

Geo-politics and 'development': an introduction

"The Global South is everywhere, but it is also always somewhere, and that somewhere, located at the intersection of entangled political geographies of dispossession and repossession, has to be mapped with persistent geographical responsibility"ⁱ

Writing in 1987 and a few years after the establishment of the journal *Political Geography*, Peter Perry noted that "Anglo-American political geography poses and pursues a limited and impoverished version of the discipline, largely ignoring the political concerns of four fifths of humankind"ⁱⁱ. Eleanore Kofman reiterated this in the mid-1990s, noting "the heavily Anglocentric, let alone Eurocentric, bias of political geography writing"ⁱⁱⁱ. These limitations are not unique to Political Geography however; 'Anglo-American' human geography more widely has periodically been subject to a very similar critique^{iv}. The concern articulated in some of these interventions is that there are dominant "parochial forms of theorising"^v in the discipline as a whole centred upon particular intellectual traditions and contexts leading to "a geography whose intellectual vision is limited to the concerns and perspectives of the richest countries in the world"^{vi}. This "view from the West" has clearly shaped a wide range of theorisations in political geography such that "parochial knowledge" has continued to be "created in universal form"^{vii}. This parochiality has been seen as based upon "a US-UK configuration"^{viii} or "Euro-American axis" that has come to prominence in a way that potentially narrows the base of political geographical thought and obscures "the situated basis of its claims and vantage-point"^{ix}.

In a similar vein there have been a number of attempts in recent years at thinking past 'Western' IR which has increasingly been seen as "ethnocentric, masculinised, northern and top-down"^x with many critics arguing that it has consistently ignored or misrepresented regions of the 'global South' and Africa in particular. International Relations remains largely configured, as Hoffman noted over thirty years ago, as an "American Social Science"^{xi}. Pinar Bilgin^{xii} has argued that attempts to insert the periphery into IR (though laudable) are based on a reversal of 'Western' theorising and that such attempts should not limit their task to looking beyond the spatial confines of the 'West' in search for insight understood as 'difference', but also ask awkward questions about the 'Westernness' of ostensibly 'Western' approaches to world politics and the 'non-Westernness' of others^{xiii}. Bilgin argues that this requires becoming curious about the effects of the historical relationship between the 'West' and the 'non-West'. IR has shared something of a Eurocentrism and reductionism with the discipline of development studies, where people and places in the South have often become the objects of history and modernity^{xiv}, foreclosing a wide range of different forms of political agency along the way. Both have also (at times) had a tendency toward the silencing of a Southern or 'Third World' Other through their constructions of the West as the only subject with a right to speak and through their mapping of the global South as a space of exception. Further, both have been characterised by an implicit and Eurocentric statism that places the state at the centre of explanations^{xv}. In a similar way political geography has played a role in the normalisation of particular kinds of states as the benchmark for analysis, creating certain assumptions and teleological arguments in which many states in the South can be depicted as 'deviant', 'weak' or 'failing', with no 'real' sovereignty^{xvi}. As Jenny Robinson argues, "what if these kinds of states were allowed to coexist, to be exemplars of state-ness everywhere, to speak to what states elsewhere might also become?"^{xvii}

Writing just over twenty years after Perry's original intervention the current editors of *Political Geography* noted in 2008 that "[m]ost political geographers in their discipline's North American and European core still know fairly little about the evolution of political geographies in relative peripheries"^{xviii}. There does however seem to be a growing number of scholars keen to challenge the hegemony of the English language in political geography and, more generally, to learn from other regions^{xix}. This is about more than just extending the geographical scope of the kinds of empirical studies which dominate the discipline and the kinds of places which are paid attention to in the course of theoretical innovation and scholarly discussion (though that in itself would be a good start). As Sidaway contends, there is more at stake here than simply "supplementing the range of case studies and terminologies that characterise Anglophone political geography"^{xx} especially if such non-western political geographies are offered as "supplements that remain as examples, footnotes or exceptions to the Anglo-American mainstream" in the absence of the mainstream becoming "more attendant to its own situatedness"^{xxi}. In moving towards a more 'post-colonial' political geography there thus needs to be a greater engagement with the complex and rich experiences and scholarship of different places. This involves examining the ways in which societies of the South have been represented and how writers and intellectuals from the South have generated counter-representations of their own realities^{xxii}, contested particular representations of North-South relations or produced their own 'geographies of repossession'^{xxiii}. It also involves a much greater engagement with questions of 'development' since this amorphous entity has often been a key organising principle around which non-western geographies are imagined and enframed. Yet the study of 'development' in Geography has conventionally been kept apart from other sub-disciplines like political or economic geography by a well established division of labour which casts an engagement with the geographies of the non-western world as 'area studies' or constructs development as a technical or managerialist domain, shorn of all politics. Yet this growing marginality of area studies in Geography is hard to understand when as Appadurai has suggested "area studies has provided the major counterpoint to the delusions of the view from nowhere that underwrites much canonical social science"^{xxiv}.

