

## **Everywhere But Always Somewhere: Critical Geographies of the Global South**

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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.

Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s tracings of the “shadow of a geographical pattern” in deconstruction (Spivak, 1976: lxxxii), I have elsewhere outlined such geographical responsibility in terms of a call to track critically and persistently the open-ended graphing of the geo (Sparke, 2005). But what does it mean to track the geo-graphy of the Global South in this persistently critical way?

Firstly it means critiquing the maps that have routinely represented the heterogeneous spaces of the Global South in the interests of colonial and neocolonial control. These maps of control include all the instrumental cartographies, moral topographies, and imaginative geographies that have provided the practical guides and promotional props for colonial practice from the times of ‘Terra Nullius’, ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Heart of Darkness’ to such contemporary conceits as ‘the Axis of Evil’, ‘the Clash of Civilizations’, and, that gleeful globalist gloss on contemporary capitalism, ‘the Level Playing Field’. All these geographical visions have in different ways overwritten and obscured the huge heterogeneity of the Global South, replacing it with pernicious ‘New

World' declarations, 'Us-Them' oppositions and 'West is Best' assumptions. The arrogance of such over-mapping is similar in its overreach to 'the Map of the Empire' in the famous story by Jorge Luis Borges, a story of imperial cartographers who aspired to map everything in such detail that their map actually grew to the size of the Empire and covered up the land (Borges, 1998). But while this story of over-mapping was used by Borges to ridicule the futility of representational totalization, and while he depicts the Map of the Empire being therefore abandoned as useless in the 'Deserts of the West', the maps of control covering up the Global South have by contrast actually been very useful to their cartographers. They have served practically to remake the world anew, justifying imperial violence all over the planet and underpinning political-economic practices that have ranged from the trans-Atlantic trading of Africans, cotton and sugar to the contemporary 'Highly Indebted Poor Country' surveillance protocols deployed by the World Bank and IMF to limit the reach of debt relief. In all of these diverse contexts the signature gesture of the maps of dominance has been simple: 'divide and dispossess'. Whether legitimating inhuman violence by liberals in colonial India (Metha, 1999), or inhuman violence by neoliberals in neocolonial Iraq (Gregory, 2004; Roberts *et al*, 2003), maps that map the Global South as a space of exception outside the bounds of humanity and human rights have remained key to the ideological legitimation and military organization of imperial rule. The maps might be richly detailed and realist in the old imperial and Cold War area studies traditions (that often mixed ethnographic care with colonial interest), or they might be highly fictional and idealist in the neo-imperial Iraq War tradition (that has mixed militaristic spin with crass commercial interest). But, in

whatever way the over-mappings have overreached, their territorializing imperatives have always worked in the interests of dispossession.

Influential as they are, however, the cartographic cover-ups and carve-ups of the Global South have never succeeded in obliterating the efforts of the colonized to map back and reterritorialize their human geographies by representing them in other more grounded, embodied and accountable ways. In this sense the geographical formulation of the Global South itself can be cast as a form of *reterritorialization* articulated in the interests of *repossession*. As such it builds upon multi-layered foundations that include all the reterritorializing work of the ‘post-colonial’ nation-states forged by independence movements against territorial imperialism (Anderson, 1991; James, 1963; Scott, 2004), as well as the original ‘Third World’ envisaged as a non-aligned world bloc at Bandung (Scott, 1999), and, in diverse geographic traditions that tie the earliest anti-colonial resistance efforts to contemporary First Nations renegotiations, the ‘Fourth World’ too. Over time all these anti-colonial reterritorializations have been subject to over-mapping. The ‘less developed world’, ‘Highly Indebted Poor Countries’, ‘basket cases’, ‘rogue nations’, ‘the arc of instability’, ‘wilderness’: the list of geographic misrepresentation is long. But, despite all these misleading cover-terms, critical geographies of the Global South have persisted in rallying and representing struggles for repossession. Secondly, therefore, persistent geographical responsibility means retracing these heterogeneous human geographies of the Global South that have been articulated in the face of the anemic geographies of dispossession.

