FORUM: REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT GEOGRAPHIES: NEW PARTNERS, TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES – A CONVERSATION WITH EMMA MAWDSLEY

Veit Bachmann, Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel and Emma Mawdsley

Received 9 July 2020 · Accepted 1 September 2020

Summary: This contribution centres around a conversation with Emma Mawdsley, held at Goethe-University Frankfurt on 31 January 2019 in the context of the closing events of the programme on 'Africa's Asian Options' (AFRASO) – a large interdisciplinary research programme, funded by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) between 2013 and 2019. During this time, we investigated the heterogeneous spaces of interaction between Africa and Asia; it closed with a lecture series, entitled 'Afrasian Futures' during which Emma Mawdsley delivered the final lecture. In this contribution, we address contemporary debates and the evolution of development geography, focussing in particular on Mawdsley's rich contributions as regards the role of 'new' development partners, such as China and so called 'emerging economies', and South-South cooperation as well as on transdisciplinary connections of the subdiscipline. It starts with an introductory part in form of a brief reflection on the role of development geography in the wider context of academic engagement with the broad complex of 'development', in particular as regards the interdisciplinary field of 'development studies'. In the following we highlight two key aspects of Mawdsley's work and contribution to such research: i) a long-term shift away from North-South towards South-South relations; and ii) an emphasis on socio-political dimensions of development geography through feminist and queer perspectives. Following an initial introduction, the remainder of the contribution consists of a conversation with Emma Mawdsley.

Zusammenfassung: Im Zentrum dieses Beitrags steht ein Gespräch mit Emma Mawdsley im Rahmen der Abschlussveranstaltungen des Forschungsprogramms ‚Afrikas Asiatische Optionen' (AFRASO), das am 31. Januar 2019 an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt stattfand. AFRASO war ein umfassendes interdisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt, zwischen 2013 und 2019 vom Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) gefördert, das sich mit den heterogenen Interaktionsräumen zwischen Afrika und Asien beschäftigte. Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit aktuellen Debatten und der Entwicklung der Geographischen Entwicklungsforschung und konzentriert sich dabei vor allem auf die umfangreichen Beiträge von Emma Mawdsley zur Subdisziplin. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf ihren Arbeiten zur Rolle ‚neuer' Entwicklungspartner, z.B. China oder sogenannten ‚Schwellenländer', und globalen Süd-Süd-Beziehungen sowie auf den transdisziplinären Verflechtungen der Subdisziplin. Der Beitrag beginnt mit einem einführenden Teil in Form einer kurzen Reflexion über die Rolle der Geographischen Entwicklungsforschung im weiteren Kontext wissenschaftlicher Auseinandersetzungen mit dem breiten Themenfeld ‚Entwicklung', insbesondere hinsichtlich des interdisziplinären Felds der Entwicklungsforschung. Im Folgenden stellen wir in Kürze zwei Kernbereiche von Mawdsleys Arbeit und ihres Beitrags zu diesem Forschungsfeld vor: i) die langfristige Verschiebungen von Nord-Süd - hin zu Süd-Süd-Beziehungen; und ii) die Betonung auf die soziopolitische Dimension der Geographischen Entwicklungsforschung durch feministische und queere Perspektiven. Nach diesem Einführungsteil besteht der Rest des Beitrags aus dem Gespräch mit Emma Mawdsley.

Keywords: South-South Cooperation, transregional relations, socio-political determinants, development geography

1 Introduction

For academic geography that uses German as a first language, the key institutional forum for development geography is labelled *Geographischer Arbeitskreis Entwicklungstheorien* [geographic speciality group for development theories]. The emphasis on the theoretical dimension of 'geographic development research' indicates, since the foundation of the specialty group in 1978, a theoretical orientation of development studies beyond the mere problem-solving and applied approaches that have traditionally been a substantial part of academic engagement with this large and power-laden complex of 'development' (Rauch 2018). Development geography, not only in Germany of course, has thereby always had a decidedly integrated and interdisciplinary component. While we as authors wish to avoid a precise or quantified analysis of volume and content of the interdependent exchange between development geography and cognate fields, it could be argued that its imports from wider social science debates and other disciplines have been both deeper and broader than its exports. Our shared interest in the transformation of transregional development – and the conversation with Emma Mawdsley – is exemplified through how development conceptions, approaches and practices have in the fold of other topics been discussed in African and Asian relations (Graf and Hashim 2017; Anthony and Ruppert 2019; Achenbach et al. 2020).

Emma Mawdsley has been a key figure for such disciplinary boundary crossing and the (theoretical) evolution of the subdiscipline over the past two decades. It is impossible to review the richness of her contributions to development geography – and beyond – here. Nevertheless, we seek to highlight two aspects of her work as regards recent developments in research on 'development' as a brief introduction to the conversation to follow: for one, a long-term shift away from North-South towards South-South relations[1)]; and for another, an emphasis on socio-political dimensions of development geography through feminist and queer perspectives.

1.1 SSC: South-South Cooperation

With what Emma Mawdsley (2018) labels as the 'Southernisation of development' she refers to a trend in international development cooperation that has dominated much debate since the beginning of the millennium: the increasing importance of Southern actors that are 'profoundly unsettling long-standing axes of power' (Mawdsley 2017, 109).

For Mawdsley, however, this process of 'Southernisation' comes not only with one question mark, as in the title of her paper, but with many. It is far from a clearly defined or homogeneous process in the remaking of geopolitical power structures. Rather, it is diverse, heterogeneous, builds on a long history (Mawdsley 2019) and is characterised by a vast variety of what she refers to elsewhere as 'South-South Cooperation (SSC)'. This is understood as the 'exchange of resources, personnel, technology and knowledge between 'developing' countries – a loose definition that can cover almost any form of interaction from South–South foreign direct investment […] to diplomatic meetings and agreements, to the provision of technical experts' (Mawdsley 2012, 63). In addition to such tangible exchanges, programmes and flows, SSC also emerge discursively as a powerful counternarrative to Global South-North relations and persistent perceptions of Northern or Western (neo)imperialism. The appeal of 'opposition to perceived US or Western 'hegemonism' or hegemonic tendencies' (Carmody 2013, 12) thereby remains a key aspect and 'development' serves, once again, as an entry point to more general constellations and shifts in the global 'geographies of power and wealth' (Mawdsley 2012, 2).

