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Statemaking at the Fringes of Development

In his recent book, *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Univ. of Chicago, 1997), Fernando Coronil writes that “[t]he tragedy of modernity is that its promise of universal progress cannot be fulfilled in the terms in which it has been cast” (p.385). This promise finds expression in modernizing development plans. No matter whether these plans are seen as emanating from the state or the market, the teleology they present – of moving toward an imagined, “developed” end-point – is constant. Coronil’s book, like other recent work on development discourse by James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta and Arturo Escobar, argues that the purported inevitability of development is never a foregone conclusion – indeed, that development projects, in a sense, *must* fail in order to ensure their continued political purchase. This aspect of development discourses and practices demands that scholars attend to the politics of seemingly technical decisions and the cultural content of supposedly universal forms of bureaucratic rationality contained within development projects.

The essays collected in this issue of *PoLAR* take their cue from this important line of research by critically examining the role of state-making and the spatial cartographies of development. They explore how the efforts of modern states to discipline and “normalize” people at the fringes of their domain, often through development projects, work to create new mappings of identity and inequality and to transform local and regional politics. One of the key contributions of these essays is forcefully and evocatively to convey popular understandings and interpretations of these re-mappings, rather than taking the state as a uniform actor or development as a total and seamless force.

As Margaret Everett notes in her essay on attempts to “integrate” an urban frontier into Bogotá, Colombia, such popular understandings represent “an uneven and highly contested development and state-making, even within the apparatus of the state” itself. Carmen Ferradás, in her article on the tri-national frontier between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, demonstrates how globalization and neoliberal development create new spatial dynamics and constitute new terrains which then become the focus of state projects. Eric Worby also looks at the creation of a dynamic zone in northwestern Zimbabwe which symbolically carries both the promise and peril of the “dangerous frontier.” He shows how “it is precisely the tension between ‘danger’ and ‘development’ that makes the frontier a site of ambivalent attraction for state consolidation.”

In a fascinating paper on statemaking in the forests of West Bengal, K. Sivaramakrishnan puts the creation of the state itself into the picture, asking how discourses of democracy work in tandem with discourses of development, often with contradictory effects. Donna Perry looks at weekly markets in Senegal that operate outside of state and development domains; they receive “scant bureaucratic attention,” she shows, because they belie the nationalist aspirations of the state and don’t fit into donors’ conceptions of what a development-deserving social movement should look like. As she writes, “groups not supportive of the nation’s on-going state-making project are simply defined out of civil society, and not touted as a new social movement. Nor are they endowed with financial support.” Finally, Udo Krautwurst turns a critical gaze toward

those non-rational aspects of development discourse transported to the colonies and argues for greater attention to “non-rational forms of development imperialism” – like water dowsing – which heretofore have not been examined “because they are not sought, not thought to exist, or thought to be trivial.” Krautwurst’s paper, in fact, returns to the magical character of modern rationality which Coronil and others have attempted to uncover: the modern mythologies of law, state and development that authorize and empower certain world understandings while denying their own mystical force. At the same time, other mythologies operate within and between the spaces modernity charts out. As Coronil concludes, “If imperial power now unfolds within global financial circuits that link metropolitan and peripheral dominant sectors across national boundaries, subaltern subjects also proliferate within reconfigured spaces at home and abroad, enabling new understandings about their worldwide connections and common predicament” (p.394).

This issue of *PoLAR* also contains a compelling paper by William New and Loucas Petronicolos on California’s Proposition 187, which attempted to deny undocumented immigrants rights to public services. The authors reveal the place of Proposition 187 in forming a national imagination in which all sides of the debate uncritically accept “immutable national boundaries,” “spheres of jurisdiction, spheres of moral responsibility, and spheres of knowledge” – in effect, in which the debating parties create new frontiers about what shall constitute the fringes of the nation and the domain of the state.

Our Methodology section contains a successful grant proposal by George Collier, and a highly engaging and thoughtful exploration of the challenges of conducting fieldwork in a regime of state-sponsored terror, by Frank Afflitto. Finally, we are pleased to present Susan Coutin’s review of Carol Greenhouse’s recent book on time, *A Moment’s Notice*; Howard de Nike’s review of two new books concerning Aboriginal rights and the doctrine of *terra nullis* in Australia; and Harry West’s review of James Scott’s new book, *Seeing Like A State*. The editors appreciate the assistance of Tom Boellstorff in producing this volume.

Bill Maurer and Sally Engle Merry