

Reading for difference in the archives of Tropical Geography: imagining an(other) economic geography for beyond the Anthropocene

J.K. Gibson-Graham

Abstract

This paper is based on the 2016 Neil Smith lecture presented at St Andrews University. It honours the work of a geographer whose pioneering work on uneven development and the complex relations between capitalism and nature shaped late 20th century thinking inside and beyond the discipline of Geography. Today the collision of earth system dynamics with socio-economic dynamics is shaking apart Enlightenment knowledge systems, forcing questions of what it means to be a responsible inhabitant on planet earth and how, indeed, to go onwards 'in a different mode of humanity' (to quote eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood). 'The Great Acceleration' since the 1950s of trends in key aspects of earth system health and socio-economic change highlights powerful dynamics that have shaped a new geological epoch, contentiously named the Anthropocene—or more perhaps to Neil's liking, the Capitalocene. In this paper I ask how might we do geographic research in these times? I reflect on this question by drawing on the feminist anti-essentialist thinking strategy of reading for difference developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham. I attempt to open up new ways of working with uncertain possibilities. I do so with reference to field research into place-based knowledges of resilience in Monsoon Asia—a region that is experiencing increasingly uncertain and extreme 'natural' events that signal Anthropogenic climate change. I return to 'area studies' scholarship of Monsoon Asia conducted in the 1950s when the engines of economic change were starting to rev, fuelled by dire predictions of population explosion and the fear of communism. Like Neil, I am interested in the genealogy of geographical scholarship and the institutional contexts in which it developed and was influential. I look back to see how local knowledge was described and appreciated by two of our geographic forefathers and I consider how reading against the grain of capitalocentrism might play a role in making other worlds possible.

Keywords: area studies; tropical geography; economic difference; community economies; Oskar Spate; Joe Spencer

Corresponding author:

Katherine Gibson

Institute for Culture and Society

Western Sydney University

Parramatta Campus

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751

AUSTRALIA

k.gibson@westernsydney.edu.au

Introduction

Giving the 2016 Neil Smith Lecture at the invitation of the Department of Geography at St Andrew's University was a great honour, not least because it offered an opportunity for some thinking about the connections between past and present geographers and the knowledge commons we produce.¹ My connection with Neil is a generational one and a personal one—we are both children of the early 1950s who, as friends and graduate students in the US in the late 1970s, participated in a radical critique of establishment Geography. We embraced and studied Marxist theory and began the work of integrating political economic analysis into new geographic understandings of uneven development, regional restructuring and globalization. In later years our research approaches diverged, although our political commitment to changing the world, not just studying it, did not. We pursued very different research agendas from the 1990s on, with Neil steadfastly committed to critical Marxist political economy and pursuing a trenchant critique of neoliberal capitalism and myself, along with Julie Graham as J.K. Gibson-Graham, combining anti-essentialist Marxian class analysis and post-structuralist feminism to theorize diverse economies and a post-capitalist politics. Yet both Neil and I, to greater and lesser degrees of depth, have turned to past geographers to advance our respective contemporary projects. We have engaged in 'conversations' with our forebears—Neil with Isaiah Bowman (1878-1950) and me with Oskar Hermann Kristian Spate (1911-2000) and Joseph Earle Spencer (1907-1984).² This essay reflects on ways of reading past scholarship and what the process of reading for difference might offer.

In an era of fast scholarship with mounting pressure to be up with the new, at the 'cutting edge' of the discipline, it might seem somewhat irrelevant to be engaging with largely forgotten figures of our geographic past—especially those whose work was associated with the now relegated sub-field of Area Studies. But in this moment where scholarship, and humanity, for that matter, is confronted with the realization of the Anthropocene, it seems pertinent to stop and look back as we seek to meet the challenges at hand.

Temporality is squarely on the political and geoscience agenda at this moment—now identified scientifically as at the end of the Holocene (Waters et al 2016). As an academic geographer for the last 40 years, whose life began in the 1950s, I cannot fail to be affected by the 26 graphs marshalled by Will Steffen and colleagues (2015) that scope out the trajectory of the Anthropocene (reproduced as The Planetary Dashboard at this site <http://www.igbp.net/news/pressreleases/pressreleases/planetarydashboardshowsgreataccelerationinhumanactivitysince1950.5.950c2fa1495db7081eb42.html>). One set presents socio-economic changes for OECD, BRICs and all other countries from 1750 to 2010, another presents biophysical changes over the same period. The juxtaposition of these graphs reveals the significant temporal alignment of multiple exponential growth curves with a shared point of rapid take off around 1950. The Great Acceleration, as it has been dubbed echoing Karl Polanyi's The Great Transformation, captures "the holistic, comprehensive and interlinked nature of the post-1950 changes simultaneously sweeping across the socio-economic and biophysical spheres of the Earth System, encompassing far more than climate change" (Steffen et al 2015:84).

