Geographies of Development: New Maps, New Visions?*

James D. Sidaway
University of Amsterdam

The use of categories (such as developing world or Third World) to demarcate world regions on the basis of their levels of development is increasingly disputed. Moreover, in the last few years, references have proliferated to the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China), or sometimes BRICA (adding the Arab states of the Gulf), as hyperlinks to future-oriented investment in the world economy. These new labels rest on more than two decades of discourse about “emerging markets” and are embodiments of and agents in the decomposition of the Third World as denoting a meaningful geopolitical and epistemological category. Where are and what then remains of the geography of development and the Third World? In addressing such questions, nuanced maps will be needed. This article sketches some alternatives. Key Words: BRICs, development, geopolitics, mapping, Third World.

Alternative nomenclature should be used consistently within a paper according to the author’s demonstrated preferences. For example: Third World/developing world/two-thirds world.


* I wish to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments and the editor, Sharmishtha Bagchi-Sen, for her encouragement. In addition, this article has benefited from the suggestions of Manuel Aalbers, Isa Baud, Niels Beerepoot, Andrew McGregor, Mario Novelli, Marcus Power, and Elvin Wyly. A series of presentations also afforded an opportunity to rehearse and fine-tune the arguments: at the East Asian Regional Conference in Alternative Geography (Seoul), to the Geographies of Globalizations group at the University of Amsterdam, at the Institute of Social Studies (The Hague), Kings College, London, the University of Oxford and the RGS-IBG Annual Conference (London). It is dedicated to Jasmin Leila and her moves across worlds: See http://www.rgs.org/JasminLeilaAward.

Today, how useful is it to talk about the geography of development or of developing countries? Where are and what remains of the geography of development and of the Third World? Amidst a proliferation of relational terms, what are the consequences of adopting such alternative nomenclature as “the South” and those listed by this journal’s style sheet? New texts, hundreds of instructors, and
many more students and researchers annually wrestle with these terms. This article reconsiders them in the light of the preceding questions, sketching some tentative answers in the context of wider geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts, and building on Vanolo (2010). This is done first through revisiting the categories of global development that, after 1945, were shaped by the Cold War, American power, and recompositions of “race.” The article then focuses on a subset of these, namely, the category of emerging markets, which to some extent has displaced the terms Third World or middle-income countries, and so on, that were formulated in those Cold War and continuing postcolonial contexts.

Critical examination of geopolitics (and associated narratives about world order, security, and identity) as discourses have been the subject of several decades of scholarship (Dalby 2010). This has been applied to understandings of development (Slater 1993, 1994; Ó Tuathail 1994). It is evident that the meta- and geocategories of the West, East, Third World (and yet other alternatives, such as South) thus carry distinctive sets of meanings and are dynamic and frequently contested. In an interview, the sociologist and author of a landmark essay on Southern Theory, Raewyn Connell (2009) remarks how:

The geographer’s “South” is not exactly the same as the South in UN trade debates, or the “third world,” or the “less developed countries,” or the economists’ “periphery,” or the cultural theorists’ “post-colonial” world, or the biologists’ “southern world,” or the geologists’ former Gondwana—though there is some overlapping along this spectrum. I mainly talk of “metropole” and “periphery,” but there is enormous social diversity within each; recognizing the polarity is only the beginning of analysis, not the end.

Terms such as the two-thirds world (as on The Professional Geographer style sheet) or majority world embody something of the radical spirit that the Third World as a space of national struggles, revolution, and liberation has also signified. The variety of terms has emerged from different fields. One set has to do with development politics; the others are more related to investors’ analyses of economies. How one has come to partly displace the other and shifts the focus of attention in relation to richer and poorer countries is considered later. Thus, the next section considers the rise and decline of the category Third World. As an entrée, debates about the status and direction of the United States serve to illustrate how the category Third World has evolved and who, what, and where are redefined by it. Noting its decline and blurring (despite the arrival of the associated term The Global South) sets the agenda for an account in the subsequent section of how the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) label came about, before the conclusions return to the question of what still remains of the geography of development and what alternative critical maps might now be useful.