Critical geographical work in, on and about the Global South is undoubtedly supported by scholarship on the economic geography of uneven global development (*e.g.*

Hart, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Peet *et al*, 2003) as well as by the recent writings of geographers on the geopolitical and geoeconomic scripting of dominance and resistance (Gregory, 2004; Featherstone, 2003; Massey, 2005; and Routledge, 2003; and Sharp, 2000). But, from Edward Said's inspirational critiques of Orientalism's imaginative geographies (Said, 1979) to El Fisgón's (Rafael Barajas's) brilliant cartoon geo-history of neoliberalism (El Fisgón, 2004), a sensitivity to the open-ended and critical geographies of the Global South has been nurtured by many others too. "Location, location, location," is what El Fisgón's main character – a roadside vendor from Mexico City – is told when he asks how he might succeed at globalization. The critical geographic lesson being that from the location of the Global South the tendentious terms of the 'level playing field' make it look a lot less level (see also the extremely telling maps of global inequality collected at Gapminder, 2006). These are lessons, it should be noted, that are also taught every day in the business press where, for example, frank discussions of WTO negotiations repeatedly remind speculators that the free trade evangelists of the Global North – chiefly the trade ministers of the US and EU– refuse to accept calls for full free trade in products from the Global South – notably of farm products from the G-21 countries led by Brazil. Yet away from all the arbitrage over so-called free trade, though, critical geographies of suffering in the Global South – whether it is the suffering of racialized dispossession in the aftermath of white rule (Moore, 2005), the suffering of gendered dispossession in new sexual divisions of labor (Pratt, 2004; Silvey, 2004; Wright, 2003), or the suffering of health dispossession in the context of the global war on the poor (Farmer, 2005) – serve to question the cover-up conceits of the cartographies of control. Clearly such questioning should not be viewed as the disciplinary preserve of

geography, a discipline that still sometimes offers its services to the map-makers of imperial statecraft (but see Mitchell, 2005). The critical graphing of the geo of the Global South instead involves a much more commonplace, and for the same reason, collaborative and radically critical capsizal of imperial cartographic conventions.

To use the terms of Du Bois (1903), a critical capsizal of colonial cartographic convention involves articulating a double consciousness about the over-mapping of the Global South: acknowledging the power of the dominant imaginative geographies while also disclosing the critical possibilities of the other geographies that are covered-up. Toni Morrison provides a powerful example at the start of her book about whiteness. She explains that she wants “to draw a map of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World – without the mandate for conquest” (Morrison, 1992: 3). Even in the original moments of mapping the ‘New World’ as New it is possible in this way to locate critical *ab*-original geographies of the Global South. Thus in ‘Newfoundland’, to pick an early example from what eventually became the ‘The True North, Strong and Free’ – according to Canada’s national anthem – the maps of Shawnadithit can be read as a critical commentary from the last of the native inhabitants on the new found colonizers at their territorial-*cum*-terrorizing work (Sparke, 1995). Tracking forward to the present, the same possibility of mapping the Global South without a mandate for conquest discloses many other critical geographies, geographies that map other-wise and which by doing so locate the Global South in places such as the tent cities of rich country homeless protests as well as in the reimagination of the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Latin America as heterogeneous but shared grounds for anti-

imperial uprising and critique. Just like Shownadithit's counter-mappings, the double-consciousness in these diverse geographies means that they are imagined and developed in critical relationship to cartographies of colonial control. For example, the World Social Forum, which has been held now four times in Porto Alegre Brazil, once in Mumbai India, and which is currently proliferating globally in the form of more accessible and diverse regional social forums, was initially imagined as a venue where the 'globalization is inevitable' world view articulated at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, might be capsized and critiqued. Retaining some of the global imagery, but transforming it through appeals to the grassroots globalization of the Global South, World Social Forum participants have repeatedly argued that 'Another World is Possible' (Fisher and Ponniah, 2003). Instead of the 'level playing field' view of globalization that is routinely rehearsed by the player-managers in Davos (Lapham, 1998), the World Social Forum has therefore also allowed for diverse counter-mappings that highlight how increasing economic interdependency has also come with increasing inequalities and increasing awareness about how to resist too (see Sparke *et al*, 2005).

Learning from the World Social Forum counter-mappings, one way of demonstrating how critical geographies of the Global South actually enable criticism is to outline in the few paragraphs that remain how they can thereby provide for a critique of one of the most successful über-mappers of the 'level playing field' writing in English today, the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. Friedman's new book-length declaration that *The World is Flat* is narrated as a form of 'road to Bangalore' conversion experience in which a visit to the campus of Infosys Technologies in India leads the columnist to return to America and whisper to his wife: "Honey, I think the world is flat"