Mawdsley's work has been instrumental for the study of these processes. In a recent *Progress Report*, she offers an insightful analysis for unpacking those shifts and the 'fracturing of the hegemonic development regime' through a 'tripartite framework of material, ideational and ontological' factors (Mawdsley 2017, 110). The *material* factors alluded to in this framework include the diverse flows of 'aid', investment, trade, goods, technical assistance, people, etc. These forms of cooperation often merge the distinction between humanitarian assistance, more institutionalised forms of established development aid as well as commercial financial flows (ibid).

The attention to *ideational* factors refers to shifts in the 'discursive construction and projection of development 'norms" (ibid, 112). As part thereof, Mawdsley observes how the prioritisation of poverty reduction that has accompanied much development

[1)] Categories such as 'South' and 'North' are inevitably contested generalisations and homogenisations, which are therefore often accompanied by inverted commas. We share this suspicion towards such coarse generalisations. Nevertheless, for the sake of orthographic ease, we will refrain from using inverted commas. For a review of the problematics of using these terminologies, see Sidaway (2012).

policy around the turn of the millennium is, to some extent, reversed in favour of a re-adjusted focus on economic growth as well as on energy and transport infrastructures. Inspired by the development interventions of non-Western donors – primarily, though not exclusively China – the focus is on government interventions in support of private sector-led GDP growth as key driver of development (ibid, 113). Through this re-orientation, however, the advances made over the past decades as regards the inclusion of social and environmental issues in development programmes are increasingly at risk.

Related to this, the focus on infrastructure and growth favoured by non-Western 'donors' led to an *ontological* shift: the 'profound re-making of (inter) national identity that has accompanied the achievement of global recognition and respect for Southern states in their role as development partners' (ibid, 110). 'Development expertise' is no longer exclusively located in Western countries – and in light of the financial crisis, maybe not a proficiency at all – but rather seen in the impressive growth rates of many so called 'emerging economies' in the Global South. Instead of the 'new donors' adaptation to the established paradigms, structures and targets of 'traditional donors', we can rather see the immense acquisition of recognition and respect of Southern donors with the effect that the 'ontological hierarchy of Northern donors and Southern recipients has been profoundly upset' (ibid, 111).

Mawdsley's thoughtful approach thereby is keenly aware that much of the literature on SSC is dominated by the immense scope of Chinese engagement in the Global South, in particular in Africa. However, it equally accounts for those cooperation measures – possibly not referred to as 'development' interventions – that are conducted by smaller 'donors' and lesser well-known partners, such as Thailand, Kazakhstan, Tunisia, Nigeria, etc. (ibid 109). Such interaction is often *ad hoc* and reaches beyond the institutionalised structures of what Hancock (1989) referred to as the 'development industry' more than three decades ago. While the diversification of possible cooperation partners certainly offers an emancipatory moment for Southern countries and societies (Bachmann 2019; Eckl et al. 2017) vis-à-vis any external cooperation partners, Mawdsley (2017, 113) also observes how explorations of South-South cooperation through more critical theories, such as 'postcolonialism, feminist theory, critical race theory, queer theory and so on as yet remain rare'. More recently, she has been amongst the pioneers to address this impasse.

1.2 Socio-political dimensions of development geography: feminist and queer perspectives

Throughout her work, Mawdsley displays an understanding that development is political. She provides a critical perspective on SSC, through which she engages in a wider conversation with other fields related to development studies. They inform her argument on development, the Global South and the possibilities of transformation emanating from there. Prominently, in her book *From Recipients to Donors* (Mawdsley 2012) she focuses a chapter on debates in international relations theory from which she draws on in the rest of her book, and which stands out because it distinguishes itself from the other chapters that are infused by political science, sociology, history and postcolonial theory. By doing this, the multitudes of influences pertinent to the study of development practices become evident. More importantly, it includes the Global South as an arena of international politics and the making of politics to whom an adequate application of analytical explanation is owed. On a theoretical level, this reinforces her reflection made in the conversation below that creating a dichotomy between recipients and donors is in her case less of a normative perspective than a pragmatic decision at the time. Combining the interest in ontological and epistemological shifts, she continues to explore the question of knowledge production and methodologies with similar attention to the conversations taking place concerning SSC in a later edited volume (Mawdsley et al. 2019). With her co-editors she explicitly acknowledges the privilege of Northern universities as locations where South-South research is conducted, whereas the practices and analysis thereof primarily take place in the Global South. Notwithstanding the reflection also leads to a pivotal insight into the diversity of what the global North might entail, and the positioning of the book as 'merely a starting point to a much larger conversation' (ibid, 3). A conversation that is interdisciplinary, bridges academic (and generational) hierarchies and is not limited by existing conventions. In a broader sense, her work therefore shines a spotlight on the gaps, contradictions and tensions of South-South research that cannot be removed from the social dynamics of such relations.