The United States as “Third World”

After World War II, the project of development was configured through the rise of the United States as a superpower in which American know-how would be brought to bear in transforming the Third World and delivering (Western-led) development. Much of the recent critical material on development takes this as a point of departure. This is especially evident in the “postdevelopment” literature, which condemns much of what has been done in the name of development, designating it as a Western apparatus of power and profit (such as Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995). In McVety’s (2008, 379) terms, therefore, the commitment (first set out as official policy by the Truman administration) to “development” was the natural culmination of America’s historic faith in the inherent value of technology to produce “progress,” which most people had long understood to be a universal term. Forced not only to look, but also to act, outward in the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. government essentially turned the American belief, again in de Tocqueville’s terms, in the “long track humanity must follow” into the foundation of a new diplomatic initiative.

The status and direction of the United States in recent decades is a mirror to many of the debates about the changing global geography of and terminology relating to development, however. In a dispatch from what he described as a “former boomtown” in south Florida but now a locale severely hit by fallout from
the “subprime crisis” and blighted by foreclosures and abandoned housing, a visiting journalist reports on the critical reflections of its residents:

Around the corner, standing outside his three-bedroom home, notionally worth $780,000... “Jim Robinson”—he refuses to give his real name—smokes a cigar and admits that if he wanted to sell, he would have to drop the price to about $600,000. But he sees the economic collapse as extending far wider than housing: “This country is no longer an industrial power. We don’t even manufacture steel, the Saudis own 30% of Wall Street and Dubai had to bail out Citibank.” With his dense tattoos and tales of gunfights in the Sudan, Robinson is an ex-mercenary who has travelled widely in the developing world, in conditions of drought, starvation and war. Now he sees those same chaotic conditions engulfing [America]. ... “These people are so clueless about what is happening beyond their compact little world, they are absolutely clueless as to what the potential [for economic meltdown] could be. You shut down the grocery store for a day and they panic. Look at what happens when we have a hurricane! People go to stores and fight over a loaf of bread. (Franklin 2008, 12)

“Jim Robinson” is not alone in making such a designation. When scenes of bodies in the streets and people stranded and awaiting aid in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina were beamed around the world in September 2005, media commentators made comparisons with disasters and chaos in poor Third World countries. Nearly two decades ago, the way that Los Angeles had become an epicenter of globalization, and fragmented by class and race, led Reiff (1991) to describe it as “capital of the Third World.” Since then, a scholarly edited collection (Sawhney 2002) has traced such juxtapositions and fractures under the title of Unmasking LA: Third Worlds and the City. More recently, the criteria first used to map the Third World via a series of “human development” reports (that sought to include data for standards of living, life expectancy, and social achievement that cannot be tabulated by crude measures of gross national product alone) have been applied to the United States. The results (Burd-Sharps, Lewis, and Martins 2008) chart a striking mixture of freedom and opportunity, deprivation, and exclusions. Amidst the expanding economic turmoil since 2008, as financial crisis in most Western economies led to new phases of restructuring and recession, the British Broadcasting Corporation’s business editor Robert Peston noted in a press interview (Edemariam 2008, 31) how the crisis contained and expressed a number of shifts:

There are a number of huge trends here. Look. The moral authority, that America can lecture the world on the best way to run their economy, has been shot to pieces. ... [Moreover] all that wealth that has accumulated in China, in the Middle East and Russia—that shifts the balance of financial power massively in their direction. ... If the Chinese got their act together, and they wanted to, they could actually at this moment, buy the entire US banking system. ... Which is an extraordinary thing—it’s something that none of us could have predicted a few years ago.