Whether called the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Gynocene or Chthulucene (Haraway 2015), it is clear that the ways that some humans have devised to

survive over the past the half century or more have involved increasing physical inputs and outputs that have degraded the environment.³ As a child of the 1950s, to view the graphs marshalled by Steffen et al is to see a lifespan tagged to the moment when take-off took place. It is to situate oneself in the midst of an exponential growth of material wealth and unthinking excess, as benefiting from 'Western' privilege and the destruction of ecologies. It is also to situate one's scholarship, as Neil and I tried to do in our own ways, with the radical critique of capitalist exploitation that fuelled the growth of GDP and shaped patterns of foreign direct investment, and one's political sympathies with the struggles for decolonization that are faintly evident in the graphs of population growth and urbanization.

These graphs invite me in turn to situate our ghostly interlocutors on these shared time lines. Isaiah Bowman's life spanned the period immediately prior to take off of The Great Acceleration and he played a major role in securing the conditions whereby the United States assumed global dominance in the post WWII period. Spate's and Spencer's professional lives reached maturity as take-off took place and both were implicated in negotiating the pathways that development and decolonization took place in Asia.⁴

From the perspective of today's challenges, I am interested in what 'our' collective scholarship has done and continues to do, and where it might lead. I am concerned that geographers seriously respond to Val Plumwood's provocation to find "new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves and our high energy, high consumption, and hyper-instrumental societies adaptively" (2007:1) and to Donna Haraway's injunction that "our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge" (2015:160). In this paper I consider how reading the past might assist in this venture.

In what follows I discuss the project of reading past geographies for difference and then I attempt a preliminary reading of the lives and work of Oskar Spate and Joe Spencer for what their field research can tell us about survival in Monsoon Asia in the past and perhaps for the future.

A critical reading: the past as prelude

Neil Smith's 2003 book *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* is a studiously detailed biography of Isaiah Bowman—explorer of South America, political geographer, academic, and adviser to US Presidents and War Departments in both World Wars. Bowman's life, from 1878 to 1950, spanned the last years of imperial expansion and continued up until the very beginning of the age of decolonization. He contributed to the prominence of geographical power in the rise of American global political hegemony in the 20th century and, paradoxically, to the demise (or failure to rise) of Geography as a popular knowledge field within American society.⁵ Bowman was implicated in the closure of the Department of Geography at Harvard in 1948 and establishing the Department of Geography at Johns Hopkins University in the same year (Smith 1987). He is someone who Neil doesn't appear to like very much, whose politics he didn't share, whose legacy he is ambivalent about, and yet with whom he spent many years in 'conversation'. What made Bowman worthy of scholarly attention is that his life exemplified a certain relationship between politics and geography. Neil's critical reading of the past is, as the subtitle of the book indicates, to trace the pre-conditions that later were to emerge as globalization—the past as prelude to the present.

In *American Empire* Smith exposes Bowman's contribution to Area Studies scholarship arguing that it implicated Geography in the production of an emerging map of US global economic dominance, or what was innocently named American *lebenstraum* (Smith 2003). He connects this Area Studies genealogy with Establishment Geography's continued role as "a handmaiden to corporate and state power" (2003:23), specifically in the 1980s via the development of Geographical Information Systems, 'business geography' and policy studies, and he differentiates it from the critical geography movement of which he was an early leader.

