

A FINE COUNTRY TO STARVE IN? AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHY PAST AND PRESENT

UM BOM PAÍS PARA SE PASSAR FOME? A GEOGRAFIA AUSTRALIANA, PASSADO E PRESENTE

Roy Jonesⁱ
Curtin University
Perth, Australia

Abstract: This paper describes the development of the academic discipline of geography in Australia from the beginning of European settlement in 1788 to the present day. While the subject material of Australian geography has been strongly focussed on the nation's physical and human environments and potential, the short history of the development of geography in Australia and the country's colonial and postcolonial circumstances have meant that intellectually distinctive Australian approaches to the discipline have largely failed to evolve. This paper is therefore mainly concerned with the broader social, political and administrative contexts within which Australian geography has developed over the last two centuries or so. Its main argument is that, by virtue of its distinctive, diverse and dynamic nature, Australia has consistently provided a fruitful environment for geographical scholarship. However, for most of Australia's post European settlement history, government and official support for the discipline has been limited. Readers are invited to compare this Australian experience with the history of the discipline of geography in Brazil.

Keywords: Disciplinary history; Settler society; Development ethos; Australian geography.

Resumo: O presente artigo descreve o desenvolvimento da geografia como disciplina acadêmica na Austrália do início da colonização europeia em 1788 até os dias atuais. Apesar da geografia australiana sempre ter tratado o ambiente físico e humano do país e seu potencial, a curta história do desenvolvimento da disciplina na Austrália e as circunstâncias colonial e pós-colonial não permitiram o surgimento de uma abordagem australiana própria e intelectualmente distinta da disciplina no país. Assim sendo, a preocupação maior do trabalho é apresentar o amplo contexto social, político e administrativo no qual a geografia australiana tem se desenvolvido nos últimos dois séculos. O principal argumento é que em virtude de sua natureza distinta, diversa e dinâmica, a Austrália sempre forneceu um ambiente favorável para a pesquisa geográfica. Entretanto, na maior parte da história do povoamento europeu pós-colonial australiano, o apoio oficial e governamental para a disciplina tem sido limitado. Os leitores são convidados a comparar a experiência da geografia australiana com o desenvolvimento da disciplina no Brasil.

Palavra chave: História de Disciplina; Sociedade Colonial; *Ethos* do Desenvolvimento; Geografia Australiana.

ⁱ Professor Emérito, Department of Planning and Geography, r.jones@curtin.edu.au.

Introduction

The title of this paper is also that of environmental historian, Geoffrey Bolton's, classic (1994) study of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The title of Bolton's book derived from the story of a young student who, in 1929, asked the economics professor at the University of Western Australia whether he thought that the state was about to experience an economic crisis. The professor replied that he thought a depression really was about to happen, but that (Western) Australia would be "a fine country to starve in". By this he meant that the state had abundant land and natural resources and a stable system of government and that it would therefore be a relatively good place in which to experience harsh economic times.

The argument that I wish to make in this brief study of the development of the academic discipline of geography in Australia is, firstly, that it is, indeed, a "fine country" for the study of geography. Given its areal extent, and its environmental, economic and cultural diversity and dynamism, many of the challenges facing Australia in both the past and the present have required and still require geographical skills and insights for their resolution. However, except for a brief period during the third quarter of the twentieth century, the discipline of geography in Australia has generally been "starved" of significant official governmental and educational support. In this paper, I will therefore summarise some of the reasons why Australia should be seen as a "fine country" for geographers to work in. I will then trace the history of the geography discipline in Australia from pre-colonial (i.e. pre European settlement) times to the present day before presenting a personal 'SWOT' (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of the discipline nationally in 2015. The paper concludes with some thoughts on the possible relevance for Brazil of geography's academic trajectory in Australia.