Peston’s observations reflect a wider sense of epochal shifts and a further dwindling of U.S. hegemony. This echoes comments from the New York–based economist and former U.S. Treasury advisor Nouriel Roubini, who has become well known for his early warnings of the global collapse in real estate prices and worldwide recession. A recent media feature on Roubini noted how:

what first tipped him off were similarities he noticed between developing parts of the world and the behaviour of the US economy. To his astonishment, he saw a pattern of economic movement in the US that by 2005 made it look like ‘an emerging market economy,’ with the same ‘irrational exuberance.’ (Testa 2009, 25)

Nonetheless, the designation of the United States as bearing characteristics of a developing or Third World country is not unproblematic. First, as Flusty (2003, 102) noted in a review of the edited volume Unmasking LA, there is reason to express:

dissatisfaction with the all-too-common use of “Third World” exclusively as a metaphor that signifies sites of colonially inflicted poverty, corruption and chaos. How soon we seem to have forgotten the Third, nonaligned world of the Bandung conference, the aspiration towards an explicitly articulated and empowering alternative to the imperial plutocracy of the First World and the imperial bureaucracy of the Second.

I return to such aspirations and connotations later. It is important first, however, to record
another, related objection to the use of the designation “Third World” in what hitherto were customarily seen as “First World” or developed countries. For as Slater (1994, 237) reminded us:

“Third World” implies more than “poverty,” “income disparities” and “lack.” … if certain regions of the developed world are being subject to a process of “Third Worldization,” this must mean that these regions have been colonized by an external power, their native populations set to work on plantations and down mines and their indigenous culture despised.

Arguably, many Native Americans and other folk historically on the margins in the United States might find aspects of their collective history that embody such processes. Leaving aside, for the moment, the questions about the extent to which the term Third World remains meaningful and exactly where or what it usefully depicts, it is notable that in the subdivisions and subdisciplines of geographical scholarship (in both teaching and research), development and its geographies still occupy a key niche, which in turn is part of a wider multidisciplinary program of research and teaching in development studies (Desai and Potter 2008). It is now widely acknowledged across such scholarship that the category of the Third World and understandings of development first emerged in the aftermath of World War II and as such were profoundly shaped by the combination of decolonization and the Cold War. Recent social/cultural, intellectual, and literary histories have done much to excavate this. Yet, as has also been noted, the Third World acquired a wide variety of meanings, especially as it was claimed by movements of national liberation and revolution—and was also the subject of a voluminous literature (see note 1). Indeed, for a while, the idea that the destiny of humanity would be set by the course of revolution in the Third World became influential, for example, in the writings of Franz Fanon or couched in terms of freedom and decolonization. Geertz (2005, 2) characterized this as “istiqlal, merdeka, uhuru, swaraj, and the rest,” citing the mobilizing slogans from Arabic, Malay, Swahili, and Hindi. Thus, as Prashad (2007, xv) has argued:

The Third World was not a place. It was a project. During the seemingly interminable battles against colonialism, the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America dreamed of a new world. … They assembled their grievances and aspirations into various kinds of organizations, where their leadership then formulated a platform of demands. … The “Third World” comprised these hopes and the institutions produced to carry them forward.

Nonetheless, as Prashad (2007) carefully documented, this ideological project unfolded through a variety of nodes and sites: It could be mapped. At the start of the 1980s, for example, the Independent Commission for International Development Issues (under the chair of the former Social Democrat chancellor of then West Germany, Willy Brandt) published its reports with a cover demarcating a global (North and) South by a line running through parts of the map of the world. Through the 1980s, however, the potency of that revolutionary moment that had engendered the idea of the South/Third World and an array of associated perspectives (dependency and Third Worldism) was in decline. Moreover, the emergence of the newly industrialized countries and economies (notably Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan) characterized a sense of growing economic diversity within the so-called Third World. Reflecting this, in the mid-1980s, Harris (1986) could write of The End of the Third World: Newly Industrializing Countries and the Decline of an Ideology, amidst debates about “how many worlds” might be needed to characterize increasingly diverse spaces of development. The blurb to Harris’s book claimed that “It was high time we stopped making facile generalizations about ‘the Third World’; instead … we must tease out the factors which have left some countries desperately backward while others are catching up with us fast.”

