



# Development and geography: anxious times, anemic geographies, and migration

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## I Introduction

Every corner of development studies is characterized in 2008 by a sense of heightened urgency. Whether in the context of the literature on poverty, water politics, global climate change, or food shortage, the current moment is framed as one of particular concern for the future of human development. World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick stated on 2 July 2008 that the ‘Group of 8 leaders and major oil producers must “act now” to address the “man-made catastrophe” caused by high food and oil prices’ (World Bank, 2008). ‘We are entering a danger zone’, he warned:

For the first time since 1973, the world is being hit with a combination of record oil and food prices, threatening to drive over 100 million people into extreme poverty and reverse the gains made in overcoming poverty over the last seven years ... Some 41 countries have lost 3% to 10% of their GDP from rising food, fuel and commodity prices since January 2007. Over 30 countries have been hit by food riots, as the impact of the crisis reaches the household level. (World Bank, 2008)

The present is thus metaphorized as crisis and marked as an exceptionally crucial moment

for intervention. This tenor of anxiety underpins recent mainstream development literature (eg, WDR, 2008) as much as it pervades critical development studies research (Hart, 2004; 2006), albeit for very different reasons.

The figure of the migrant plays a central role in accounts of the crisis-ridden present. Trafficked humans, environmental refugees, and displaced farmers are at the heart of dystopic visions of development that emphasize human vulnerability. As Hyndman (2005: 3) writes, ‘Since 9/11, but starting well before, migrants have come to stand in for all that threatens state security and welfare’. In contrast, in relatively optimistic renderings of possible futures, the transnational migrant serves as an icon of the promise of alternative development, a vector of progress, and a protagonist of urban justice activism (Tarrow, 2005). The subject of the migrant thus carries with it a broad range of normative attachments representative of development as both fear and hope (Lawson, 2007a).

In this review essay, first I explore the ways that the desire- and terror-loaded discursive presence of the migrant (Puar, 2007) haunts

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and limits the geographic imagination of development as intervention (WDR, 2008). I pay particular attention to the 2008 and 2009 World Development Reports as examples of policy-oriented development research that inscribes a depoliticized view of the geographies of migration. Second, and in contrast, I trace the current reinvigoration of feminist interest in social reproduction. Research on migration as it ties into social reproduction complements Hart's (2004) call for critical ethnographies of development. Specifically, migration research that engages with the spatial politics of farmwork, domestic work, factory jobs, childcare, nursing, and sex work (for a review, see Boyle, 2002) attends to the dynamic processes and power relations that go into making international development (Lawson, 2007b). Serious engagement with feminist development research (Katz, 2001a; Radcliffe, 2006), and in particular with the political geographies of social reproduction, can provide insight into the specific ways that development as intervention is 'shaped by political-economic relations [that it presumes it] cannot change; how [it] is constituted, that is, by what it excludes' (Li, 2007: 4). Social reproduction and migration are not entirely excluded from policy-oriented development studies, but their full implications for development studies have yet to be elaborated.

This is the 'age of migration' and yet most development work remains focused on the global South. Critical development studies has long refused the spatial and analytical separation of the global South from the global North. Because migrants embody and live the relational, cross-place geographies upon which critical development studies insists, scholarship on migration can contribute to creating robust analyses of the geographies of development. Migration as a process includes transnational gendered and racialized labor value transfers between low- and high-income countries and is integral to the production of hierarchies of privilege and power across scales. As such, it provides a

window onto the ongoing production and exacerbation of unequal geographies of capital accumulation and social welfare. In addition, activist struggles for migrants' rights as workers and citizens, and for the social reproduction needs of human populations, offer valuable examples for building that are necessary for understanding the contemporary production of international inequality.

## **II Anemic development geographies and the depoliticization of migration**

The spatial stage of contemporary Development has taken shape in relation to the sedimented histories of the capitalist development of colonial, imperial, and post-second world war political economies. International financial institutions (IFIs) reflect neo-imperial geopolitical hierarchies, upholding the interests of some states more than others across transnational space (Sparke, 2005). Critical development geographers place primary importance on understanding the contemporary perpetuation of these historical geographies of inequality and the power relations that undergird them. Development practitioners, in contrast, tend to take colonial history as a commonsensical backdrop. Instead of examining the historical roots of inequality in dynamic tension with contemporary development patterns, the World Development Reports (WDRs) focus on:

the obstacles to development primarily as problems of implementation in the face of technical constraints; corruption; and recalcitrant, incompetent, protectionist or predatory states. While they refer to 'political realities' that make the pursuit of certain policies difficult, they are less willing to concede that there might be anything problematic about the theoretical and ideological assumptions that underpin these policies. (Mawdsley and Rigg, 2002: 100)

The 2008 World Development Report, 'Agriculture for Development', continues this history of ideological denial.