One of the fields that underlines Mawdsley's approach, and which similarly centres social dynamics, is that of feminist and queer theory. Like feminist geographers before her, such as Janet Townsend whose work has been central to making women's voices and their organisation in the political economy of devel-

opment visible (e.g. Momsen and Townsend 1987; Townsend 2005), Richa Nagar who highlights feminist activism and praxis across global economic, social and cultural divides (e.g. Swarr and Nagar 2010; Nagar 2014) or Jennifer Hyndman, whose specialisation on violent conflicts, humanitarian action and refugee protection (e.g. Hyndman and Giles 2004; 2017), her work is embedded in a wider disciplinary debate that crosses academic disciplines. Traced back to empirical and theoretical developments in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist geography has been able to introduce a spatial dimension into questions of *gendered* human interaction, global structures and social relations. Stemming from the critique of 'women and development' it has grown to incorporate the more complex notions of gender that have materialised since then and questioned liberal approaches to including women in development analyses. As with feminist work in the other social sciences, the research in this field results from a commitment to emancipatory politics, focuses on women and gender relations, is distinctly interdisciplinary and oftentimes collaborative. Particular to the geographic contribution is the analysis of 'material and symbolic space and place' (Nelson and Seager 2005, 7; see Wucherpfennig and Fleischmann 2008). Far from suggesting that the field is a monolithic body of work, the identified theoretical direction hinges on feminist geography's close association with development studies and the interdisciplinary conversation so typical for this perspective. It predates the early gender debates in international relations specifically (for instance Enloe 1990; Grant and Newland 1991; Tickner 1992; Peterson 1992) and found its way into the German-speaking context prior to discussions of feminist international politics here (see Ruppert 1998; Locher 2000; Brabandt 2017).

In line with queer interventions of development, Mawdsley takes the analysis and deconstruction of sexuality and gender relations further, to queer SSC. As she states as an objective of her recent contribution: 'queer(y)ing SSC alerts us to the constitutive roles of gender, race and sexuality—amongst others intersectional identities—in framing emerging and increasingly powerful narratives of conviviality, difference and hierarchy' (Mawdsley 2020, 229). By borrowing from queer contributions in other disciplines her focus lies on the constructions and non-conformity of the Third World, portraying how development is infused with colonial tropes. She further posits that a masculinisation of development discourse seems to be taking hold within the Global South too. From her perspective, in sum, the continued rise of Southern partners has queered international development itself. 'A queer critique opens up the complex, malleable, and heterogeneous ways in which different partners transgress, bolster and (re-)invent categories, identities and hierarchies' (Mawdsley 2020, 235). The continuity of economic flows and social forces across the North-South divide applies equally, as she argues, to the diverse power asymmetries within the Global South. For the field of SSC these insights represent unique and valuable contributions through which critical analyses centred on asymmetrical power relations are productively extended through the study of gendered and sexualised imaginaries.

The conversation with Emma Mawdsley to follow took place in the wider context of increasing South-South interactions. Like her lecture entitled 'South-South Cooperation and Africa-Asia Relations in the Decade Ahead: The Challenges of Success', which concluded the final lecture series of the AFRASO programme, it was held at Goethe-University Frankfurt on 31st January 2019. Mawdsley (2017, 114) observes that 'the formal realm of international development is being 'provincialised', as Western hegemony – material, ontological and ideational – is at last being eroded' and so draws on Dipesh Chakrabaty's (2007) much cited account. Her lecture, thus, provided a conceptually and empirically rich conclusion to the overall project that, more widely, explored African-Asian spaces of interaction in terms of their imaginaries and materiality as well as through the lenses of emerging sets of literature on transregionalism and postulated geopolitical shifts from Global North-South to Global South-South relations (Middell 2019; Bachmann 2019; Graf and Hashim 2017; Cornelissen and Mine 2017; Mielke and Hornidge 2017; Schulze-Engler 2014). The conversation below was conducted on the same day by Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel and Veit Bachmann.

2 A conversation with Emma Mawdsley

EM: Emma Mawdsley
RM-B: Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel
VB: Veit Bachmann

RM-B: Welcome, dear Emma, and thank you for joining us here in Frankfurt. Many people have read your book 'From recipients to donors' (Mawdsley 2012) and become familiar with your work on emerging powers in South-South development co-

operation. Prior to embarking on this research, you worked on environmental and regional politics in India. How did this massive shift in topic come about?

EM: Thank you. I should say that the title of the book is terrible! It was the publisher's decision. With a bit more experience I would have pushed back harder, because of course a central argument of the book was that it was not a case of 'recipients' to 'donors'. Many Southern states had been development partners for decades, and both labels are fraught with problems. I think the book is good, but the title is terrible!

I had always been interested in international development politics – now more usually thought of as global development politics. And I had done some work with NGOs quite a while back, with wonderful colleagues in Durham and Mexico and India and Ghana, including Janet Townsend, Gina Porter, Emma Zapata and Saraswati Raju. So, I had already an interest in, and a little bit of research experience on, working on, what we might call, the formal development sector. The real reason I turned to South-South Cooperation (it is a bit macabre!) is that it was discovered that I had a tumour in my head in 2005. It made me feel very unwell and it made it hard for me to concentrate and all of my existing work started to feel like walking through mud. And one day I read something about China in Africa and it just seemed fascinating to me. And there was very little other work. So, I went to the SOAS library, which is brilliant, and started reading the books written in the 1950s, '60s, '70s, '80s about China and Africa. And for some reason, this somehow could energise me while I was waiting for the operation to take the tumour out of my head. So, it is a really happy story [laughs]. But I think the important thing is, that I could see that there was a lot of ignorance about what was being said on China-Africa. There was also some real expertise. I read Deborah Bräutigam's (1998) book and thought it was fantastic and my colleague, Giles Mohan, was starting to work on China and Africa. I thought that was brilliant. But I was neither a Sinologist nor an Africanist - and because I had spent so long working in India, I felt aware of the 'known unknowns'. And it seems to me, you should be humble about your knowledge. I had an awareness of how ignorant I was about India after only working there 15 years or so. And I did not think it would be right to try and break into this China-Africa field unless I was really prepared to spend years and years becoming more familiar. So that is why I thought: well, what about India. It is also a development partner, has that history, other countries. And it seemed it was a good idea to think about the broader South-South phenomenon. Because there was so much intense focus on China and Africa – even though understandably – it was distorting the whole field. So that is how it came out. It literally is associated with a very rare skull base tumour, which changed my academic career path.