At the same time, the Global South was increasingly being used as an alternative term for the residual “non-Western world”—contra the competitive market players. Taylor et al. (2009, 836–37) thus noted:

In the last decade the term “Global South” has become a new favoured term to describe the poorer countries of the world. Widely used across academia—for instance, in environmental studies … in political science … in economics … and in geography …—it has been adopted by UN agencies … making the term in some sense “official.”
They also described it as a “chaotic concept,” as it is unable to capture the range of economies and polities that it claims to signify with one label. Indeed, the eclipse of the Cold War and the ensuing new geographies of globalization and commerce embodied deeper shifts. For through the 1990s, with the “Second World” gone and rescripted as “transition economies,” the place of a collective Third World or South was even more fundamentally in question. Thus, at the end of that decade, Thérien (1999) charted the limits to a North–South framework and the emergence of alternative narratives. More recently, Kreutzmann (2008) has mapped the proliferation of ways in which the world is conceptually ordered and divided, from the height of the first-, second-, and third-world era of the middle twentieth century to a range of post–Cold War narratives framed in the context of globalization. It is in such a context of attention to the significance of discursive frames and with the decline of the Third World as a credible signifier that critical debate has turned on the category of “emerging markets” formulated in corporate discourse. Embodying neoliberalism and reworking prior categories, the designation of emerging markets began with a section of the World Bank and was soon embraced by fund managers, traders, and the financial media in the early 1990s. During the ensuing long boom (through “turbulence,” such as the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s), the category was finessed and subdivided. The following considers the range and impacts of these reworkings.

**Emerging Markets to BRICs**

Since the term *emerging markets* entered circulation, cycles of boom and bust have led to modifications in the range of countries it labels. Geographers have registered such shifts, noting, in the words of Lai (2006, 627), “the intriguing geographical ‘imagineering’ that goes into the construction and maintenance of ‘emerging markets’ (EMs) as a category, and the roles played by fund managers, traders and analysts.”

The term was first established in the second half of the 1980s within a unit of the World Bank, to designate equity investments in selected countries within what was then more usually called the Third World (Sidaway and Pryke 2000). In the last few years, corporate analysts have further reworked the emerging markets designation. Since 2001, they have come to talk of the BRICs, a subset of giant economies set to become the world’s largest. The term was popularized via a series of widely disseminated global investment research reports produced by analysts at the investment bank Goldman Sachs (2003, 2005, 2007). The most recent turmoil in financial markets is being read in a range of ways, sometimes against but more often as confirmation of the thesis (set out in those successive Goldman Sachs reports) that China and India will dominate production of goods and many services and Brazil and Russia serve as key markets and raw materials suppliers. Other economies are frequently presented as parts of this subset, notably those of the Arab Sultanates of the Persian Gulf coast and other developmental states in Asia (e.g., South Korea or Taiwan), but the scale and population of the BRICs are seen to confer a special role as the leading non-Western economies and as future motors of global accumulation. In this narrative, the scale of the BRICs means that their aggregate wealth (even at considerably lower than Western or Japanese per capita levels) will exceed that of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economies.