This need to intensify the dialogue between critical geopolitics and development theory was recognised in a series of interesting exchanges in *Transactions* between Gerard Ó Tuathail and David Slater in 1993-4^{xxv}. Slater's important intervention challenged the circumscription and disciplining of the political by western development agencies by exposing the meta-politics and geopolitical imaginations that enframe their orthodoxies. Slater's contention that all conceptualisations of development contain and express a geopolitical imagination which condition and enframe its meanings and relations is a critical one, suggesting that it is impossible to understand the contemporary making of development theory and practice *without* reference to geo-politics and the geopolitical imagination of non-western societies^{xxvi}. As Slater has argued more recently: "power and knowledge ... cannot be adequately grasped if abstracted from the gravity of imperial encounters and the geopolitical history of West/non-West relations"^{xxvii}. In the international business of development these kinds of abstractions are commonplace as a sense of the importance of empire and geo-politics to the very constitution of development is often erased or considerably downplayed. In response Ó Tuathail suggested that in order to develop this engagement further it was also necessary to document how Cold War discourses were a condition of possibility for post-war development discourses and to document a range of geo-politics of development (disciplinary, practical and popular). This would involve attending to the institutionalised regimes of knowledge and procedures of examination "that constitute development as an object with a particular spatiality" along with the geographically and political situated ideologies expressed in the development practices of

institutionalised authorities and the popular geo-politics of development expressed in novels, cartoons, film and the media.

Despite this important and insightful exchange my sense is that to a significant extent the domain of the (geo)political is *still* widely regarded as discrete and separable from the economic and the technical domain of 'development'. The dialogue between critical geopolitics and development theory that Slater and Ó Tuathail sought to intensify remains underdeveloped. One arena in which the two might have come together more often is in tracing the colonial and imperial histories of their key constructs. Just as scholars have increasingly come to look at the colonial construction of 'development' and its key concepts so too might political geographers give further consideration to the colonial construction of the entire framework of geopolitics and its key categories (such as sovereignty^{xxviii}, territory, states, and so on). In this sense a postcolonial critique needs to "take aim at the theoretical heart of the discipline"^{xxix}. Another is the formulation of a more nuanced sensibility towards the varied range of postcolonial trajectories and forms of politics which in itself "ought to introduce caution into some Western narratives about their universality and value across diverse contexts^{xxx}. Other areas where this dialogue could be further intensified include the political geographies of globalisation^{xxxi} and a more detailed consideration of the forms of resistance and anti-geopolitics that have emerged across the South. As Smith and Cowen^{xxxii} have shown globalisation is an important part of the recent recasting of traditional geopolitical logics and practices and as such it may also require a "geoeconomic" conception of space, power and security which sees geopolitical forms as "recalibrated by market logics".

We might also attend to the 'over-mapping' of the global South in "acknowledging the power of the dominant imaginative geographies while also disclosing the critical possibilities of the other geographies that are covered-up"^{xxxiii}. These are the "cartographic cover-ups and carve-ups"^{xxxiv} - the maps that have routinely represented the heterogeneous spaces of the Global South "in the interests of colonial and neocolonial control"^{xxxv} and may include, as Anke Strüver's^{xxxvi} work has shown, the kind of representations (as space-producing practices) constructed by development practitioners such as aid agencies in their narration of regional disparities. It might also involve more attempts to think through the 'entwining' of knowledges and the imbrications of inside and outside, domestic and foreign, first and third worlds. James Sidaway's work on the complex geographies of (post)development^{xxxvii} raises important questions about the composition and decomposition of the 'Third world' as a meaningful geopolitical and epistemological category and underlines the need for more sustained attention to the interactions of enclosure, boundaries and subjectivities. The focus on the new metageographies of development including enclaves^{xxxviii} and other 'spaces of enclosure'^{xxxix} is very valuable here and provides important examples of the 'tangled geographies of dispossession and repossession' that, according to Matt Sparke, geographers have a responsibility to map.