RM-B: We were also wondering if the term 'South-South Development Cooperation' is not in itself something like an oxymoron? On the one hand, you have the political and historical genealogy of South-South relations as the antithesis of North-South relations – and development cooperation, which on the other hand, epitomises North-South intervention. Where do you see your work bringing in a perspective on that?

EM: I have increasingly called it 'South-South Cooperation' and not 'Development Cooperation', because the word is so loaded. Different countries use it very differently. I suppose the really interesting thing is, that it is really very hard to identify the right language to use. In fact, I'm not even sure there is the right language. And that says something about who gets to name what, right? And then also the repeated mistake of calling it 'aid', which then invites the wrong comparisons and often the wrong judgements and so on. So, some partners do call it 'Development Cooperation', taking in trade, diplomacy, cultural exchange, all those other things. But the definition of what it might be continues to be very contested, very permeable. I have never satisfactorily been able to put a hard and fast definition around it. And I have not really tried.

RM-B: So, which critique from 'the field' would you say is the most significant with regards to development cooperation in a sense from the viewpoint of South-South cooperation against or towards development cooperation?

EM: Some of my early work was about the moral framing of South-South Cooperation. All too often, China in particular was pitched as an entirely immoral actor as it expanded its activities in Africa and elsewhere. I did some work using gift theory, so Marcel Mauss and others, to argue that China and other partners were *morally* framing their relationships and growing footprint through the power of

reciprocity. As Mary Douglas said, charity is not undesirable, but it is wounding, and Western aid is often framed as charity even if we know it is not: there are lots of hidden reciprocities or, rather, not really reciprocities but hidden benefits. But in the Western mind, most people on the street, think of it as a charitable donation from rich to poor. Whether they are critical of that or if they are supportive, it is framed by charity. So, I used gift theory to try to recover the importance of the idea of reciprocity, dignity and solidarity. It was fascinating and disturbing that so many think tanks and journalists, and even a few academics in some disciplines seemed to be utterly ignorant of the critical discourse of solidarity from Bandung onwards.

VB: When we are talking about this morality of South-South cooperation or, before, the lack of morality in there, I was wondering if you could spot a chronological shift in the way this is often portrayed in media outlets? In particular, I am thinking now of East Africa, of Kenya, where I have worked. I found that fifteen years ago, there was much more of a euphoria about Chinese engagement there. In a sense that finally somebody has arrived who is 'treating us as equals, who is interacting with us on equal footing'. Whereas in maybe the last five to ten years, when first credits started to be due, it becomes very obvious that it is maybe not an equal but an interest-led cooperation, this euphoria has ceased a little bit. Have you had made similar observation in your work?

EM: Well, that is a fantastic observation. The very success of South-South cooperation – its expansion, its ideational autonomy, its remarkable change over the last ten, fifteen years – has sowed the seeds for a set of challenges. So, just to be clear when I talk about the moral framing of Southern partnerships, there is also departure from moral framing. It is not that the Chinese or others always were highly moral. The point is that their moral framing was different to the West's moral framing. But, your point is well taken. Precisely that language of reciprocity, dignity, Third-Worldism, and solidarity is the language of the forty, fifty years of South-South Cooperation. It is harder to sustain once your footprints expand, and it is always going to be complicated. And so that's the subject of tonight's talk: "What next?"

RM-B: What is really interesting, I think, is that one of the ways in which morality has expressed itself is the manner of relations at the microlevel and in how those are portrayed as a being highly sexualised and used also as a synonym for the wider kinds of relations. So just recently there have been different kinds of media depictions and scandals. The most recent one is about somebody who looks like a Chinese construction worker embracing two women and holding their breasts. It is not quite clear if they are photoshopped or not. There was a big detergent advert on China and Africa and white washing. And one of the other things that we have seen, was one of Michael Sata's satirical caricatures on 'China loves Africa'. So, there is this whole debate. I think that this question about morality expresses itself very strongly not just in what the media says about what kinds of relations these are. But also, how gendered and sexualised and racialised they are.

EM: Yes absolutely. I mean that moral framing, I am talking about is really the language of diplomacy. You don't necessarily get corporations or individuals putting it in those terms. So, this is the language of high-level diplomacy or conferences or summits or presidential addresses. But it is much more diverse and variegated and complex. And you find this everywhere – not just China, but also India, elsewhere, Brazil, which is still very colour hierarchical. So, those racialised, sexualised, gendered issues are very interesting. There is some brilliant work edited by scholars at Ohio State University, who put out a collection of essays on Wolf Warrior 2 (Liu and Rofel 2018), which is the highest grossing Chinese movie, I think of all times. Basically, a Chinese hero comes and rescues Africans from white people and other Africans; and the imagery is one of muscular Chinese heroism inflected by all sorts of imagery around gender, race, and nationalism. But there are of course also counter examples, of conviviality, of friendships and so on. Katia Taela did her PhD at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University and wrote a really interesting thesis looking exactly at these sorts of deep personal encounters in relationships that emerge, in this case between Mozambican and Brazilian co-workers in the development sector. I just wrote a paper on queer theory as a lens on South-South cooperation to look through the gendered, racialised and sexualised ways in which South-South has been presented, resisted and so on (Mawdsley 2020). In fact, we can even find this in diplomatic language – Brazil and China and India come to 'court' and to 'woo' their partners, they say.

RM-B: Well, it somehow shows us that we are starting to understand much more about the complexity of these African-Asian relations but also just more

generally on South-South relations. So, in a sense that we know that they have changed over time but that they have also been constant over time. And that they do raise the ire of certain people. And they bring about euphoria, as you called it, from other people.