Australia as a Geographical Laboratory

Australia is one of the world's largest countries. At 7,682,300 square kilometres it is almost as large as Brazil. It possesses great environmental diversity encompassing tropical monsoonal rainforests and Alpine snowfields and its terrestrial ecosystems are unique, featuring plant and animal species that are found nowhere else in the world. Its natural environments are also extremely challenging. It is the driest continent on the planet after Antarctica and much of its land area is desert or semi desert. It is also a geologically ancient continent and its soils are generally poor and infertile. It is therefore not surprising that, even today, it is sparsely populated. At ca. 23 million, it has little more than a tenth of the population of Brazil.

Nevertheless, this population figure is a massive increase on its estimated 300,000 inhabitants in 1788, at the time of the first European settlement. Even though British colonial and, after independence in 1901, Australian governments often sought to restrict immigration from areas other than the British Isles these policies often failed and, since World War Two and especially since the 1970s, they have been progressively abandoned. Australia's population is now highly and increasingly culturally diverse (Jones and Birdsall-Jones, 2008).

Migrants were attracted to Australia both to take up new farmland, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Powell and Williams (eds.), 1975), and to exploit the country's considerable mineral resources (Blainey, 2003). The gold rushes of the second half of the nineteenth century attracted many settlers from Europe and Asia and, over the last fifty years, vast reserves of iron ore, coal, uranium, bauxite, and oil and natural gas and other minerals have been exploited, often in remote areas characterised by difficult terrain or, in the case of oil and gas, on Australia's huge continental shelf. Much of the recent demand for these mineral resources has come from Asia, initially from Japan but increasingly from China. While this was of benefit to the country during the recent Global Financial Crisis and should continue to be so as the world progresses through its so-called "Asian Century" (Dicken, 2007), Australia remains an isolated part of the global periphery, far from the major centres of political, demographic and economic power. It is therefore highly vulnerable to international economic shifts and, as Bolton demonstrated, it was particularly hard hit in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In these circumstances, very few aspects of physical, social or economic geography fail to offer great potential for both academic and applied study in Australia and this has been the case since the beginnings of European settlement in 1788.

Indigenous Australia Prior to British Colonisation

The first Indigenous inhabitants arrived in Australia at least 60,000 years ago making them the oldest living culture on the planet. For almost the whole of this period they functioned in isolation from other human groups. From the sixteenth century Sumatran (Makassan) fishers visited Australia's north coast (MacKnight, 1976) and, from the seventeenth century, European, especially Dutch, ships surveyed and, occasionally, were wrecked on the west coast. However most of the pre-colonial Aboriginal population was located in the more temperate south and east and experienced little or no outside contact prior to colonisation.

The Aboriginal population operated at a subsistence level and was organised into very small and local political and social units. It is estimated that there were ca. 400 distinct Aboriginal languages in Australia in 1788. There was also a very great technological discrepancy between the Aborigines and the British colonists. In these circumstances, a relatively small colonial population was able to subdue any Indigenous resistance and to take control of the entire continent in the space of little more than a century from first settlement.

However, the small scale and low technological level of Aboriginal society should not obscure its very high levels of environmental and spatial sophistication. Over a very long time period, they developed highly refined methods of living in often harsh environments. There is now some debate over whether they should be seen as hunter-gatherers or whether their environmental modifications, especially through the use of fire, should be seen as a form of farming (Jones, 1969). Certainly their relationship with and dependence on their local environments was and is central to their spiritual and social values which still focus strongly on their ancestral territories and the kinship groups which occupied them.

Geographers and Indigenous Australia

For much of the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries, Aboriginal issues were not a topic of great interest to geographers in Australia or elsewhere. At least until the early twentieth century, it was widely believed that exposure to a combination of European diseases, European culture and European interbreeding would cause the Aboriginal population either to die out or to assimilate completely into the wider (Anglo)Australian society. There was also a Western view that the study of such 'primitive' peoples was more properly the remit of anthropologists rather than geographers.