All the papers in this collection attempt to bring critical geopolitics together with the critical study of development and were originally presented at the 'Critical geopolitics 2008' conference held at the University of Durham in September 2008^{xl}. This international conference sought to assess the current state of 'critical geopolitics', to explore the *practice* of critical geopolitical enquiry and how it shapes our current and ongoing research and to explore areas for reconsideration and future investigation. Just over a decade on from the publication of Ó Tuathail's landmark text *Critical Geopolitics* in 1996 and a special 'Critical geopolitics' issue of the journal *Political Geography* in the same year, this conference recognised that, politically as well as intellectually, this was an important moment in which to appraise and reflect upon the

contribution that this corpus of critical scholarship had made both within and beyond the discipline^{xli}. As a body of scholarship that first emerged in the early 1990s ‘critical geopolitics’ originally sought to bridge the disciplines of Geography and International Relations. By including two sessions under the heading ‘Geo-politics and Development’ we wanted to see if critical geopolitics (as currently theorised and practiced) could potentially serve, over two decades later, as a bridge between the disciplines of Geography, Development Studies and IR. Ó Tuathail’s 1986 paper on the “Language and Nature of the New Geopolitics”^{xlii}, which according to Dalby^{xliii} was “the first explicit attempt to posit the scholarly agenda which subsequently has become known as critical geopolitics”, began with a concern with El Salvador and the culture that supported US ‘interventions’ there. So non-western political geographies were important to the very foundations of what would later become known as ‘critical geopolitics’ even if they were to become somewhat neglected in its future development and elaboration.

The paper by Haim Yacobi explores the relevance of post-colonial critiques in its discussion of Israel’s involvement and investment in development projects in Africa between 1956 and 1973. The role of Israel in the post-colonial development of Africa has been a widely neglected theme and Yacobi questions the assumption that knowledges of development are a by-product of the polity between Empires and their margins. In recent years both the architecture of international governance and the established modes of development co-operation have been increasingly transformed by the emergence of countries like Brazil, India and China as donors with important implications for the global geopolitical ecology of investment, production and trade. The papers by Power and Mohan and Carmody and Taylor both critically explore the particular case of China and the growing importance of Africa to Chinese foreign policy. The paper by Power and Mohan explores the geopolitical ‘traditions’ that shape current China-Africa relations and China’s mobilisation of historical discourses of geo-politics in order to justify and legitimate its contemporary Africa policy. They also engage with Chinese IR and the unfolding of ‘neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics’ both in China and (through China’s contemporary vision of ‘foreign assistance’) in Africa. The paper by Carmody and Taylor explores the impacts of China’s increased engagement with Africa on governance through a comparative study of two contrasting cases: Sudan and Zambia. They characterise China’s resource or geo-economic strategy in Africa as being embodied by different strands of engagement and modes of governance: clientelism (proxy force and hegemony) that together constitute what they term “flexigemony”.

The papers by Doyle and Chaturvedi and by Grove both employ critical geopolitics in their explorations of climate change in the global South. Doyle and Chaturvedi depict climate as an issue which deterritorialises existing geopolitical realities in a manner which suits the discourses of both elite science and corporate globalisation. With reference to India they examine some of the imaginative geographies of climate change as well as government responses to the new realities of the global climate change agenda, demonstrating how climate change as a site, as a discourse, as a form of territory, is a product of the global North. The paper by Kevin Grove examines the framing of climate change as a multifaceted security issue that has made possible a host of policies and programs designed to promote adaptation and lessen vulnerabilities. Grove provides an analysis of the biopolitical dimensions of environmental security discourse and draws attention to the politically loaded deployment of insurance-based practices of risk management, tracing the emergence of an insurance-development-security complex.