EM: Yes, of course, and I think that this is one role for academics, right? At least I think that is my role – to be a critical friend. In my earlier work on South-South cooperation I was really trying to steer between the euphoria and the hostility. And there was a lot of both around. I am positioned uncomfortably here, as a Western scholar, I don't mean to suggest that it is my place to adjudicate. But I felt I wanted to bring better scholarly understanding and support to South-South Cooperation, without buying into some of the very uncritical assertions by some of its strongest advocates. Like all development cooperation, we can question underlying constructions of what is development itself, and then questions about its conduct, winner and losers and so on.

VB: Like many people would say in 'the West'.

EM: Exactly! And I think that my role as an academic is to critically unpick that, but not demolish everything. It is to look at it in the round and to try and understand it better. So yeah, precisely trying to get between the euphoria and the hostility seemed to me an important role. Now there is a lot of change. People are so much better informed. There is a lot more awareness. I think there is more nuance in the debate. Evidently, it has been around for ten or fifteen years, but still there is still a lot of work to do.

VB: How do you engage with that double role that India as a political society, is playing in the sense that on the one hand it is a place that has been long subjected to Western development intervention itself, but then on the other hand it is an increasingly powerful country that is conducting these kind of interventions elsewhere?

EM: Well, it is variegated. I think the interesting question is "who"? So, it is not so much a formal development agency in the case of India, rather it is corporations who are the leading edge and who would not necessarily frame themselves as working for development cooperation, for instance when it comes to Ethiopian land. It is the big companies. But they are being enabled in part through [Government of India] lines of credit. And these corporations completely buy into the discourse around 'This is good for everyone'. You know, 'This is waste land.' And that is exactly what the British said about India and elsewhere – it is waste land, it is underused, it is underexploited, so we will fix it. This rests on a massive neglect of the contradictions – India's own contradictions and its own development trajectory are utterly ignored, disconnected from anything happening overseas. When I and friends in Indian civil society organisations raised some of these issues, ten years ago we were really, really slapped down for saying it. Now there is a little more space for the voice of Indian civil society actors. And I noticed in some recent meetings in Delhi, at least it seemed to me, that some of the government actors were more willing to tolerate a more critical analysis – to an extent. It is hard to say whether that is really changing anything. But at least there is a slightly more sense of being willing to debate some more of the complexities in Northern and Southern-led development. But now in India itself there is a very strong illiberal trend. So civil society, progressive civil society, is finding it very difficult and there is, it seems, little concern or sympathy for the plight of many indigenous people in India, poor people and so on. So, the Indians have their own development contradictions and are really not engaging with what they might mean for their work overseas. So they are doing some great stuff as well. But there is quite a modernist approach to development, which is unreflective.

RM-B: I think that is really something that stands out in your work. As you put it, being a critical friend, right? If I understand you correctly, this entails a sensitivity to global patterns and to the broader strokes of developments, as well as having this awareness of the more particular and specific kind of relations and agendas that are projected into the world. And I am wondering if the only way that one can do that kind of work is if one is really acutely aware about North-South asymmetries. Not just changing topics but really taking that in and saying 'Okay, I understand what that implies.' Is that how you bring in a way of looking at it practically, or if I can put it this way, of mitigating those asymmetries that are created through North-South relations, by working with civil society and going outside of the academic field?

EM: Hmm, yes. Academically I am a human geographer and like many of us belong in the area of critical thinking. So, the asymmetries of North-South development were really my bread and butter. And so, bringing that approach to thinking through power in South-South Cooperation is central to what we do.

In terms of trying to look at the relationship between big global patterns but also understand what is going on in particular spaces, I really owe so much to my graduate students. I have been incredibly fortunate to have a large number of graduate students who looked at different aspects of South-South cooperation and global development more generally: Sung-Mi Kim on Korea. Then Danilo Marcondes and now Laura Trajber-Waisbich on Brazil; Sebastian Haug looking at Mexico and Turkey. Han Cheng looking at China. Kasia Baran looking at Haiti and its relationship with its different Southern and Northern donors. I'm gonna miss people off! Lots of others, sorry if I've missed you off. It is really an exchange of knowledge. They have been so critical to my better understanding of South-South in reality, in practice, in the specificity. As well as big theorising, they are all great. But then in terms of your saying about how to deal with this. I think that is the next question: how to respond in a more polycentric world, because oddly enough, despite having been a tremendous critic of North-South development, it sometimes did provide a bit of founding and security and space for progressive civil society. And that is complicated. It is not an uncomplicated situation. But what happens now is a big question as donors exit from certain places, we see a right-wing populist term all around the world, in Europe and beyond. So that is concerning. In the case of Ethiopia, land rights activists brilliantly mobilised across India and Ethiopia to contest the same processes of land acquisition. And they are not listened to at all by the Ethiopian or the Indian government. Western donors have also suppressed or ignored some civil society voices, but in other cases facilitated them.

What do you think, Rirhandu?

RM-B: Well, I think it is a bit of a challenge? As it is not the same thing to be aware of North-South asymmetries as to try and act on them, right?

EM: Yes, of course. Well, I am a typical scholar, you know. I have to acknowledge that I doubt very much that anyone is reading my work thinking 'Oh, great! Now I know how to go out and change this stuff. I am much, much better at describing, explaining, understanding than saying 'Now we need to do this'.

RM-B: Absolutely. And also, what it does is that it gives us a different way of capturing and understanding what is going on at the moment. But I think it is also the challenge of understanding in terms of the conceptual landscape that we find ourselves in… that certain ideas and concepts are fraught or need redefinition, such as the idea of civil society in the Global South, the idea of civil society is one that is highly contested.

EM: Yeah.

