RESENHA DE LIVRO

Power and Territory in the Digital Age

Saran, Samir & Anirban Sharma. 2025. *Geotechnography: Mapping Power and Identity in the Digital Age*. Penguin Random House India 2025.

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As we approach the second quarter of the 21st century, it is undeniable that the advent of the internet, the creation of artificial intelligence, and the deepening of informational infrastructures have served as vectors of paradigmatic social changes. The book under review primarily seeks to address the consequences and trends evidenced by the emergence of Big Tech companies and, consequently, the accelerated expansion of the technological frontier. At the outset, however, authors reinforce and clarify that the book does not seek to diminish the role of geography in contemporary times–as we remain "children of our landscape" (2025, 1)–but rather to highlight a new phenomenon concerning geographical spatiality. The term *Geotechnography*, which gives the book its title, is not the "death of geography". It is defined as "a coalition between geography,

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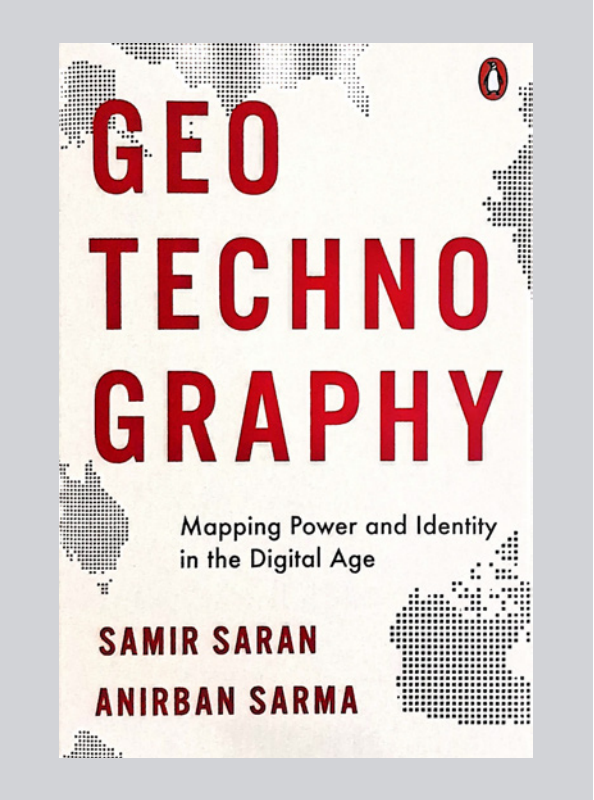
technology, and society" (p. xiv). As described in the opening paragraph (2025, xiii):

> *The Internet may have collapsed distances and blurred boundaries, but to argue for the end of geography would be laughable as we touch the twenty-first century's quarter-way mark. Not since World War II have we witnessed conflicts as fierce and a collective resolve to kill or be killed as steely as a result of people's obsession with land.*

As disputes around the control of both territories and technologies are not new, to highlight why the current trend is disruptive, authors provide an overview of the evolution of the connections between land, technology, and the feeling of belonging. Historically, the formation of societies and their identities has been directly shaped by the geographical spaces inhabited by human beings, with ecological conditions fostering distinct types of social organization over time. The authors succinctly summarize the long evolutionary process that culminated in the establishment of a territorialized system of nation-States, with the Peace of Westphalia (1648) serving as a landmark for the consolidation of the international order. Their primary effort lies in capturing the shifts in social constructions and relationships that emerge from the interaction between new technologies and human organizations–much like the transformative impacts of agriculture, industrialization, and, more recently, the internet and social media, which constitute manifestations of a necessarily informational digital revolution.

What is new is that virtual infrastructures now enable interactions capable of generating extraterritorial identities, as they arise from exchanges between spatially located individuals simultaneously connected to a multinational global network–the inherently virtual and borderless nature of cyberspace. The authors called this type of engagement as "cloud societies", "virtual communities that are anchored



in particular geographies but use the internet and social media to share views, exchange opinions, band together with like-minded peers or interest groups, and engage in online political action" (2025, xiv). This phenomenon allows territorially rooted issues to assume a broader global dimension, as exemplified by worldwide mobilizations concerning Israel's attacks on Palestine.