(Friedman, 2005: 5). The fact that Nandan Nilekani, the CEO of Infosys, had said nothing about flatness but rather “Tom, the playing field is being leveled,” is not allowed to interrupt Friedman’s new world narrative. Neither is the wouldbe Columbus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century put off from his discovery discourse by the fact that the actual road to the Infosys headquarters is pockmarked and bumpy. “As I left the Infosys campus that evening and bounced along the road back to Bangalore, I kept chewing on that phrase: ‘The playing field is being leveled’. What Nandan is saying, I thought, is that the playing field is being flattened... Flattened? Flattened? My God, he’s telling me the world is flat!” (2005, 7). Here, in one of its most populist, pompous and reality-repudiating rehearsals, is how the Global South gets over-mapped most frequently today. The unevenness on the road to Bangalore is invoked only to be ignored, while an Indian CEO is ventriloquized to tell the American columnist what he wanted to hear in the first place.

The truth of course is that Friedman had been imagining that the world was flat long before the trip to Infosys. In fact his earlier best-seller guide to globalization articulated exactly the same imaginative geography with most of the same clichés about the level playing field. Globalization, Friedman explained in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, was creating

a single, integrated, open plain. Today that plain grows wider, faster and more open every day, as more walls get blown down and more countries get absorbed. And that’s why today there is no more First World, Second World or Third World. There’s just the Fast World – the world of the wide open plain – and the Slow World – the world of those who either fall by the way-side or choose to live away from the plain in some artificially walled-off valley of their own (1999: 41).

In this version the Global South was territorialized as the ‘Slow World’, the world of the olive trees that was contrasted with the fast world of the Lexus in the old book’s title. For Friedman it was a world brought to imaginary life by looking through an orientalist eye

that he developed when working as a Middle East reporter based in Lebanon (where perhaps the paradigmatic walled-off way-side appeared to him in the form of the Bekaa Valley). That same epic encounter and its attendant moral topographies – to use Melanie McCalister’s media savvy terms (McCalister, 2001) – continues to overshadow *The World is Flat* where the sufferings of the slow ‘offline’ world are always already posed as self-inflicted wounds, the penalty of deliberate disconnection from the good gamesmanship of the level playing field.

The successful ignoring of history in Friedman’s presentism is common in the wider boasts about globalization and is easily identified (Cooper, 2000; Coronil, 2001). By simply remembering the history of colonialism, oil exploitation and U.S.-enabled authoritarianism in the Middle East, for example, Friedman’s recycled ‘McWorld versus Jihad’ storyline can be seen as mere cover for what, by contrast, Timothy Mitchell (2002) valuably posits as the more historically hybrid force-fields of ‘McJihad’. But reading *The World is Flat* after reading a critical Global South geography such as El Fisson’s *How to Succeed at Globalization* also makes it possible to develop a double consciousness about the abstract triangulation of geography that accompanies Friedman’s successful ignoring of history. His first angle away from reality is to ignore his own privilege and American politics of location. His second is to impose the flat world as a complete end of geography, a borderless, frictionless, wired and post-Wall end-space to match the *End of History* (Fukuyama, 1992). And his third angle is to then impose equally decontextualizing but culturalist maps to explain why there might be exceptions to the one world flatness of the level playing field. Following a long tradition of ‘northernist’ environmental determinism stretching from Ellsworth Huntington to David Landes

(1998), local, supposedly natural or endogenous factors are thereby introduced by Friedman to explain why the Global South fails to succeed on the playing field of globalization. Historical-geographies of connection to the global system through colonialism, neocolonialism, exploitation and oppression are thereby all angled aside. To invoke the double consciousness in El Fisgón's critical irony, here we see the power of a kind of global real estate redlining in action: location, location, location (that is, *assume and normalize* locations of privilege, *ignore and deterritorialize* locations of inequality, and *blame and externalize* locations of difference).

By charting the continuities between the historical geographies of imperialism and the redlining of neoliberalism, the counter-mapping of El Fisgón and others also reminds us that the new India discovered by Friedman shares something with the new India discovered by Columbus: namely, that it is imagined, implicitly or not, as a new frontier for accumulation by dispossession. In other words, in addition to the assumption, deterritorialization and externalization aspects of Friedman's approach, reconsidering the flat world from the Global South makes it possible to chart what the abstract triangulation achieves even as it obscures. For example, writing from a much more accountable Indian location Vandana Shiva summarizes how the epistemic exclusions that make the flat world conceivable also help to cover-up its dispossessing exclusions on the ground.