RM-B: And of course there are African scholars and Chinese scholars that are trying to re-describe it, to revive the term in a way that befits their own context but also that differentiates it in a certain way from a Northern imposition or a Northern definition of what it should be and what it should not be.

EM: Yes. So, I have some Indian friends who have said that, as donors have exited the Indian scene and many civil society organisations have faced severe funding problems, that might be no bad thing. The argument is that civil society will go back to the grassroots and you know there is an argument to be made for that authenticity to not having to support donor agendas. Again, I think it is complicated and not so straight forward as to 'let's defend civil society' which is so often a product of very Northern agendas.

RM-B: Or even the reaction to Northern agendas and Northern funding in terms of 'professionalisation' and certain kinds of constraints that come with that – which, of course, leads away from politicisation.

EM: Well, funny enough that is the work I did back when I was working on India. I had two strands of work. It was with these wonderful colleagues I mentioned before – Janet Townsend, Gina Porter, Saraswati Raju, Emma Zapata and others – looking exactly at whose knowledge counts. And how it is, that civil society gets depoliticised through things like professionalisation, classic performance indicators and management speak. And those have real powerful impacts on changing the nature and activity of civil society. So, yes, that is one way on which North-South inequalities presented in transnational civil society, even in what appeared to be the most benign relationships. And we looked at various ways in which the agenda was – and the knowledge of gender – was often, sometimes almost unwittingly but sometimes deliberately, framed by the North, the Northern partners. More often than not.

VB: I would like to talk about something very geographic and engage with the spatiality of this South-South cooperation. Already saying '*This* South-South

cooperation' is problematic, because obviously there is not just one, it is highly heterogeneous. But I was wondering about the spatialities that are underlying the way South-South cooperation is very often articulated. Part of what brought us together in this research project [AFRASO] was to advance debates, also conceptual debates, on transregionalism and transregional interaction. And we have struggled with that a lot. Often, we use the term transregional, not interregional for particular reasons. But then we were asking ourselves, if this is really 'regional'? Are we talking about regional or transregional things, or are these just interactions that are happing on a translocal level, on a transnational level? Also, if you think about framings that articulate the Global South as a region, I was wondering, for you and your work, does that notion of transregional interaction play any role?

EM: That is a tough question. I think I can see myself about to waffle. I think in a sense it is 'horses for courses'. So, for a lot of South-South cooperation, at the moment at least, still has a strong connection to diplomacy and states. So, it is often very official and bilateral. The Gulf-states are a bit different. They do have more regional institutions. But then, when we are looking at the flows of people, money, intimacies of trade then it can be really capillary, right? And I think, it is interesting as a big picture, I am starting to pick up on active efforts to show a differentiation between Asia and Latin America in some of the politicking around the future of South-South cooperation because some powerful commentators are saying: 'Well, you know, you do it differently, we do it like this, you do it like that.' Rightly or wrongly, they want to resist moving towards a firm definition of South-South cooperation so that Southern states cannot be held accountable to any particular metric. And they are just saying 'No way, we cannot put a definition on this that fits us all'. The idea of the united, of South-South being universally applicable. I think it really depends on what we are talking about – it is tremendously diverse, of course, but there are underlying politics in some of the insistence on this heterogeneity. How me might think spatially about what is the South for different people at different levels.

RM-B: But I think also if we take it further, the success of South-South cooperation probably relies on it *not* being a region, right? If anything, regionalisation in sub-Saharan Africa has been shown to be quite fraught. Also, because of the heterogeneous nature and hegemonic ambitions of certain states and certain kinds of foreign and economic policies that exist.

EM: Speaking as a British person [and considering the Brexit process] I am afraid this is coming home to us very hard that regionalisation is proving to be difficult, you know!

RM-B: Yeah, and it is just so difficult to define what is a region. That is something that the experience in the UK is showing us right now as well. And then the debate we have had in Germany in the past couple of years around the whole discourse of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Which then goes out of the window, as soon as something more opportune comes along to redefine who is part of the European Union or of Europe – not even the European Union formally itself.

EM: Well, I think critical geographers – instinctively – would maybe not buy into these fixed ideas of regions, not least because of some of their associations with long imperial theories of space and place and power that have always been very much a political construct of one sort or another – or a social construct. And now maybe it is a good thing that we are actively seeing India more actively trying to define the Indian Ocean as a space. Although, that too is based on power issues and tensions, inequalities and omissions. Certainly, that is a somewhat more democratic space, I suppose that is one way of putting it, trying to define the South.

VB: One thing that I could observe over the past ten years, and in the context of the multiple crisis we have had in the EU, is that regionalisation is being more questioned now. Now you find amongst actors interested in regionalisation – in East Africa for example – also an openness towards looking at the process that has been dragging on in Europe for well over sixty years in terms of negative lessons to learn and to avoid. Before the Euro crisis came up, it was almost exclusively framed in a process that has to be emulated: 'it has been fantastic', 'it has created freedom', 'it has created prosperity', 'it has created open borders' and those kind of overenthusiastic imaginations. And this is probably, I would say, a positive aspect of the crisis in Europe that this 'model', if you want to call it a model, is being increasingly questioned – that it is taken for the things that might be useful, but also for those that might not be useful at all.

EM: So, by regionalisation, do you mean sort of political, and free trade, or what do you mean by that?

RM-B: It depends on who you speak to. It is not just the question what is a region, but what is regionalisation itself? Because for somebody like me, and the work that I do, transregionalisation is a process of actually quite distant spaces becoming much more interlinked with each other and finding each other in something as the 'Global South' or in something as African-Asian organisation of XYZ, right? It does not necessarily mean that you buy into this. It can also mean that you oppose it, that you contest it. But it is important to have that common reference framework, which is part of this political process. You do not have to be an official actor; you can also be a non-state actor to do this. You can also be on the margins of international politics, if you will. But I think other people have other kinds of definitions that bring about this contestation. There is no consensus of what transregional actually is. We were busy talking about if this would not actually be interregional if we are talking about the Global South? And then asking ourselves what is the difference or how does interregional then relate to transregional? But that depends, I suppose, on the kinds of terminologies and theoretical backgrounds that are used to address this question.