More recently, however, this has changed radically. After more than a century of decline, Aboriginal population numbers have recovered strongly, growing from 20,000 in 1911 to 670,000 in 2011. Following a referendum in 1961, Aboriginal people were formally recognised as citizens of the nation rather than as the social responsibility of its component states. Perhaps more important for geography, however, was the 1992 legal recognition of Aboriginal rights to land. Since that date a national system for reviewing Indigenous land claims has been in operation. Over the last half century therefore a growing number of particularly social and cultural geographers have become increasingly involved in research into a wide range of Aboriginal issues.

Geographical Issues in Colonial Australia

In order to gain control over and to settle Australia, essentially over the course of the nineteenth century, the British colonial authorities were faced with a range of geographical challenges. Ideally, these would be first addressed by the compilation of accurate geographical data through exploration, survey and resource assessment. However, the country had first been claimed as a penal colony and settlers moving into the interior to herd sheep or to prospect for gold were not its initial concern. A large amount of the infant colonial authorities' time was taken up with simply trying to manage these Aboriginal, convict and settler populations, many of whom were located beyond the colonial governments' effective areas of control. However, as order began to be established in the course of the nineteenth century, other essentially geographical tasks were undertaken (Jeans, 1975). These included designating town sites, allocating land to settlers and planning for a growing infrastructure of roads, railways, harbours, water supplies and so on.

While these tasks were in many ways geographical, in Australia, as in most parts of the nineteenth century world, they were largely carried out by a wide range of other professionals including surveyors, engineers, lawyers, agriculturalists, military personnel and politicians (Powell, 1988). Nevertheless, the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia was set up in Sydney, New South Wales in 1883 with branches in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. While the original membership consisted of non-geographers, its strong initial focus on issues of colonial development indicated a level of local acknowledgement of the practical importance of geographical knowledge.

The Beginnings of Academic Geography in Australia

In 1901, the six colonies federated to form the newly independent Commonwealth of Australia. Very soon thereafter, the federal government set up a range of scientific organisations such as the Commonwealth Weather Service, and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and began to support Antarctic expeditions. Scientists, often non-geographers, from these organisations were among the first people to teach geography in Australian universities in the early twentieth century.

A notable example of this process was Griffith Taylor, a geology graduate, a physiographer on an Antarctic expedition and a Weather Service scientist, who was appointed as the first head of an Australian geography department at the University of Sydney in 1921. Taylor is a key figure in the development of geography in Australia. He advocated the establishment of the Geographical Society of New South Wales and became its inaugural President in 1927. The Society then commenced the publication of the country's first academic geography journal, "Australian Geographer", in 1928. New South Wales has remained the pre-eminent state within Australian geography ever since. But, perhaps unfortunately for the discipline at that time, Taylor's opinions, while often accurate, were highly controversial. He rightly questioned the prevailing view that Australia offered almost unlimited prospects for demographic growth and economic development forecasting, correctly, that Australia's population in 2000 would be about 20 million (rather than the figure of 100 million which was being widely circulated in the 1920s). He also pointed out the severe environmental constraints to development in Australia's north and west where he (wrongly, as it turned out) deemed 'white' settlement to be unfeasible.

His views were widely criticised and even ridiculed in the press and by politicians and his works were even banned in some states. After he was repeatedly denied a full professorship at the University of Sydney, he left Australia in 1928 to take up a position at the University of Chicago and went on to become President of the Association of American Geographers in 1941 (Powell, 1988). Between the 1920s and the early 1940s, the teaching of geography commenced at each of the six state universities (Melbourne, in Victoria; Sydney, in New South Wales; Adelaide, in South Australia; Queensland; Tasmania; and Western Australia) which had been established in the six former colonies between 1853 and 1911. However, given the controversies generated by Griffith Taylor in the 1920s and the shortages of funds available to universities during the depression and the Second World War, very small numbers, or even single, geographers were appointed to these institutions. These early geographers had often been trained in other disciplines, such as geology and biology, and generally retained a national development focus in their work albeit without achieving the level of notoriety or celebrity attained by Taylor (Powell, 1988, 1994).

