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# Geographies of Development: New Maps, New Visions?

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## Abstract

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.

使用国家类别（如发展中世界或第三世界）并基于其发展水平来划定世界地区的方法越来越有争议。此外，在过去几年中，对金砖四国 BRICs（巴西，俄罗斯，印度，中国）或有时称为 BRICA（增加一个海湾阿拉伯国家）的引用，并把它们作为世界经济中未来投资的超链接，已日益激增。这些新标签停留在过去二十年关于“新兴市场”的话语，它们是把第三世界作为一个有意义的地缘政治和认识论的范畴进行分解的化身和代理。地理发展和第三世界还在何地保留何种特征呢？为解决这些问题，细致入微的绘图是必要的。本文草拟一些替代的方法。

El uso de categorías (como países en desarrollo o del Tercer Mundo) para delimitar a las regiones del mundo sobre la base de sus niveles de desarrollo es cada vez más disputada. Más aún, en los últimos años han proliferado las referencias a los BRICs (Brasil, Rusia, India, China), o a veces BRICA (añadiendo a los Estados Árabes del Golfo), como hipervínculos para inversiones orientadas al futuro en la economía mundial. Estas nuevas etiquetas se basan en más de dos décadas de debate sobre los “mercados emergentes” y son las personificaciones y agentes en la descomposición del Tercer Mundo, denotando una significativa categoría geopolítica y epistemológica. ¿Dónde están y qué queda entonces de la geografía del desarrollo y del Tercer Mundo? Para atender tales preguntas se necesitarán los mapas de matices. Este artículo esboza algunas alternativas.

Key Words:

BRICs development geopolitics mapping Third World

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Palabras claves:

BRICs desarrollo geopolítica mapeo Tercer Mundo

## Notes

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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>.

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> See Thirlwall ([2008](#)) and White ([2008](#)) for more on the Human Development Index and other indexes. See Power ([2006](#)) for some useful background on its creation and the key role of the Pakistani economist Mahbub Ul Haq (1934–1998) in establishing the index as a widely used measure, via the United National Development Program's Human Development Report series. See Morse ([2008](#)) and Rigg ([2008](#)) for other critical reflections on development indexes.

<sup>3</sup> 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 alternative labels shift the ways that the crisis is interpreted.”

<sup>4</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>5</sup> 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](#)).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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