EM: Yeah. And it depends, I guess, on the object of study or the particular thing that we are looking at, at any point.

RM-B: So, I know we touched on this in a different way but where do you see the potential for further transregional cooperation or South-South cooperation?

EM: That is a good question. (...) Well, I think it would be fantastic if civil society could be more enabled and engaged through organisations like Via Campesina. And there are brilliant examples – you know as a way of getting Italians and Germans and Nigerians and Fijians together talking about some of these processes and structural inequalities. So, a bit like the women's movement, just by virtue of being transnational, civil society does not make it free of tensions, power, contradictions and different positionalities and needs and so on. As South-South cooperation, I hope, extends, it needs to pay increasing attention to some of the price payed by ordinary people for the creative destruction of this thing that we call development. One of my PhD students, Han Cheng, has looked at FOCAC documentation. And what we see is a remarkable expansion of the areas of agreement and discussion. The last FOCAC report is full of claims to people-centred development, which was not the case earlier on. We have framed this as a sort of a Polanyian double movement. It is protecting Chinese capital, protecting Chinese interest and investment by thinking more about the impact of the sort of interventions and investments abroad. So, my thesis, is that I think we are going to see a new stage where there will be changes in South-South cooperation as it consolidates in some places with tensions. And the question is: Will it be more likely or less likely to promote inclusive sustainable development for minorities, for the poor and others or not?

RM-B: I have one final question and I have to ask this question. We have spoken about the EU. We have spoken about Brexit. This is to show the linkages, it is not to make a comparison between the two because that's also got its own issues, always looking at the Global South in relation to the Global North. Brexit is obviously a dissolution of a regional relationship on an unprecedented scale. How does it impact your work in the future?

EM: Oh, good question. You know, I hadn't actually thought of that. I have just been so ashamed by my country. Not just because of the decision. I do think it was a terrible campaign, and it was a terrible decision. But my real shame about my country has been the appalling degree of public and political debate. It is so superficial, nasty, lying. It has really, really let us down in the eyes of the world. So, I have been reflecting a lot on my position in the world and the UK's role. And I am very, very worried for the future. Of course, the people who will be hardest hit by the economic consequences of Brexit are many of the people who voted for it. You know, I foresee greater poverty and I foresee the forces of transnational capital having ever greater power, which I am afraid the Tory government will welcome with open arms. So, chlorinated chicken for us. For my work where I suppose I have thought about your question, the UK is currently trying to build political and economic relations with other countries with ever more urgency than ever before. India is one notable place. And in fact, I am doing some work right now on how the UK and India are, well the UK in particular is trying to re-engineer its development relationship with India: rearticulating new narratives and creating new tools – that is how to change the vehicles and narratives and partnerships. So, there is a lot to

do. But this is not actually just the UK and Brexit. We are seeing this across the so-called traditional donor community. But Brexit is a sharp stick that is prodding the UK to act fast. And unfortunately, though, all too often shambolically. So, yes, there is certainly going to be more – in what's already an interestingly and positively and problematically world in flux. I think we are going to see very big changes in the international development landscape – about over what aid is and what it does, about different relations between different countries. We are already seeing this very positively in terms of the rise of the South. But the next twenty years ahead are going to be a very interesting one for any scholar of global development politics.

VB: I think that was a very nice and fitting closing word.

EM: Thank you.

RM-B: So we look forward to the next twenty years. And to your work in the next twenty years and to possibly delving into these issues further at another stage.

EM: Thank you so much. It has been just an absolute pleasure to be here.

VB: Thank you for being here.

RM-B: Thank you for being with us.

References

Achenbach, R.; Beek, J.; Karugia, J. N.; Mageza-Barthel, R. and Schulze-Engler, F. (eds.) (2020): Afrasian transformations. Transregional perspectives on development cooperation, social mobility and cultural change. Leiden. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004425262

Anthony, R. and Ruppert, U. (eds.) (2019) Reconfiguring transregionalism in the Global South. Basingstoke.

Bachmann, V. (2019): (Trans)regionalism and South–South cooperation: Afrasia instead of Eurafrique? In: Third World Quarterly 40 (4), 688–709. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1573634

Brabandt, H. (2017): Genderforschung in den Internationalen Beziehungen. In: Sauer, F. and Masala, C. (eds.): Handbuch Internationale Beziehungen. Wiesbaden, 283–312. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19918-4_20

Bräutigam, D. (1998): Chinese aid and African development. London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230374300

Carmody, P. R. (2013): The rise of the BRICS in Africa: the geopolitics of south-south relations. London.

Chakrabarty, D. (2007): Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400828654

Cornelissen, S. and Mine, Y. (eds.) (2017): Migration and agency in a globalizing world. Afro-Asian encounters. London. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-60205-3

Eckl, F. K.; Mageza-Barthel, R. and Thubauville, S. (2017): Ethiopia's Asian options: a collage of African and Asian entanglements. In: Insight on Africa 9 (2), 89–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/0975087817707445

Enloe, C. (1990): Bananas, beaches & bases: making feminist sense of international politics. Berkeley.

Graf, A. and Hashim, A. (eds.) (2017): African-Asian encounters: new cooperations and new dependencies. Amsterdam. https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048534913

Grant, R. and Newland, K. (eds.) (1991): Gender and international relations. Milton Keynes

Hancock, G. (1989): Lords of poverty: the power, prestige, and corruption of the international aid business. New York.

Hyndman, J. and Giles, W. M. (eds.) (2004): Sites of violence: gender and conflict zones. Berkeley.