In that the 2008 WDR frames itself as ideologically neutral, it is representative of the body of development work that operates like an 'anti-politics machine' (Ferguson, 1994). The Report indexes a return of agriculture to the forefront of development debates (WDR, 2008). It builds an argument for investment in rural economies. It stresses the need to increase agricultural productivity for subsistence farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and to generate rural employment through 'labor intensive, high value agriculture linked to a dynamic rural non-farm sector' in Asia (WDR, 2008: v). Overall, the WDR focuses on increasing agricultural productivity and strengthening the ties between rural non-farm and rural farming livelihoods.

But – as critics, activists, and alternative development practitioners have repeatedly pointed out – the root causes of rural poverty and dispossession cannot be isolated from the dynamics of global capital accumulation. Indeed, according to critics (eg, IAASTD, 2008), the WDR rests on an indefensible denial of the interdependencies linking rural and urban people and places internationally. It states that 'marginal areas are especially vulnerable, and until migration provides alternative opportunities, the challenge is to improve the stability and resilience of livelihoods in these regions' (WDR, 2008: 49). The report thus produces a set of policy prescriptions that view rural places as containers in need of enhanced livelihood 'stability and resilience'. The goal, then, in the presumed absence of migration's 'alternative opportunities', is to help rural populations stay in place. The report presents a version of the rural population as potentially managing their livelihoods without migration. Such an image sidesteps the large body of evidence that demonstrates that migration is *already* integral to the dynamics of rural economies and the livelihoods of rural populations (cf. Rigg, 1998).

The report argues at some length (Chapters 1 and 2) that the majority of poverty reduction witnessed in rural areas in recent

years is a result of improvements in the rural economy. The analysis depends on a separation between the rural and urban economies that the report itself admits is empirically indefensible. Indeed, it goes on to note that the decomposition of the urban versus rural sources of poverty reduction 'is an accounting exercise and thus does not speak to the indirect ways in which migration and urban growth contribute to rural poverty reduction (such as remittances)' (p. 48). Nor, perhaps even more saliently, does it speak to the agricultural market manipulations that have transnational effects of farmers' livelihoods. The geography that is represented in the report is thus, in a word, anemic. It is 'a geography that, like white chalk on slate, conceals the complex geographical palimpsest over which it writes a singular and supposedly coherent geo' (Sparke, 2005: xvi). While it explores migration as one of three pathways out of rural poverty in Chapter 3, it underplays the importance of rural-urban networks of resources, the transnational politics of financial decision-making, and the power relations that interpolate all places. Indeed, the anemic geography of the report is worse than inaccurate: it is complicit in the production of the very spatial imaginaries embedded in policies that have worsened rural poverty, namely, the promotion of export-oriented agriculture as the key to poverty reduction. While this form of agriculture has indeed reduced poverty for some farmers, it has also heightened rural class differentiation and deepened poverty for millions of the world's poor and landless farmers.

Global agribusiness benefits when states and international regulatory institutions adopt the WDR's depoliticized view of the rural. Internationally, as state and private interests increasingly appropriate assets such as land, water and seeds through primitive accumulation, they do so under the guise of marketization (Glassman, 2006). Meanwhile, neoliberalizing states emphasize individual responsibility for subsistence and

social reproduction. A critically informed geography attends to the active roles that states, corporations, and international organizations play in producing the boundaries between individual and social responsibilities. These actors can and do take advantage of the anemic geographies promulgated by the WDR. Often in collaboration with corporations, states offload social reproduction onto the local and the individual; they ignore labor regulations or lower labor and environmental standards in order to enhance corporate competitiveness; and they alternately monitor then ignore the activities of temporary migrant workers. Critical development scholarship illuminates the interests underlying these practices and institutions, and thereby contributes to understanding how they continue to shape contemporary social inequalities.

Early descriptions of the 2009 World Development Report, 'Reshaping Economic Geography', indicate that it will maintain the 2008 report's anemic geography, a spatial optic that critical geographers interrogate. The objective of the 2009 report is:

to identify and understand the interactions between geography, economic activities, and living standards, and to draw the implications of these interactions for public policy ... WDR 2009 will chart the changes that accompany development in the three spatial dimensions: rising **density**, falling **distance** and persisting **division**. The report will identify the forces that influence the location of economic development. The report will then assess public policies that can facilitate the spatial transformations necessary to sustain economic growth and reduce geographic disparities in welfare ... The ... report will propose that integration of markets should be the guiding principle for designing policies and institutions that help developing countries exploit the economic gains from concentration while ensuring convergence of social welfare. (WDR, 2009)

Market integration is thus taken to be the panacea for the spatial inequalities in development, while decontextualized abstract

concepts such as density, distance, and division stand in for what should be a more socially and politically attuned spatiality of relations. But, as geographers have demonstrated repeatedly, facilitating the flows of capital across space has served in fact to widen inequalities and heighten the concentration of both wealth and poverty between places. Migrants are pushed, pulled, made and unmade in relation to these geographic inequalities.

