

**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 16<sup>th</sup> 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

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



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