The Postwar Boom and Geography in Australia

The 'long boom' from the end of World War Two to the oil crisis of the mid 1970s was a period of rapid growth and development in Australian geography. However, this

growth was largely the result of the massive expansion of the Australian university sector as a whole and of the rising popularity of the social sciences in general in the English speaking world over that period, rather than of any discipline specific factors. Australia experienced both high birth rates and high rates of immigration during the post war period. Between 1945 and 1975, Australia's population almost doubled, growing from 7.3 million to 13.7 million. Over the same period the number of universities in Australia quadrupled from 6 to 24 (all still government controlled) and the number of university students grew even more rapidly as the proportion of students entering higher education increased. Academic geography therefore grew as this 'rising tide lifted all boats'. By the 1970s, there were 16 Geography departments in Australian universities; a national Institute of Australian Geographers was established in 1959 and it commenced publication of its journal, initially called "Australian Geographical Studies", in 1963 (National Committee for Geography, 1994). While there was at least one geography department in every state, the discipline remained strongest in New South Wales where six geography departments were in operation.

One result of this rapid expansion of Australian university geography from a very small base was that there were very few qualified Australian geographers to take up the new positions that became available. Just as the first geography teachers in Australian universities had been non-geographers, so were many of the post war recruits to the new and expanded geography departments non-Australian. In both Britain and New Zealand, geography had become a well-established university discipline in the early twentieth century and these countries became major suppliers of Australia's post war geography academics with others coming from the USA and continental Europe.

While this influx of overseas academics was not restricted to geography, it did tend to intensify, in academic geography as elsewhere, the phenomenon of the 'cultural cringe' (Phillips, 1958) which characterised early post war Australia. Cultural cringe was a description of the attitude that, especially British but gradually also American, standards would always be higher than Australian ones and that therefore Australians and Australian institutions, including universities, should defer to, especially English-speaking, authorities from the northern hemisphere. This attitude was reflected in the tendency, up to the 1970s at least, for Australian academics to encourage their best students to go overseas for postgraduate study or, failing this, to have their theses examined by British or American academics.

Even following this expansion, Australian geography departments remained small. Several barely attained double figures for academic staff numbers and a complement of twenty counted as decidedly large. Furthermore, they were often geographically isolated with many departments hundreds and, in a few cases, even thousands of kilometres from their nearest neighbour. Finally, a significant proportion of the staff was non-Australian. Many of their academic contacts remained and many of their sabbaticals were taken in the countries from which they came or in which they had undertaken their postgraduate study. When the prevalence of the cultural cringe was added to this mix, it was not surprising that the intellectual ideas and approaches of Australian geography at this time tended to reflect those of the global, and especially the North Atlantic/Anglo-American, 'core'. Thus, in human geography, regional and empirical approaches were common in the early post war period. By the 1960s positivism and quantitative techniques became

more popular and, in the 1970s, behavioural and structuralist epistemologies were introduced (Johnston, 2004).

However this did not mean that these approaches were not applied to Australian material. The new focus on Aboriginal issues has already been mentioned and the post war period also saw increased interest in, for example, the multicultural character of Australian cities and the distinctive nature of a wide range of Australia's environments and ecosystems. This period also witnessed the emergence of an expanding regional focus. This encompassed research in Papua New Guinea (an Australian dependency until 1975) and the Pacific and also in South East Asia.