### III Social reproduction and development inequality

Migration is mutually constituted with patterns of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to both the reproduction of labor power and the biological reproduction of the species. It involves processes, institutions, and social relations tied to the making and maintenance of communities. Ultimately, social reproduction provides the basis for all production (Bakker, 2003). Its particular form in a given society emerges in relation to the institutions of health care, education, elder care and childcare, or what feminist economists term the 'care economy' (Elson, 1998; Folbre, 1994), and it creates the conditions of existence for the ongoing production of goods, services, and capital.

Feminist conceptions of social reproduction extend its meaning (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983; Andrew *et al.*, 2003). Whereas Marxian views of social reproduction focus on its role in supporting the perpetuation of class structures and modes of production, feminists go further to emphasize that social reproduction is integral to life itself. It is the 'fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (Katz, 2001b: 711), entirely and immediately necessary for 'maintaining existing life and reproducing the next generation' (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 383). Social reproduction thus structures the contingencies not only of production but more fundamentally of human existence.

As states and international regulatory institutions adopt neoliberal policy agendas,

the social basis of human survival and reproduction is neglected. Feminist theorists of social reproduction Bakker and Gill (2008) argue that we have entered an era organized around a 'new constitutionalism'. They point out that recent global shifts towards privatization and informalization are part of a new social contract. They argue, along with many other feminists (for a review, see Nagar *et al.*, 2002), that the heaviest burdens of structural adjustment in both the global North and South are borne by poor people and women. In the USA, for instance, the subprime lending crisis has led to 'record levels of evictions and foreclosures. And when you cannot pay taxes, it undermines schools and public transportation and healthcare ... We need a much more massive approach than this by our federal government, a kind of mortgage Marshall Plan' (Jackson, 2007). For a new Marshall Plan to be developed to better fund schools, public transportation, healthcare, low-income housing, social welfare, and indeed social reproduction it would need to be a priority of governments and international organizations. It would require that scholars work towards understanding the cross-cutting political subjectivities and discourses that devalue reproductive labor, and thereby also identify the theoretical ramifications of its exclusion from development frameworks (Mitchell *et al.*, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Attention to the necessity of social reproduction (Katz, 2001b) is reflected in the rhetoric of a number of international platforms, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Yet these platforms reflect ideals that do not translate easily or completely into the context of national state-led development agendas. The difficulties of translating platform ideals into policy are deepened by the international context within which developing states aim to implement policy (Bebbington *et al.*, 2007) and particularly in the context of neo-imperial geopolitics (Roberts *et al.*, 2003).

Specifically, as Floro and Hoppe (2008) argue, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization put pressure on low-income countries to deregulate, liberalize, and privatize their economies, thereby limiting state capacity to work towards the ideals reflected in pro-social platforms, and also their power to put in place their own development agendas which are often more pro-social than those of the international financial institutions (IFIs). Trade liberalization, as promoted by the IFIs, threatens both food security and livelihoods, priorities that are at the center of social development platforms. A policy focus on social reproduction, according to Floro and Hoppe, could lead to better integrated frameworks which would be more successful at supporting the basic livelihood and survival needs of women and poor people worldwide.

#### **IV Robust geographies of development**

Transnational migrant labor exemplifies some key dimensions of the uneven spatial and social organization of social reproduction as part and parcel of global development inequalities. Low-income migrant workers are permitted entry into host countries as contract laborers or temporary farm workers, for instance, but they are not permitted to settle with their families, nor in most cases to become citizens of the host country. Such patterns of unequal citizenship rights are not new. Indeed, they continue a long 'legacy of people of colour being admitted to some countries only through coercive systems of labour that do not recognize family rights' (Arat-Koc, 2006: 76; see also Calavita, 2005). Host countries exploit individual migrants as workers while 'offshoring' the social reproduction costs of the workers or their family members. Indeed, the costs of reproducing the migrant labor force 'can be totally hidden with the economic, social and psychic costs transferred to a different location and state' (Arat-Koc, 2006: 88).

