sphere.”

Readers of the journal will be familiar with this range of formats, and with their complementarities:

- Research articles
- “Reflections” essays
- Book Review Essays
- Book Symposia
- Book Critical Dialogues
- “Undisciplined” Reviews and Review Essays (featuring reviews of books from other disciplines)
- A special thematic Book Review section in each issue
- Standard single, double, and triple Book Reviews

Readers will also be familiar with the ways that we have sought to plan our production schedule so we can package writings in these formats together thematically, and highlight these themes in my Editor Introductions. These efforts draw scholarly and public attention to broad and interesting themes. And by promoting broad and relevant scholarly discussion, they also help us reach beyond the discipline, and to gain the attention, and sometimes even the involvement, of journalists, policy intellectuals, and sometimes even a broader reading public. Recent examples include:

- Our June 2012 issue featuring work on violence
- Our September 2012 special 10th Anniversary issue on “Post-Katrina New Orleans and the Politics of Reconstruction”
- Our March 2013 issue featuring work on “The Politics of Inequality in the Face of Financial Crisis”
- Our June 2013 issue featuring work on “Nature and Politics”

It is sometimes overlooked how central our Book Review section is to these efforts. But even a casual perusal of any recent issue of *Perspectives* will remind colleagues of the centrality of books.

I have been a professional political scientist for over thirty years. We are all well acquainted with the still widely accepted notion that book review assignments are convenient means of getting a free book that you want to read and of dashing off a thousand-word commentary during one’s breaks from “real” research and writing. For the past eight years we have worked tirelessly, and successfully, to counter this unfortunate notion.

Books are important, and so serious intellectual attention to them is important.

While promptly published scholarly articles are also important, the book format remains the only format that allows scholars, in every field and from every perspective, to take the time and space to develop an argument in depth. Books are at the heart of political science. Important books help to create new research agendas. The names Almond or Dahl or Katzenstein or Putnam or Skocpol or Ostrom or Riker or Olson or Fenno or Mansbridge or Aldrich do not evoke journal articles. Each evokes an

important *book*, and typically more than one of them. Every year many hundreds of new political science books containing new political science perspectives are published. We know this. The Book Exhibit at the annual APSA conference is one of the main attractions for almost everyone.

These books seek and deserve more than mere citation and more than glorified “Book Note” type reviews. They deserve serious discussion in a serious scholarly context. They deserve well-written reviews that are carefully edited by editors who work with reviewers, and prompt them to think a bit more broadly, and to view their book reviews as real scholarly engagements. Such reviews do much more than publicize and provide short cuts to books that readers might not otherwise know about. They *engage* the books and make them really a part of serious scholarly dialogue.

But there is something else: these reviews make *their authors* part of seriously scholarly dialogue.

Most of our colleagues do not work at research-intensive universities. Most of them spend most of their time teaching, often with heavy loads, either as tenured or tenure-track professors at teaching institutions, or as adjuncts and part-time academic workers. For many of our colleagues, the chance to write a fine book review, and to have it seriously engaged by an editor, and to have it published in a “flagship research journal,” is one of the only significant opportunities they may have to write and to publish in a given year.

Every year *Perspectives on Politics* publishes hundreds of book reviews written by a very wide range of scholars with a wide range of institutional affiliations. We are very serious about the range and diversity of the contributors to our book review section. One reason is because it allows our journal to reach broadly, and to *include* many of readers as *contributors*. This “community-building” function of *Perspectives* is very important, for a scholarly community ought to be linked by scholarly conversation in which each participant has genuine opportunities to speak as well as to listen and to be an author as well as a reader.

But this kind of inclusion is also important in an *epistemic* sense. For it “enforces” a breadth of scholarly perspective, and brings expert discourses into conversation with more generalist perspectives, to the benefit of the kind of true critical engagement that is the heart of the scientific enterprise. In this sense, every 1500 word book review that we publish is much more than a professional “service”; it is a serious contribution to scholarship and to the development of scholarly research. And the publication of these reviews in a flagship journal of political science, alongside rigorously peer reviewed research articles, essays, symposia, and dialogues, highlights their importance.

We are excited about the range of formats contained within *Perspectives*, and the way that they work together to project a vision of scholarly and intellectual seriousness. We believe that in this age of specialization, “modularity,”

From the Editor

and almost costless digital creation and circulation of texts, it is important for an intellectually serious political science discipline to have at least one broad, integrated, and intellectually serious journal that features a range of perspectives, formats, and scholars.

We believe, in short, that it is important for there to be *a political science public sphere*.

We are also grateful to the many colleagues who support us in these efforts, and who embrace the chance to be active participants in and contributors to the journal and its many formats. We continue to receive a growing number of article submissions, and we have many exciting book review special features planned in the coming issues. As we move forward, we welcome your ideas and suggestions.