The paper by Jan Bachmann explores the recent establishment of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) and its vision of “proactive peacetime engagement” on the continent which targets crucial communities and their perceptions through humanitarian and development projects. Bachmann interrogates AFRICOM’s discursive strategy and considers the implications of this merging of security and development along with the origins of AFRICOM in counterinsurgency arguments that highlight the military’s role in ‘fostering’ development. The paper by Mark Berger and Devleena Ghosh explores the role of Cold War geopolitics in shaping the character and direction of the trajectories of nation-states in Asia. With particular reference to India they show how the Cold War provided the crucial backdrop for the rise and fall of developmental nationalism, while the post-Cold War era has set the scene for an array of cultural nationalisms. The paper by Stephen Young questions popular claims about the capacity for microfinance to reduce poverty and empower women in the global South in the context of the financialisation of development and the geopolitics of global redlining. Young traces the ‘everyday geopolitics’ of microfinance in India, suggesting that instead of separating microfinance as a development tool from the broader geopolitical restructuring of financial markets we have to explore the unequal interdependencies between them and that critical geopolitics can play an important role in this.

ⁱ M Sparke, ‘Everywhere but always somewhere: Critical geographies of the Global South,’ The Global South, 1(1) (2007), p117.

ⁱⁱ P. Perry, ‘Editorial comment. Political Geography Quarterly: a content (but discontented) review’, Political Geography Quarterly 6, 1 (1987) p6.

ⁱⁱⁱ E. Kofman, “Unfinished agendas: acting upon minority voices of the past decade” Geoforum, 25 (1994) p437.

^{iv} L.D. Berg, ‘Scaling knowledge: towards a critical geography of critical Geographies’, Geoforum, 35, (2004), pp553-558. J. Robinson ‘Postcolonialising Geography: tactics and pitfalls’, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 24, 3 (2003) pp273-289. C. Minca ‘Empire goes to war: or, the ontological shift in the transatlantic divide’, ACME An Electronic Journal of Critical Geographies 2, (2003) pp227-235. D. Slater, Territory and State Power in Latin America: the Peruvian case, (London, Macmillan Press, 1989).

^v J Robinson, ‘Postcolonialising geography: tactics and pitfalls’, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 24(3) (2003), pp. 273–289.

^{vi} Ibid, 273.

^{vii} J. Robinson, ‘Political geography in a postcolonial context’, Political Geography, 22, 6, (2003) p648.

^{viii} V. Mamadouh ‘Some notes on the politics of political geography’, Political Geography, 22, 667 (2003).

^{ix} J D Sidaway, ‘The Geography of Political Geography’ in K. Cox, M. Low and J. Robinson (eds) The Handbook of Political Geography (London, Sage, 2008), p51.

^x K. Booth, ‘Human wrongs and International Relations’, International Affairs, 71, 1, (1995), p125. See also G. Chowdhry and S. Nair (Eds) Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations (Routledge, London 2003).

^{xi} S. Hoffmann, ‘An American Social Science: International Relations’, Daedalus 3, (1977): 41-60. See also A. Tickner ‘Seeing IR Differently: Notes from the Third World’, Millennium: Journal of International Studies (32, 2, 2003), pp295-324.

^{xii} P. Bilgin, ‘Thinking past ‘Western’ IR’, Third World Quarterly, 29, 1 (2008), pp5-23.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} J. N Pieterse, White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture, (London, Yale University Press, 1995). G. Hart, ‘Development critiques in the 1990s: culs-de-sac and promising paths’, Progress in Human Geography, 25, 4 (2001), pp649-658. A. Escobar, Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World, (Princeton University Press, 1995).

^{xv} K C Dunn, ‘Introduction: Africa and International Relations Theory.’ in K C. Dunn and T M. Shaw, (eds.) Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp1-8.