> *The authors argue that Big Techs are moving "from censers to censors", and absorbing the controlling and advisory capacities that were, before, associated to religion. They ask, therefore: "is big tech the new clergy?"*

As an additional layer of concern, authors emphasize that the communication channels enabling such information exchanges are predominantly controlled by a small group of high-technology corporations–the Big Techs. These corporations engage in monopolistic practices, embodying the *Braudelian anti-market* (Braudel 2009), and are thus structurally integrated into the global technological race. The authors argue that Big Techs are moving "from censers to censors", and absorbing the controlling and advisory capacities that were, before, associated to religion. They ask, therefore: "is big tech the new clergy?" (2025, 76).

To answer the question, the authors further argue that the virtual environment fosters an interactive phenomenon whereby users create idealized representations of themselves–what they call the "mediated self" (2025, 57). This alienation of the concrete self in favor of the virtual self has given rise to both new and traditional forms of disturbance. Elections have increasingly been influenced by the decentralized communication capabilities provided by social media platforms, as, according to the authors, illustrated by the victories of Donald Trump, in 2016, and Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018. It is not merely a question of transmitting a message but of mobilizing emotions and frustrations–a process made possible by Big Techs' immense data-gathering capabilities. At the epicenter of the concept of *Geotechnography* lies the idea that when combined with the interests of powerful actors, such capabilities can decisively shape the political trajectories of territorial nation-States. Monopoly power implies manipulative power, as social media platforms have become primary informational mediums, often irrespective of the veracity of the content disseminated.

The principal instrument guiding the content exposed to each user is the algorithm, predominantly programmed

by Big Tech corporations. This feature allows a few companies to wield substantial influence in shaping global trends by selectively curating and double-standardizing available options. Through the algorithmic crystallization of personal preferences–based on the capture and analysis of user data – virtual groups are formed, reinforcing specific identity clusters. As described in the book, this dynamic has given rise to a new form of tribalism, where platform-driven algorithmic selection organizes distinct tribes, each convinced of the truthfulness of its own narrative. Against this backdrop, the authors pose a crucial question akin to the *prisoner's dilemma*: is it preferable that a few agents control the source codes of these new technologies, or should such information be broadly accessible? In a dialogue with current political phenomena, we can add that the recent example of DeepSeek demonstrated that the availability of open-source code could outperform the capabilities of companies operating with closed-source models and far greater investment resources (Foletto & Wolffenbüttel 2025).

Therefore, the rise of *Geotechnography* engenders a dialectical relationship between territorially and virtually constructed identities. These overlapping dynamics lead to rapid changes in the demands of civil society–changes that territorial institutional structures often struggle to keep pace with. Demands consolidated globally through virtual platforms may conflict with the political projects of nation-States, generating tensions rooted, at least in part, in the construction of new identities and the absorption of demands by the "cloud society".

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In response to these challenges, the authors advocate for State regulation of Big Tech activities, what would mean to "reboot history" and build a rules-based order for the digital age. India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) is cited as a successful example of resistance against uncontrolled Big Tech dominance. As proposed by the book, regulation and the establishment of a shared digital infrastructure create conditions for fair competition among private companies, thereby "democratizing" innovation and providing Global South countries with enlarged access to the North-dominated technology.

While the proposal is compelling and offers practical solutions, certain nuances merit further emphasis that could be developed in follow-up texts.

The apparent conflict between territorial States and virtual-space-operating companies is, at a higher level of abstraction, a tension between a centralized power entity–the State–and private actors emerging from civil society. Moreover, the technological capabilities of Big Techs result from past State choices, wherein States, by providing conditions and funding, fostered trends capable of generating competitive advantages in a system whose nature is inherently competitive. Thus, the institutional innovations highlighted throughout the book should be understood within the broader systemic interplay among State entities themselves.

As the book was recently launched, examples and narratives are not only updated but also thought-provoking. The authors successfully managed to transform a complex issue into a narrative that flows easily due to the combination between theory, practice, and political implications. By using concrete cases that were widespread through global media, they also manage to engage with different audiences, in different countries–from Myanmar to the United States, from Bangladesh to Brazil.

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