The diversity of the components and many of the assumptions made about the roles of the BRICs are questionable. Nonetheless, over the nine years or so since Goldman Sachs’s invention of the category—and the sense of epochal transformations that it invoked—it has captured the imaginations of corporate and business media. Symptomatic of this are the two consecutive *Newsweek* magazine covers (for the Asian edition of this magazine) that were published in the middle of the Northern Hemisphere in the summer of 2007 that featured “The New Middle East” (subtitled “The Remarkable Rise of the Gulf Could Transform the Region and the World”) and “Beijing Rising” (subtitled “The Olympics Face-Lift Is the Most Dramatic Reconstruction of a World Capital, Ever”). Both covers showed visions of spectacular new urban landscapes. In the case of the image of Beijing, an architect’s model of a cityscape of new skyscrapers was shown. In the
case of the feature on the Gulf, the Newsweek cover bore an image of an architect’s computer rendering of the contracted Abu Dhabi Performing Arts Center (Figure 1). The impact of such international English-language news magazines (in tandem with other print media) as distillations of wider geopolitical discourses has occasionally been the subject of critical scrutiny. For example, thirty years ago, the roles of Time magazine in scripting the Persian Gulf as a key American strategic arena were evident. In tandem with statements from key military figures and politicians, Time thus presented the Gulf as vital to America’s security (Sidaway 1998). More recently, Campbell (2007) has examined how Darfur became a space demanding humanitarian action (in the context of many other sites of violence that have not been privileged as such) by exploring the visual economy and visual field of the print media in this process. Representations of hunger, poverty, and violence (as signs of underdevelopment) endure and retain a deep hold in such media. These are now also refracted through concerns about security and “failed states” (think of Somalia or Yemen) in the context of the war on terror (Roberts, Secor, and Sparke 2003). Thus, the taxonomy of states and sites meriting development assistance from Washington, DC, has recently been reworked by the U.S. Agency for International Development (Essex 2008).

Yet the successive Newsweek cover stories embody a different narrative of excess, modernity, and influence. In other words, selected parts of what was the Third World are now being represented as more dynamic and modern than the West. In parallel terms, a story three years later in The Economist (“Rethinking the “third world”: Seeing the world differently” 2010), reproduced a cartogram indicating how the world economy is expected to be configured by 2015, whereby parts of Asia evidently loom large (Figure 2), noting how:

Trade between developing countries, and between them and the BRICS, is rising twice as fast as world trade. Even more strikingly, while growth has headed south, debt has headed north, the opposite of what happened in the 1970s and 1980s, when poor countries ran up vast debts. Gross public debt in the rich countries is rising, from about 75% of GDP at the start of the crisis in 2007 to a forecast 110% by 2015, says the IMF. Public debt in emerging markets is below 40% of GDP and flat. (69)

Although bullish about the prospects for BRICs and imperative about seeing the world differently, the range of terminology used in the article indicates the endurance of older terms
At the same time, in policy and academic literatures, a substantial strand of work has emerged on the role of (to use the favored term) “Asian drivers,” primarily a term for China and India and a “cluster of other countries in the Asian region” (Kaplinsky and Messner 2008) in setting agendas elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Gu, Humphrey, and Messner 2008; Ravallion 2009). On a related track, a key report copublished by the World Bank and Singapore’s Institute for Policy Studies entitled Dancing with Giants: China, India and the Global Economy seeks to chart “China’s and India’s interactions with the global trading and financial systems and their impact on the global commons, particularly with regard to climate” (Bourguignon, Devarajan, and Kharas 2007, viii). The growing role of China, India, and other Asian and Gulf states as aid donors (McCormick 2008) and investors (Helleiner 2009) also reconfigures the north–south framework in which development has been conceived during the twentieth century. Six (2009, 1103) went as far as arguing that “The rise of new state donors such as China or India questions not only the established modes of development co-operation but also the development paradigm as a whole.” For Six, the Western framing of development is now fading in the context of a series of economic and political shifts. Six probably overstated the extent of the shifts (see Ho-Fung 2009 for a more circumspect interpretation of China’s role), but the transformations are also being registered in the architecture of international governance. At the September 2009 meeting of the group of the twenty largest economies (G20), The Economist (“The role of emerging markets: Cosmetic surgery” 2009) joined other media in noting how

The G20 meeting in Pittsburgh secured the place of emerging markets at the top table of global economic policy. “Bretton Woods is being overhauled before our eyes,” declared Robert Zoellick, head of the World Bank. The G20 leaders agreed to shift voting power substantially within the IMF towards “dynamic emerging markets and developing countries,” and endorsed similar reform at the World Bank.

It is now widely perceived that the recession following the credit crunch has accelerated the movement. Claims that, as the
London-based *Sunday Times* newspaper put it, “Goldman [Sachs] has dodged the credit-crunch bullet and is emerging from the crisis stronger than ever” (Arlidge 2009, 24), have also reinforced the authority of their BRICs label.