The Whitlam Watershed

In 1972, Gough Whitlam led the Australian Labor Party to a federal election victory, ending over twenty years of conservative rule. His government undertook a range of radical reforms. Several of these improved the circumstances of universities in general. These included moving responsibility for universities from the states to the federal government, increasing university funding and abolishing university fees. However, many of this government's other policy changes also raised the profile of issues relevant to geography and therefore opened up greater possibilities for geographical research and the employment of geography graduates. These included: a greater emphasis on urban and regional planning and development at federal as well as the state level; an increased concern for environmental protection; a growing focus on multicultural issues and the formal ending of the discriminatory "White Australia" immigration policy; and the ending of Australia's support for and troop presence in the Vietnam War and the development of a more positive focus on Australian involvement with Asia.

However, the Whitlam government's period in power also coincided with the end of the post war long economic boom as a result of the oil price shocks of the early 1970s. It soon experienced financial difficulties and was controversially dismissed by the Governor General (Australia's head of state) in 1975. Over the next four decades the level of university funding per student has declined in real terms. While fees have been reintroduced and gradually increased, this has not made up for the funding shortfall and staff:student ratios have therefore increased. One impact of the increasing cost of university education is that vocational and professional subjects with clear employment paths have increased in popularity and the number of students enrolling in academic disciplines such as geography has fallen, at least as a proportion of the total student load.

The De-departmentalisation of Australian University Geography from 1978

Even at the end of the post war expansion period for Australian university geography, most geography departments were small. With very few exceptions, they did not control their own undergraduate courses. Like most academic disciplines in Australian universities, geography was taught as a 'major' in a three year general Bachelor of Arts or Science degree after which students could pursue their discipline for a further 'honours' year and then progress to postgraduate study. In addition, geography was a difficult

subject for university administrators to deal with since it could be seen as a science, as a social science or as an arts discipline. Geography departments were therefore located in different faculties in different universities and, wherever these departments were located, they were often seen as different and rarely as central to any faculty's interests.

As university funding levels fell steadily over the late twentieth century, university managers sought ways to save money. One means of doing this was to merge or close departments in order to reduce administrative costs. While this has occurred repeatedly across the Australian university system in recent decades, the small size of geography departments and the intellectually diverse and idiosyncratic nature of the geography discipline ensured that geography was affected both sooner and more intensely by these changes than were most other disciplines (Holmes, 2002). Between 1978 and 2002, all of Australia's university geography departments were either merged with other subjects into multidisciplinary 'Schools' or discontinued, with their staff members, if they were retained at all, being scattered between other administrative units.

Inevitably, these developments have challenged the unity and focus of Australian geography in various ways. When geography/geographers were located in Environmental Science or Earth Science Schools, human geographers could feel marginalised. Equally, physical geographers could feel marginalised in Social Science or Planning/Built Environment Schools. In several cases, GIS specialists have been separated from geographers and placed in, for example, Spatial Science Schools and GIS is now taught as a separate discipline from geography in several institutions.

Over recent decades, many disciplinary boundaries have become increasingly blurred, not only for the negative reason of the closure of disciplinary departments but also for the positive reason that interdisciplinary study and research can provide insights and opportunities beyond those available to a single discipline. As university enrolments and university appointments formally identified as geography have remained static or have declined, some Australian geography academics have, not surprisingly, sought employment in a wide variety of 'growth areas' within the national university system. Over time, these have included tourism, planning, environmental management, heritage studies and sustainability among others and many of those who have undertaken these career trajectories have ceased to identify themselves as geographers (Jones 2002a).

This blurring of disciplinary lines has had a more than individual dimension. It has become increasingly common for Australian geographers to research with interdisciplinary colleagues, to publish in interdisciplinary journals and to supervise research students with first degrees from a wide range of disciplines. While these need not be problematic issues in themselves, they do raise questions about the identity and even the survival of the discipline of geography in Australia, especially now that geography departments as such no longer exist. A particular recent concern of the Institute of Australian Geographers has been that physical geographers appear to be showing a greater tendency than human geographers to publish in non-geographical journals and to attend non-geographical conferences. This could be seen as threatening geography's characteristic role as a bridge between the natural and the social sciences (National Committee for Geography, 1994). However, twenty first century developments in a perhaps unexpected quarter, namely the Australian school system, may assist in counteracting this tendency.