Critical Marxist geography from the 1970s on sought to redraw Bowman's map by exposing the "social contours of the power that continually makes and remakes these world geographies" (2003:24). In his first book, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* published in 1984, Neil Smith did this by enrolling Marx's writings on spatial development and nature. His 2003 Bowman biography reads as a personalized version of this structural tale. In this statement at the beginning of *American Empire* Smith links the structural and personal entry points:

Uneven geographical development on all scales in the global landscape is certainly an expression of the structured social relations of capitalist societies and the multifaceted logic of capital accumulation, but it is simultaneously authored by everyday individuals and classes, groups and governments. The geography of the American Century, therefore, is neither wholly planned nor entirely voluntaristic. It represents not a one-dimensional devaluation of space but *a restructuring of the spatial grammar of economic expansion*. (2003:25 emphasis in the original)

If Bowman's work provided a prelude to globalization and mapped out the boundaries of a US dominated global capitalist world, Smith's redrawn map was a mirror image that exposed the underbelly of the workings of this triumphant world order. It was a map born of radical geographic scholarship that abandoned Area Studies with its seemingly a-theoretical compendiums of place-based knowledge about landforms, climate, land use, economic activities, urban patterns and so on. Both the putative empiricism and political function of these texts was something for radical geography to eschew. All this specificity was soon to be subordinated to the map of internationalized capital—or what became known as the age of globalization. Against the triumphalism of Bowman's map of a new global world order Neil Smith's critical map foregrounded the exploitative extraction of surplus and the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the few. It highlighted the annihilation of space by time and the political geography of resistance. His work attests to the dissenting claim made early on in *American Empire* when he writes: "There is more than one way to redraw the map of a 'global' world." (2003:24).

The relationship between survival and surplus is a concern that, through our common training in Marxian political economy, I share with Neil Smith. He sought to reveal and 'map' the exploitative "spatial grammar" of capitalist economic expansion. I am interested in identifying and 'mapping' a fragile knowledge commons that unevenly survived capitalist global expansion and that may now be crucial to building resilience and navigating a new post-capitalist way forward. I take seriously his claim that there is more than one way to redraw the map of a global world. My interest is in redrawing an(other) map of a 'global'

world that might guide action in the Anthropocene and in what follows I outline one strategy for generating input into that redrawing.

Following Neil, I engage in a (one way) conversation with two tropical geographers whose lives spanned the 20th century.⁶ My objective in striking up a conversation with ghosts is not to produce definitive biographies, nor to critique their form of Area Studies scholarship. It is to search for rich descriptions and moments of appreciation of non-capitalist economic practices and to knit these fragments and gleanings into an(other) 'map' of community economies and ecologies in Monsoon Asia. I place 'map' and 'mapping' in quotes as I am using the term in a metaphorical manner. I would indeed like to see this 'other map' *actually* mapped using participatory GIS, but this is a long way off. The first step is to generate the conception and the data for a map of the knowledge commons of community economies.

Reading for difference: the past as potential

The practice of reading for difference is a technique that has been developed within the diverse economies research program as a way of reading against the grain of capitalcentric economic discourse (Gibson-Graham 2014; 2020). When reading for difference, the task is to attend to the great variety of non-capitalist or 'more-than-capitalist' economic activities including: non-capitalist forms of commodity exchange, as well as non-monetized exchanges, gifts and reciprocity; unpaid forms of labour as well as paid labour remunerated in cash or kind according to a range of agreements other than the capital-labour wage relation; non-capitalist enterprises organized around logics other than profit maximization and private capital accumulation; common property ownership and open access as well as collectively managed private property; and non-capitalist forms of investment, savings and capitalization.⁷ It is to identify the specificity of these practices rather than their sameness or subordination to capitalist commodity exchange, waged labour, capitalist enterprise, private property or capitalist finance.

The practices highlighted when reading for difference constitute what post-development thinker Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls rich "ecologies of productivity" (2014:165). Productivity here refers not to returns to capital but a whole plethora of arrangements and strategies that contribute to livelihood resilience—of both humans and non-humans. Across the world, but particularly in the majority world where many of these ecologies of practice are still in use, they are rarely recognized as an asset to be worked with. Indeed, Santos argues that a sociology of absence has banished both from standard knowledge systems. This is nowhere more evident than in Monsoon Asia—that region of the world often designated as 'South and Southeast Asia'⁸ where large-scale winds bring distinct seasons of wet and dry weather with which human settlement has interacted over the millennia.