Accompanying such shifts is a growing awareness that modernity cannot be defined primarily by reference to First World (Western and then Japanese) cities, as has customarily been the case in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Agendas of what it means to be modern are increasingly shaped by places such as the cities of the Pearl River Delta in south China (Simpson 2008) or the petro-dollar-saturated sultanates (cities such as Doha or Dubai) on the Gulf coast of the Arabian Peninsula (Elsheshtawy 2010). Recent financial turbulence has now halted some construction projects there, but Dubai already had the world’s tallest skyscrapers and largest malls and most of the dozen next biggest are in China, Malaysia, or Taiwan. In the light of these transformations, it is worth returning to the opening questions in this article about how useful is it to talk now about the geographies of development or developing countries. In turn, that question takes us back to an older one: What does development mean? The conclusions reconsider these.

**Conclusions**

Although the classification of national economies in tables of development fails to capture the nuances of uneven development (and arguably masks many transnational trends), this remains profoundly influential, bolstered by an apparatus of surveillance and data collection (tabulated by the World Bank and other UN agencies) that articulate, with corporate practices. Although long mindful of these, the geography of development (since its emergence from tropical, commercial, and economic geography) has always been both caught up in and a reflection of wider reconfigurations and transformations.

Today, although profound geopolitical and geo-economic shifts are evident, arguably what particularly merits geographical scrutiny is the way that these are represented. Such representations are complicit in the processes they seek to describe. Put simply, ideas such as BRICS are more than merely descriptive labels. They become means of making mental maps and claiming the future. Interviewed in 2010, the veteran Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (2010) answered that among the key trends since the publication of his landmark *Age of Extremes* (1991) was the emergence of a new entity, “the BRICS.” And the capital markets editor of the *Financial Times* set out how:

in the past decade, Bric has become a near-ubiquitous financial term, shaping how a generation of investors, financiers and policy makers view the emerging markets. … Financial institutions now run Bric funds; business schools have launched Bric courses. … Bric … has redrawn powerbrokers’ cognitive map, helping them to articulate a fundamental shift of influence away from the western world. (Tett 2010, 1)

In turn, the label is being adopted by those it designates. In July 2009, the four heads of state met in the Russian city (over 800 miles east of Moscow) of Yekaterinburg. Dubbing themselves the first BRIC summit, their joint statement called for measures “to advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the global economy” (President of Russia 2009). The *Financial Times* correspondent was surely right to go on and claim that “When the cognitive map is redrawn … even in the world of marketing and investment bank ‘spin’—it tends not to be erased so much as appropriated” (Tett 2010, 2). Indeed, as this article has sketched, the rise and circulation of BRICs also rests on two decades of emerging market discourse and are embodiments of and agents in the decomposition of the Third World as denoting a meaningful category. Third World is now more likely to be invoked for its historical resonances, rather like the term Soviet Bloc. Or it might be used to describe a site of poverty, decay, or disorder that could be anywhere. Thus, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina or the conditions for patients in some badly run public (although thoroughly corporatized) hospitals in Britain are sometimes described by media as being Third World scenes. What, then, of geography of development? Where and what remains of the geography of development? In addressing such questions, nuanced maps will be needed.
One path is to examine the proliferation of landscapes of enclosure (see the typology by Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey 2008) and enclave spaces that are bound up with the wider transformations in the global division of labor. Arguably therefore, “prior metageographical demarcations: the categories such as ‘Developed’ and ‘Third World’ (which emerged in the years after the Second World War and long provided key points of reference, commitment, analysis and mobilization) have shattered and re-converged around enclaves” (Sidaway 2007a, 336). The past three decades, coinciding with the other global shifts charted earlier, have therefore witnessed a proliferation of export processing/malquiladoras, tourist, financial, residential, and extractive mining (and similarly demarcated and often fenced) zones. Like the plantations of old, these can be partially disembedded from their immediate surroundings at the same time as they become integrated into the global economy. Indeed, they are often gated, but they are linked to each other and to other nodes of power. The residential and consumption expressions of these (epitomized in the artificial islands being constructed in the Persian Gulf and gated communities in China, Indonesia, etc.) have been described as “dreamworlds of neoliberalism” (Davis and Monk 2003).

