

**Re-presenting Geopolitics: ethnography, social movement activism,
and nonviolent geographies**

Submitted by **Kerry Burton** to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Abstract

This thesis starts from the premise that Geopolitics is performative, an iterative discourse “of visualising global space...reproduced in the governing principles of geographic thought and through the practices of statecraft” (Agnew 1998:11). During the last decade, two dominant discourses have shaped the contemporary geopolitical imagination – the ‘war on terror’ and ‘climate change’. These have steered conceptualisations of security and insecurity - performative iterations of who, where, and what poses a threat. The resulting geopolitical picture of the world has enabled the legitimisation of human and geographical domination – an acceptance of geographical norms that enable the continuation of uneven geographies.

The research is concerned with the performative spaces of alternative geopolitics; spaces that emerge where nonviolent social movement activism and geopolitics intersect and the sites through which these are practiced and mediated. The motivations are twofold. The first is a desire to intervene in a critical geopolitical discourse that remains biased toward engagement with violent geographies. The second is to take seriously ‘geopolitics from below’, alternative geographical imaginations. I address the first of these through research that is concerned primarily with the spacing of nonviolence – the performed and performative spaces of nonviolent geographies shaped through a politics of the act. The second is approached through substantial empirical engagement with social movement activists and sites of contention and creation in opposition to dominant environmental geopolitics.

‘Militant’ ethnographic research took place over six months in 2009. It traced the journeys of two groups as they organised for, and took part in, large counter-summit mobilisations. The first was a UK based social movement, the Camp for Climate Action (UK). The second was an intercontinental caravan, the Trade to Climate Caravan. Both groups shared a common aim – to converge on the 16th of December in a mass demonstration of nonviolent confrontation; the ‘People’s Assembly’, to contest dominant discourses being performed inside the intergovernmental United Nations Conference of the Parties 15. Social movement groups from around the world would present alternative narratives of insecurity and offer ‘alternative solutions’ garnered through non-hierarchical forms of decision-making. The research followed the route each group took to the People’s Assembly and the articulations (narrative and practices) of nonviolent action.

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Acronyms

ATTAC	Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions & Aid to Citizens
ACPO	Association of Police Officers
CfCA	Camp for Climate Action
CCC	Climate Camp Cymru/Camp for Climate Action Wales
SCfCA	Scotland Camp for Climate Action
CIRCA	Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army
CJA	Climate Justice Action
CJPOA	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act
CJC	Climate Justice Collective
CJN	Climate Justice Now!
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
GRO	Grassroots Organisations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NAFTA	North American Trade Agreement
NETCU	National Extremist Tactical Coordination Unit
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NSM	New Social Movement (theory)
NVDA	Non-violent Direct Action
NWSM	Newest Social Movement (theory)
OWINFS	Our World Is Not For Sale
SOCPA	Serious Organised Crime and Police Act
T2CC	Trade to Climate Caravan
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
UNCOP	United Nations Conference of the Parties
UNFCC	United Nations Framework on Climate Change

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