When workers or their family members are children in need of care or are ill or unable to work because of disability, and when they are elderly, the time and energy and indeed labor necessary for their survival will be carried out in their countries of origin. From all of these perspectives, the migration of workers whose social reproduction costs are covered by their home countries constitutes a direct development subsidy to the economies of wealthy nations.

Given that the transnational migration of labor supports the economic development of labor receiving nations while costing low-income economies, it should be engaged both analytically and politically as a development issue. Yet development scholars and policy-makers have tended to analyze migration primarily in relation to what it has to offer in the way of remittances to the place of origin, or the productive labor that migrants' departures may withdraw from the origin country's economy. International 'inter-agency task forces', involving DFID, the World Bank, and the ILO (eg, 2003) and the OECD (eg, 2004) have targeted migrants' remittances as a development issue, and they have aggressively promoted economic and neoliberal approaches to the circulation, investment and 'productive' use of migrants' earnings. Such approaches limit their primary focus to the scale of the nation state, and they thereby conceal, and indeed in effect reinforce, the inequalities embedded in the transnational politics of social reproduction and geographies of development. Rather than a sole or primary emphasis on the effects of a declining welfare state or simple state withdrawal from social provisioning, research can instead attend to the dynamics of everyday gendered labor (Nagar *et al.*, 2002) as these reflect and reinforce 'transnational state effects' (Sparke, 2005). Such a relational approach to processes occurring across places and over time has been central to research that has traced the ways that gendered, racial, caste, and class-based inequalities are reproduced

in the context of global political-economic change (Chari, 2004; Rankin, 2004). This work is contributing to understanding patterns of social reproduction as reflective of the transnational character of capitalist development.

To take seriously the transnational character of economic development as both intervention and as capitalist transformation, and to engage critically with processes of social reproduction, both require that scholars attend in fresh ways to the operation of power (Lewis and Mosse, 2006). One particularly fruitful line of inquiry has relied on refining and updating the central precepts of Marxian political economy (Glassman, 2006). In stark contrast to the anemic geographies of the WDRs, Glassman reviews what he terms 'accumulation by extra-economic means' in relation, for instance, to the historical migrations of agricultural workers in California (Walker, 2004). Unlike earlier political-economy research, this recent research is determinedly informed by conceptions of capitalist processes that take on board Polanyian, Gramscian, and Foucauldian insights into political processes. There is also an important and growing body of feminist work that opens up space for considering the potential for political alliances that link different social groups and the analytical interconnections between processes occurring across places, scales, and groups (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Rai, 2002; Katz, 2004; Moghadam, 2005; Sangtin Writers and Nagar, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Scholarship that engages with the politics of migration (Nevins, 2002; Mitchell, 2004; Mountz, 2004; Pratt, 2004; Hyndman, 2005; Wright, 2006) can help observers better grasp the cross-place power relations that are at the core of the spatial production of development inequalities. Research across multiple sites and scales has led feminist researchers to concentrate on social reproduction as pivotal to the structuring of global capitalism. Integrating the feminist

insights on social reproduction more deeply into development debates can enable better understanding not only of the particular spatial manifestations of neoliberalism, but also of the consequential frictions and contestations around the language, programs, and practices that compose what Jean and John Comaroff (2000) have called the 'culture of millennial capitalism'.

Development scholars are anxious about the future for good reason. The growing migration of people reflects both the growing wealth of the increasingly mobile global elite and the deepening poverty, dislocation, and imprisonment of the world's poor. Internationally, a wide variety of crises in the areas of agriculture, healthcare, childcare, and elder care have caused alarm. One way in which states are seeking to resolve these crises is through the management of migration, selectively regulating borders and citizenship rights. In drawing attention to the politics of migration and the politics of social reproduction, my goal has been to identify the anemic geographies at the core of the WDRs, and begin to chart a path towards more robust understandings of the systems of globally unequal development that depend in part on those very spatial imaginaries for their perpetuation.

In future reports, I will take up two aspects of possible futures that have both long histories within development studies and are, in new ways, at the forefront of current debates. The report that follows this one will examine the changing role of the state in development scholarship and policy. The state remains somewhat surprisingly under-theorized within much development work, and an overview of recent work on the topic indicates that an unearthing of assumptions about the definition, operation, role, and limits of the state can add depth to the analysis of processes of neoliberalization and the cultural dynamics of political-economic change. The final report will take on questions of ethics and engagement within development studies. The last few years have

witnessed fresh interest within the social sciences in the meanings of collaboration, discourses of responsibility, the politics of research, the effects of 'audit culture', and the relationships between 'theory' and 'practice'. Outlining the contributions to these ongoing philosophical questions in relation to development studies can help scholars imagine and enact more hopeful and equitable trajectories in relation to development.

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