The relationships of these sites and zones with states, workers, residents, and markets and to the macrolevel transformations that labels such as BRIC seek to capture and shape constitutes a broad research agenda. Intersections of enclosure and enclavization with macroshifts in the geography of accumulation demand careful scrutiny (Benjamin 2000; Sidaway 2007b; Jackson and della Dora 2009; Sheller 2009). Although the comparative specification of how these intersect and what this means for workers, residents, and consumers requires further detailed work, one example and a broader theoretical and political challenge must suffice as a close to this article.

Taking the political direction first, it is instructive to ask how established categories of citizenship (with rights and political allegiances) might better be captured by the term “denizen” (derived from the sense of a dweller within a demarcated zone) to denote the range of and limits to expectations and obligations of individuals who live, labor, or play within or across such spaces (Shearing and Wood 2003). Consider, for example, what citizenship means and how it is thus reconfigured for a young woman worker in an East Asian export processing zone, whose rights to reside therein are partly governed by a contract of employment with a transnational corporation. Or for a young male who has a four-year contract (subject to clauses about conduct and good health) to live and work in a tourist enclave in Indonesia hundreds of miles from his “home” community. Consider how residence and citizenship shifts for wealthy Lebanese, Dutch, Cuban, Egyptian, or British-born executives or celebrities, who spend months each year in (gated) real estate that they have purchased as homes for family and friends in Persian Gulf or Caribbean jurisdictions. They might no longer be resident for tax purposes in, say, London, Miami, Mumbai, Amsterdam, or Frankfurt (where they previously lived and still own property and have extended family connections and some business interests). These political and theoretical questions articulate with wider debates about subjectivity and sovereignty, but it is another example that raises other questions of historical-geographical parallels.

In late 2008, Daewoo logistics announced that it planned to pay nothing for a concession of agricultural land in Madagascar (to be used for palm oil and maize cultivation), one of a number of such new phases of agricultural concession and enclosure being made around the world. The land would—it was claimed—be granted rent-free; the benefit to Madagascar—one once led by an avowedly Marxist regime (see Covell 1987)—was the employment possibilities for an impoverished population. Maps (from which Figure 3 is derived) appeared in the press indicating the vast areas at stake. The deal did work out as originally envisaged and there have been subsequent clarifications from Daewoo and political turmoil in Madagascar. The expectation or prospect of a free lease is possibly unprecedented in the region, however, since the colonial epoch when, across the Mozambique Channel, prazos (extended leases) were granted in the Zambezi Valley of what would become Mozambique (Isaacman 1972). The sites in Madagascar (and others around the world—see Figure 4) lead to the question of how, in Moore’s (2008, 258) terms, geobodies...
Figure 3 Concessions sought by Daewoo in Madagascar in late 2008. Drawn by the Cartographic Resources Unit at the University of Plymouth, UK. Compiled by the author from a range of media sources.

Figure 4 Transnational investment in agricultural mega-projects, 2008. Drawn by the Cartographic Resources Unit at the University of Plymouth, UK. Compiled by the author from a range of media sources.
become “entangled with the striations of racialized dispossession from previous histories of sovereignty, violence and subjection.”

A testing and profoundly geographical agenda returns: charting these contests and their relations to the past, present, and aspirations of development.