- xvi C. Mercer, G. Mohan, M. Power, 'Towards a critical political geography of African development'. Geoforum (34, 4, 2003), pp19-436. See also W. Brown, 'Africa and International Relations: a comment on IR Theory, anarchy and Statehood', Review of International Studies, 32: 1 (2006), pp119-143.
- xvii J. Robinson 'Political geography in a postcolonial context', Political Geography, 22, 6, (2003) p651.
- xviii J. O Loughlin, P Raento and J D Sidaway, J D 'Editorial: Where the tradition meets its challengers', Political Geography, 27, (2008) p2.
- xix Ibid.
- xx J D Sidaway, 'The Geography of Political Geography' in K. Cox, M. Low and J. Robinson (eds) The Handbook of Political Geography (London, Sage, 2008).
- xxi Ibid.
- xxii D. Slater, Geopolitics and the Post-colonial: Rethinking North-South relations, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
- xxiii M Sparke, "Everywhere but always somewhere: Critical geographies of the Global South," The Global South, 1(1) (2007), 117 – 126.
- xxiv A Appadurai, Modernity at large (University of Minnesota Press, London, 1996) p16.
- xxv G.Ó Tuathail, 'Critical geopolitics and development theory: intensifying the dialogue. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 19 (1994) 228–233. D. Slater 'Reimagining the geopolitics of development: continuing the dialogue. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, (1993), 19: 233–239. D. Slater 'Geopolitical imaginations across the North-South divide: issues of different development and power', Political Geography 16 (1997), pp 631–653.
- xxvi D. Slater, 'The Geopolitical Imagination and Enframing of development theory', Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 18, 4 (1993), pp419-37.
- xxvii D. Slater, Geopolitics and the Post-colonial: Rethinking North-South relations, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) p224.
- xxviii For an important example of this kind of scholarship see J. D. Sidaway, 'Sovereign excesses? Portraying postcolonial sovereigntyscapes', Political Geography 22, 1, (2003), pp157-178 and J D Sidaway, 'Postcolonial geographies: an exploratory essay', Progress in Human Geography 24, (2000) 4 573-594.
- xxix J. Robinson, 'Political geography in a postcolonial context', Political Geography, 22, 6, (2003) p649.
- xxx Ibid.
- xxxi For a useful series of reviews of work to date in this area see M Sparke 'Political Geographies of Globalization (3): Resistance', Progress in Human Geography, 32 (1), (2008), pp1-18.
- xxxii N Smith and D Cowen, 'After geopolitics? From the geopolitical social to geoeconomics, Antipode, 41 (1) (2009) pp22-48.
- xxxiii M Sparke, "Everywhere but always somewhere: Critical geographies of the Global South," The Global South, 1(1) (2007), p122.
- xxxiv Ibid: 119.
- xxxv Ibid, p117.
- xxxvi A. Strüver, 'The production of geopolitical and gendered images through Global Aid organisations', Geopolitics, 12 (4), (2007), pp680-703.
- xxxvii J. D. Sidaway, 'Spaces of post(development)', Progress in Human Geography, 31, 3, (2008), pp345-61.
- xxxviii J. D. Sidaway, 'Enclave space: a new metageography of development?', Area, 39, 3, (2007) pp331-339.
- xxxix A Vasudevan, C McFarlane and A Jeffrey 'Spaces of enclosure', Geoforum, 39 (5), (2008) pp1641-1646.
- xl The conference was organised by the Politics-State-Space research cluster at the University of Durham University with sponsorship from the Department of Geography at the University of Durham, the Political Geography Research Group (PGRG) of the RGS-IBG and the journal *Political Geography*. The full conference programme together with all titles and abstracts and some photos from the event can be found at: <http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/conf/criticalgeopolitics2008/>. The paper in this special issue by Timothy Doyle and Sanjay Chaturvedi is different to the original presentation given by Sanjay Chaturvedi at the conference in Durham.

-
- ^{xii} For further reflections on 'critical geopolitics' see the special issue of the journal Geopolitics (Volume 13, Issue 3).
- ^{xiii} G. Ó Tuathail, 'The Language and Nature of the "New Geopolitics" – The Case of US-EI Salvador Relations' Political Geography Quarterly 5/1 (1986) p. 73.
- ^{xiiii} S. Dalby 'Imperialism, Domination, Culture: The Continued Relevance of Critical Geopolitics', Geopolitics, 13, 3, (2008), p414.