"Friedman," she writes in a scathing review of the book,

has reduced the world to the friends he visits, the CEOs he knows, and the golf courses he plays at. From this microcosm of privilege, exclusion, blindness, he shuts out both the beauty of diversity and the brutality of exploitation and inequality, he shuts out the social and ecological externalities of economic globalization and free trade, he shuts out the walls that globalization is building – walls of insecurity, hatred and fear – walls of 'intellectual property', walls of privatization (Shiva, 2005).

Drawing attention to Friedman's complicity in the wall-building, Shiva also underlines how his flat world over-mapping only works by presenting a peculiarly partial perspective – the view from on top of the new walls – as a global and universal view. “Friedman presents a 0.1% picture and hides 99.9%,” she says, deploying a double consciousness that reverses Friedman's fixation on dramatic numbers in order to foreground the scale of the excluded Global South. “And in the 99.9%,” she therefore highlights,

are Monsanto's seed monopolies and the suicides of thousands of wars. In the eclipsed 99.9% are the 25 million women who disappeared in high growth areas of India because a commodified world has rendered women a disposable sex. In the hidden 99.9% economy are thousands of tribal children in Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan who died of hunger because the public distribution system for food has been dismantled to create markets for agribusiness. The world of the 99.9% has grown poorer because of economic globalization. And it is their rights we fight for. We work to build alternatives for a just, sustainable, peaceful world – a shared and common world – in which our common humanity and universal responsibility links us in earth democracy (Shiva, 2005).

Here, while the Global South is figured as the missing 99.9%, it is also and more importantly introduced as a list of real places, real people and real suffering. Moving from an acknowledgement of these spaces of dispossession to an appeal for repossession, Shiva's argument also illustrates how and why the Global South needs to be invoked as an open-ended and inclusive category: not a fixed territory or geo-strategic bloc, but rather a congeries of human geographies that are place-specific and space-making in the face of devastating and yet far from flattening forces.

Another lesson of place specific counter-mappings is that they underline the danger of imagining the Global South in abstract terms that merely reverse the false universalism of flat world discourse. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's singular concept of a global 'Multitude' struggling in and through the global space of 'Empire'

falls into exactly this idealist trap. It is therefore no accident that – despite obviously holding much more critical worldviews – Hardt and Negri reduplicate some of the same deterritorialization in Friedman’s account when they imagine the geography of Empire as “a kind of smooth space across which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance” (2000, 198). From the perspective of even the most mobile inhabitants of the Global South – Mexican workers in the U.S., Indonesian workers in Saudi Arabia, Filipino workers in Singapore, Turkish workers in Germany, for example – the concept of gliding across national boundaries without substantial resistance surely sounds like a bad joke. The only class of global subject for whom such gliding is a reality is the class that Friedman writes for: the transnational capitalist class for whom flat world discourse is a daily reality or at least an ever-present advertising idea through which to try to live (Sklair, 2001; Roberts, 2004).

While the consolidation of the wealth and privilege of the transnational capitalist class has grown in tandem with the dispossession of the Global South (see Harvey, 2005), this elite class remains a tiny fraction of the global populace, no doubt even smaller than the 0.1% noted by Shiva. Nevertheless, it does exist, and moving from elite golf courses to elite airport lounges to elite private jets, it does enjoy a certain cocooned geography that, as Shiva suggests vis-à-vis Friedman, helps bring flatness into view. Given this very particular and privileged geography, might it not be mistaken to assert – as I did at the start here – that the Global South is everywhere? Does not this risk reduplicating the groundless imagery of a global Multitude existing everywhere across the smooth space of Empire? To be sure, we can point to the co-presence of golf course gardeners, airport cleaners and even jet-booking office workers in outsourcing centers such as Bangalore,

but no one from the Global South, it might still be protested, actually gets to travel the world from the deterritorializing heights of corporate jets. Yet here, I would submit, the formulation of a Global South that is everywhere but always somewhere still remains useful. In their successful bid to create an unaccountable global gulag the American military and CIA have used the hidden hand of the market to help with their hidden handcuffing of people targeted for imprisonment and torture without trial (*Amnesty International*, 2006). As a result, victims of so-called extraordinary rendition have been transported by private corporate jets all over the planet, and those who have lived to tell their stories of kidnapping and torture have also highlighted the cruel ironies of being manacled *en route* to the leather upholstery of a corporate jet (Mayer, 2005; Sparke, 2006). In contrast, then, to the corporate cosmopolitanism of Friedman and his fans, extraordinary rendition therefore presents us with the carceral cosmopolitanism of the Global South: everywhere, but always somewhere, struggling to take back and sustain human geographies in spaces of inhuman violence and dispossession.

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