Recent Developments in School Geography in Australia

Separate school systems developed in Australia's six component colonies in the course of the nineteenth century and school education remained a state responsibility following both federation in 1901 and the transfer of university and higher education to the federal government in the 1970s. Within most state school systems, geography is only taught as a separate subject in the final two years of high school (Powell, 1988; Jones 2002b). For all or most of the first ten years of schooling, geographical material is characteristically presented as part of a subject grouping called Studies of Society and Environment, known colloquially as SOSE. In addition to geography, this subject grouping includes history, economics, law and civics. Much of the geography that is currently taught in Australian schools is therefore either not formally identified as geography, not taught by trained geographers or both.

In spite of this, both state and federal geography teachers associations have been in existence since the 1970s and, in recent years, two prime ministers have, materially if not deliberately, made significant contributions to the development of geographical education at school level. John Howard was conservative Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007. Both before he assumed office and during his prime ministership, an academic and political debate known as the History Wars (Macintyre, 2004) was raging over the related topics of British colonisation and Aboriginal dispossession. Howard repeatedly entered this debate claiming that the teaching of Australian history in schools should be given greater prominence and that the role of the colonists should be portrayed in a more positive and nationalistic/patriotic light. A perhaps unintended consequence of the school curriculum changes that resulted from Howard's successful support for this position was that, when history was given a clearer disciplinary identity in the school system, by default its fellow SOSE subjects, notably geography and economics, benefited in the same way.

Howard's government was defeated in 2007 and the Australian Labor Party's Julia Gillard became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education in 2007 and Prime Minister from 2010 to 2013. As the minister with federal responsibility for schools, she called for increased standardisation of school curricula across the country both to raise educational standards overall and to assist pupils who moved from one state to another during the course of their schooling. School geography had recently received an inadvertent boost from John Howard and, when Gillard instigated a process for the development of a national curriculum, all of geography's national bodies (the geography teachers organisations, academic geographers through the Institute of Australian Geographers and the Australian Academy of Science's National Committee for Geography) cooperated to lobby for and eventually to achieve the inclusion of a named geography curriculum in all 13 grades of school education from kindergarten to the final year of high school (Australian Academy of Science, 2007). This curriculum is now being developed and implemented nationally (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011).

A 'SWOT' Analysis of Geography in Australia in 2015

Drawing on this history, I offer an, admittedly personal, 'SWOT' analysis of geography in Australia today.

Jones, Roy.

Strengths

- 1) Geography has effective national organisations, notably the Institute of Australian Geographers, the Australian Geography Teachers Association and the (recently renamed) National Committee for Geographical Sciences, all of which have shown that they are prepared to work with each other and with their state branches and counterparts to promote and protect the discipline.
- 2) It has two well-established and well-regarded academic journals, 'Australian Geographer', founded in 1928, and 'Geographical Research' (formerly 'Australian Geographical Studies') founded in 1963, both of which figure strongly in the global ISI/ISS1 impact rankings.
- 3) The international profile and mobility of Australian geographers is facilitated by the increasingly global use of English both as the language of academic discourse and more widely.
- 4) Geography in Australia has therefore maintained a strong research output in relation to the size of both the country's and the discipline's populations.
- 5) In recent decades there has been a significant export of talent and ideas from geography to other research fields.
- 6) The nature of the discipline ensures that, collectively, it possesses a broad range of skills and expertise.

Weaknesses

- 1) There is very limited formal recognition of geography's disciplinary identity within individual universities.
- 2) The diversity of their expertise can make it difficult to locate geographers - and geography - to specific faculties and academic units.
- 3) At the national level, the government classifies physical and human geography research outputs separately (Johnston, 2006).
- 4) Physical and human geographers have, of late, displayed differing levels of commitment to the discipline's organisations, conferences and journals.
- 5) The export of talent from geography to other fields could be conceived of as a 'brain drain'.
- 6) Australia's peripheral and distinctive nature means that geographical research on certain topics (e.g. marsupials) may have limited global relevance and therefore limited global impact.