– (2017): Refugees in extended exile: living on the edge. Abingdon/New York.

Liu, P. and Rofel, L. (2018): Wolf Warrior II: the rise of China and gender/sexual politics. MCLC Resource Center, Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, University of Ohio. http://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/liu-rofel/ (last accessed 16 September 2020)

Locher, B. (2000): Internationale Beziehungen aus der Geschlechterperspektive. In: Braun, K.; Fuchs, G.; Lemke, C. and Töns, K. (eds): Feministische Perspektive der Politikwissenschaft. München/Wien, 332–67.

Mawdsley, E. (2012): From recipients to donors : emerging powers and the changing development landscape. London.

– (2017): Development geography I: cooperation, competition and convergence between 'North' and 'South'. In: Progress in Human Geography 41 (1), 108–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515601776

– (2018): The 'Southernisation' of development? In: Asia Pacific Viewpoint 59 (2), 173–185. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12192

– (2019): South–South cooperation 3.0? Managing the consequences of success in the decade ahead. In: Oxford Development Studies 47 (3), 259–274. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2019.1585792

– (2020): Queering development? The unsettling geographies of South-South cooperation. In: Antipode 52 (1), 227–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12574

Mawdsley, E.; Fourie, E. and Nauta, W. (eds.) (2019): Researching South-South development cooperation: the politics of knowledge production. Rethinking development. London, New York. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429459146

Middell, M. (ed.) (2019): The Routledge Handbook on transregional studies. Abingdon. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429438233

Mielke, K. and Hornidge, A.-K. (eds.) (2017): Area studies at the crossroads: knowledge production after the mobility turn. Basingstoke. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59834-9

Momsen, J. H. and Townsend, J. G. (eds.) (1987): Geography of gender in the Third World. London.

Nagar, R. (2014): Muddying the waters: coauthoring feminisms across scholarship and activism. Dissident feminisms. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield. https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252038792.001.0001

Nelson, L. and Seager, J. (2005): "Introduction." In: Seager, J. and Nelson, L. (eds.): A companion to feminist geography. Malden, MA, Oxford, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996898.ch1

Peterson, V. S. (1992): Gendered states: feminist (re)visions of international relations theory. Boulder, CO.

Rauch, T. (2018): Vier Jahrzehnte deutschsprachige Geographische Entwicklungsforschung im Spannungsfeld zwischen dialektischem Lernprozess und Zeitgeist. In: Geographische Zeitschrift 106 (3), 175–204. https://doi.org/10.25162/gz-2018-0013

Ruppert, U. (ed.) (1998): Lokal bewegen - global verhandeln. Internationale Politik und Geschlecht. Frankfurt am Main/New York.

Schulze-Engler, F. (2014): Africa's Asian options: Indian Ocean imaginaries in East African literature. In: Mann, M and Phaf-Reinberger, I. (eds.): Beyond the line: cultural narratives of the southern Oceans. Berlin, 159–178. Berlin.

Sidaway, J. D. (2012): Geographies of development: new maps, new visions? In: The Professional Geographer 64 (1), 49–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2011.586878

Tickner, J. A. (1992): Gender in international relations: feminist perspectives on achieving global security. New York.

Townsend, J. G. (1995): Women's voices from the Rainforest. Florence. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203975749

Wucherpfennig, C. and Fleischmann, K. (2008): Feministische Geographien und geographische Geschlechterforschung im deutschsprachigen Raum. In: ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 7 (3), 350–76. https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/811

Authors

Emma Mawdsley is a Reader in Human Geography at the University of Cambridge, and the Director of the Margaret Anstee Centre for Global Studies at Newnham College. Emma's research originated in environmental and regional politics in India, before turning to critical inquiries into international development politics. She has worked extensively on South-South Cooperation, and more recently has examined how this and other trends are re-shaping 'northern' donors. Her book "From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape" (Mawdsley 2012) has received wide critical acclaim and has been followed by an edited volume on "Researching South-South Development Cooperation: Critical reflections on the politics of knowledge production" (Mawdsley et al. 2019).

Dr. Emma Mawdsley
University of Cambridge
Department of Geography
Downing Place
Cambridge
CB2 3EN
United Kingdom
emma.mawdsley@geog.cam.ac.uk

Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel is a political scientist and a sessional professor at the University of Giessen. Prior to this, she was a senior researcher at AFRASO, Goethe University Frankfurt and visiting professor for International Gender Politics at the University of Kassel. Her work employs transnational and postcolonial perspectives to focus on the normative dynamics of international politics, post-conflict transformation processes and African-Chinese relations. Among her publications, she is co-editor of "Negotiating Normativity: Postcolonial Appropriations, Contestations and Transformations" (Springer, 2016) and most recently "Afrasian Transformations: Transregional Perspectives on Development Cooperation, Social Mobility and Cultural Change" (Brill 2020).

Dr. Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel
Justus Liebig University Giessen
Department of Political Science
Karl-Glöckner-Straße 21E
35394 Gießen
Germany
rirhandu.mageza-barthel@sowi.uni-giessen.de

Veit Bachmann is a political geographer in the Department of Geography at the University of Bonn. Prior to his current position in Bonn, he was based at the Department of Human Geography at Goethe-University Frankfurt where he worked on different research projects on African-Asian and African-European relations. His research interests include geopolitical transformation processes and their underlying socio-spatialities, whereby his work engages with European studies and global South-North relations, focussing on the international identity and role of the EU as a global and development actor. After his undergraduate education in geography, international relations and economics at the Universität Trier, Germany, he obtained the degrees of MSc in geography at Texas A&M University, USA (2006) and PhD in geography from the University of Plymouth, UK (2009).

Dr. Veit Bachmann
University of Bonn
Department of Geography
Meckenheimer Allee 166
53115 Bonn
Germany
veitbachmann@uni-bonn.de