Postscript

How will the issues in this article and their interpretation look in two decades—or more? Further BRIC summits have already taken place, including one at which South Africa was formally admitted to the group; henceforth to be the BRICS. The Economist (“A More Hopeful Continent” 2011, 67) reports that Africa’s ‘lion economies are earning a place alongside Asia’s tigers’, noting how since the millennium, six of the world’s ten fastest growing economies are in Africa. And since this article was accepted for publication in May 2010, a series of high profile intergovernmental and corporate reports have reinforced impressions of a shifting global economic geography that reconfigures maps of development/underdevelopment. Constraints on space preclude me from citing more than two of these here (The World Bank 2011; Ward 2011). Comprising several genres, such as corporate and intergovernmental reports, extensive media discussions, blogs (http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/) and so on, a discourse is in the air. This is a particular way of seeing, interpreting, and enacting what critical work in geography has conceptualized as uneven development. That critical work also reminds us that perceptions of epochal change are not in themselves new and an historical—geographical moment should not be known simply by its own consciousness. Hence, ongoing geographical research must foreground accompanying struggles, contradictions, and counter-discourses. Other ways of knowing the world are possible.

Notes

1 Over the last decade, the historiography of this period has become much richer in excavating such intersections. Key works are Bair (2009), Borstelmann (2001), Engerman et al. (2003), Latham (2000), Plehwe (2009), Reynolds (2008), and a recent set of papers published in the journal Diplomatic History (2009, Vol. 33, No. 3). Among many other sources, the radical responses from the Third World form the subject of Prashad’s (2007) volume and a set of papers on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Third World Quarterly (Berger 2004). See also Simon (2009) for another line of enquiry into the moment “when development was all new, the world was full of optimism and the prospects for development and poverty alleviation were unquestioned” (881).


3 The naming of the crisis merits reflection. As noted in Sidaway (2008, 197): “the media don’t usually call this a predatory lending crisis, let alone an American crisis. Arguably however, such alterative labels shift the ways that the crisis is interpreted.”

4 In addition to the U.S.-focused literature cited earlier, see Kothari (2005) on the British role and case. For a case study of a site of development that was, like many others in the Caribbean, shaped by first British and then American power, see Wainwright (2008).

5 This has evolved in tandem with a deconstruction of the claim that the experience of the West is the chief arbiter of modernity. In other words, it recognizes that there are multiple (geographical and historical) experiences of and modes of modernity (Eisenstadt 2000). In turn, these relate to wider debates about Eurocentrism and the long term of the world system. The literatures on these are vast, but for an interpretation of what he termed the reorientation to an Asia-centered world system, from a writer whose earlier work on development and underdevelopment was briefly influential, see Gunder Frank (1998).

6 This past of development geography is a complex story connecting narratives about commerce and “race,” with imperialism and physical geography, in the form of environmental determinism (Barnes 2000; Power and Sidaway 2004). With respect to the latter, Poon and Yeung (2009, 3) noted how “These debates have been particularly revitalized among scholars, policy makers and the popular media since the publication of Jeffrey Sachs’ (2005) The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time linking economic underdevelopment to environmental and locational constraints (‘bad geography’). Do geographic factors account for differences in growth and development . . . as Sachs so forcefully argues?” As another paper (in the set that Poon and Yeung assembled) addressing Sachs...
argued, asking this “is perhaps less important than asking how political economic and policy processes convert these geographic conditions into factors that do have material implications” (Bebbington 2009, 11). The mirror image of Sachs’s advocacy of aid for and stress on environmental constraints on development is Moyo’s (2009) Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is A Better Way for Africa, emphasizing economic and political mismanagement, although both also advocate market-led strategies. Both are also in a long tradition of diagnoses (and self-diagnoses) of the African condition. As a counter to either, Rodney (1972) or Chabal and Daloz (1999) is rewarding. According to her Web site, Moyo once worked for Goldman Sachs and is now writing a sequel about how the BRICs and selected Middle East countries are set to become dominant players in the twenty-first century.

Literature Cited


JAMES D. SIDAWAY is Professor of Political and Cultural Geography and a member of the Geographies of Globalization research program in the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, Amsterdam 1018 VZ, The Netherlands. E-mail: j.d.sidaway@uva.nl. His principal scholarly interests are geopolitics and political geography and the history and philosophy of geographical thought.