Opportunities

- 1) Geographical insights are extremely relevant to numerous high profile global issues, notably climate change but also renewable (or non-renewable) energy, the economic rise of Asia, globalisation, multiculturalism and the aging of the population among others.
- 2) The communication (and transport) revolutions are, in many ways, overcoming the 'tyranny of distance' (Blainey 2001) which has traditionally challenged Australia and Australian geography both nationally and globally.
- 3) The development of a national school curriculum, in which geography has a significant and increased role.
- 4) Australia's current (and, it would seem, medium term) economic and population growth and the environmental and social consequences that flow from this.

Threats

- 1) A level of anti-intellectualism, which can cause scientific and academic findings to be dismissed by the wider society. This is currently most apparent in relation to climate change.
- 2) Residual levels of racism and xenophobia resulting, in part, from the country's colonial history and former immigration practices.
- 3) High levels of concentration of (frequently offshore) business ownership, especially in the media and resource industries. These have recently enabled media and resource magnates to use their power and wealth to influence government policy and to exacerbate both of the threats listed above.
- 4) Foreshadowed government cuts to university funding and increases in and/or deregulation of university fees.

Conclusion

In the foregoing narrative, and perhaps especially in my SWOT analysis, I have drawn upon my own experiences as a geography academic, a university manager and as a British migrant in Australia since 1970. I have drawn a picture of Australian geography past and present that has emphasised the political and administrative elements of the discipline's history in Australia rather than its intellectual ones for two reasons. First, as I have tried to indicate above, I do not consider that a clear distinction can be made in intellectual terms between the geographies practised in Australia and those practised elsewhere in, at least the Anglophone, world. Like many, if not most, English speaking geographers, my linguistic competencies are limited and my ability to provide a genuinely global contextualisation of this issue is thereby constrained.

Certainly much of the subject matter of Australian geography is often nationally, regionally or environmentally distinctive focussing as it does, for example, on droughts, bushfires, marsupials, settler societies, multicultural issues, coral reefs, low density populations and remoteness and even on the problems of small island states. However, geography as a discipline developed late in Australia. During its infancy it drew its practitioners from other fields. In its first growth phase it attracted many of its academics from overseas and, by the time that PhDs in geography were being awarded in reasonably large numbers by Australian universities in the late twentieth century, the processes of globalisation were operating strongly. The country's widely scattered universities, in which designated departments of geography were, by that time, disappearing, were therefore not in a position to facilitate the development of distinctive national modes of disciplinary thought such as that of the Annales School in France.

The second reason for my administrative and political focus is that I am writing here for a specific national, in this case Brazilian, audience. I am doing so without a knowledge of the development of geography in that country so my aim has therefore been to present a picture of geography's development in a large, environmentally diverse and challenging, resource rich, multicultural and ex-colonial country which is located spatially in the global periphery and economically in its semi periphery and thus shares a number of similarities with Brazil. I have sought to provide thereby, if not a model or a yardstick, then at least an example against which readers can compare their own knowledge and experience of the development of geography in Brazil.

As you make these comparisons, I refer you to my admittedly idiosyncratic SWOT analysis. The strengths to which I refer above, albeit with an added linguistic challenge for any non-Anglophone country, are potentially attainable even when, as often occurred in Australia, official sources or wider circumstances have "starved" the discipline. The weaknesses that I have identified largely stem from the intellectual diversity that inherently and inevitably characterises and threatens the unity of an integrative discipline such as geography anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, over much broader spatial and temporal scales than Australia can provide, geography has survived. It has repeatedly overcome these internal weaknesses and, on occasion, turned them into strengths. Most of the opportunities listed above underline that the impacts of many contemporary global processes are combining to make Australia a "fine country" for geographers of all kinds to work in and I invite you to consider the extent to which these (and other) opportunities may apply in Brazil. On reviewing the threats that I have selected, I am impressed by the large extent to which they are posed either directly by the current federal government or indirectly by the resource and media interests that fund and support it. There is thus an encouraging contrast, for Australia at least, between the medium or even long term nature of the opportunities and (in a relatively democratic country) the possible short term nature of many of the threats.

When this contemporary SWOT analysis is placed in the context of the history of geography in Australia, two conclusions endure. On the one hand, almost a century on from the Great Depression, Australia's many pressing environmental, social and economic issues still make it a "fine country" for a geographer to work in. But, on the other hand, and almost a century on from Griffith Taylor's departure/exile from Australia, the country still possesses a pro-development ethos which is perhaps too positive and

uncritical and an anti-intellectual attitude which is perhaps too negative and critical. In Australia as, I suspect, in any other national context, geographers will always need, both through their research outputs and through their organisational abilities, to convince governments, industries, communities and university administrations of the value of their work if they wish to avoid “starvation”.

References

AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE. *Australians Need Geography* <https://3-science.cdn.aspedia.net/sites/default/files/user-content/resources/file/nc-geography-australians-need.pdf> , 2007, acessado 22/01/2015.

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM. Assessment and Reporting Authority. , 2011, acessado 22/01/2015.

BLAINEY, G. *The Tyranny of Distance: how Distance Shaped Australia's History*. (Rev. Ed.) Sydney: Macmillan, 2001.

BLAINEY, G. *The Rush that Never Ended: a History of Australian Mining*. (5th. Ed.). Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003.

BOLTON, G. *A Fine Country to Starve in*. (New Edition). Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1994.

DICKEN, P. *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*. London: Sage, 2007.

HOLMES, J.H. Geography's emerging cross-disciplinary links: process, causes, outcomes and challenges. *Australian Geographical Studies*, v.40, p.2-20, 2002.

JEANS, D.N. The Impress of central authority on the landscape: south-eastern Australia 1788-1850. In: POWELL, J.M. e WILLIAMS, M. (orgs.), *Australian Space, Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975, p.1-17.

JOHNSTON, R.J. *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Geography since 1945*. 5th. Ed. London: Arnold, 2004.

JOHNSTON, R.J. Research quality assessment and geography in Australia: can anything be learned from the UK experience? *Geographical Research*, v.44, p.1-11, 2006.

JONES, R. Geography in Australia's new (post 1987) universities. *Australian Geographical Studies*, v.40, p.48-57, 2002a.

Jones, Roy.

JONES, R. Geography and education for sustainability in Australia. *Planet Special Edition* 4, p.32-33, 2002b.

JONES, R. e BIRDSALL-JONES, C. The contestation of heritage; the colonizer and the colonized in Australia. In: GRAHAM, B. e HOWARD, P. (orgs.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, p.365-380.

JONES, R.M. Fire-stick farming. *Australian Natural History*, v.16, p.224-228, 1969.

MACINTYRE, S. e CLARK, A. *The History Wars*. (Rev. ed.). Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004.

MacKNIGHT, C.C. *The Voyage to Marege': Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1976.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHY. *Building Bridges: Geography in Australia*. Canberra, Australian Academy of Science, 1994.

PHILLIPS, A.A. *The Australian Tradition: Studies in Colonial Culture*. Melbourne: Cheshire, 1958.

POWELL, J.M. Geographical education and its Australian heritage. *Australian Geographical Studies*, v.26, p.214-230, 1988.

POWELL, J.M. A negotiation of discourses: geography in its Australian setting. In: NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHY (org.), *Building Bridges: Geography in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Academy of Science, 1994, p.5-12.

POWELL, J.M. e WILLIAMS, M. (orgs.). *Australian Space, Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Recebido em: 11/6/2014

Aceito em: 18/6/2014