The task of marshalling information about ecologies of productivity in Monsoon Asia involves reading against the grain of capitalcentric development discourse which positions diverse economic practices as part of the 'informal economy', as 'patron-client relationships', or as 'social capital' (Gibson-Graham 2016; Gibson, Hill and Law 2018). Classified as such, they are either primitive practices that will die out with the advance of capitalist modernization, practices to be mobilized for capitalist development, or practices that must be eradicated or modernized so that they no longer are a barrier to

entrepreneurialism. There is no need to attend to the detailed vocabulary of negotiation around economic transactions, value flows and habitat maintenance, let alone identity formation and social cohesion. Reading for difference is a corrective practice that involves keeping eyes and ears attuned for evidence of community economy practices—what I will call commoning knowhow. This can be done on the ground in contemporary Asia drawing on field based observations and interviews.⁹ Or it can be done ‘in the archives’—re-reading discarded texts and recovering descriptions of place-based practices that contribute(d) to community economies in which survival and surplus interdependencies are negotiated in common.

In this paper I turn to that body of knowledge that was produced in the first part of the 20th century focused on Monsoon Asia.¹⁰ I explore how local practices and knowledge were noted, appreciated and positioned by two academic geographers who lived and worked in Asia before WWII and who wrote major country based ‘tropical geography’ texts in the 1950s as The Great Acceleration was getting going. Both reading exercises are part of a larger project of researching forms of economic and ecological resilience in the face of climate uncertainty.¹¹

Reading for difference in the archives of Tropical Geography

Tropical geography was a field of inquiry consolidated by first world scholars who, through employment or military service, spent time in (mostly colonized) tropical and equatorial regions of the world. In Monsoon Asia tropical geographers worked in British India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Malaya, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies and the US administered Philippines and were involved in processes of decolonization and development after the WWII. Large country specific volumes were written before geographical analysis took up systematic study of the spatial processes of modernization and underdevelopment. They addressed ‘tropical difference’ with detailed description, inventories, surveys and photographs of a vast range of practices embedded in the cultures and geographies of place (Forbes 1984). Today these tomes remain foundational texts in university geography courses in many of the countries they focus on.¹²

Their authors, including Pierre Gourou, Jan Broek, Wilhelm Credner, O.H.K. Spate, L. Dudley Stamp and J.E. Spencer, were some of the shapers of area studies within academic geography.¹³ Many were trained in cultural geography and were noted opponents of the environmental determinism that dominated much of early 20th century geographic analysis. Above all, this cohort of tropical geographers saw themselves as pragmatists “concerned with material things and their associations on the landscape, both locally and regionally” (Dobby 1961:21). Even so, their analyses could not escape a Eurocentric commitment to the superiority of ‘western civilization’. People of the tropics were routinely positioned in their texts as ‘backward’ and practices as ‘clumsy’, needing modern economic development. Progress was to come with modern state development.

My two interlocutors are the British/Australian geographer Oskar H. K. Spate and the American geographer Joseph E. Spencer.¹⁴ I am interested in what we can learn by reading against the grain of the judgemental Eurocentrism that pervades the tropical area study geographies of the times and the underlying imperative of modernization that draws forth

certain normative pronouncements. So I am reading for what these field workers say and don't say about human-environment interactions in place, filtered through the discourses they brought with them from their metropolitan and imperialist homelands of the US and UK.

In what follows I can give only a brief snapshot of some key issues drawn from preliminary archival research into their lives and works.¹⁵ First I give a short biographical sketch of each and then draw out some examples of their thinking and observations from published and unpublished writings. My attempt to read Spencer and Spate for economic difference has been alternatively rewarded and thwarted, but along the way I have gained insight into the political commitments of two remarkable people. In the post-war context of anti-communism and cold war rhetoric that Isaiah Bowman helped shape in the US, they quietly held to dissenting and pragmatic views which informed their scholarship in interesting ways.

Oskar Spate and reading for difference in Burma and India

Oskar Hermann Khristian Spate (1911-2000) was the Foundation Professor of Geography in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University in 1951. He served on the Punjab Boundary Commission during the partition of Pakistan and India and later played an influential role in the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby and the University of the South Pacific in Fiji.¹⁶ His life spanned the 20th century and his academic output began as The Great Acceleration was also beginning. For the purpose of this paper I am most interested in his writings and reflections on Burma and India that were based on research conducted before coming to Australia. Spate was a prolific note taker and daily diarist and I have delved into the archive of his unpublished as well as published writings. Thankfully Spate annotated his first handwritten and then typewritten diaries later in life adding subject headings to every page. These diaries and notes provide fascinating reading on many topics. His writing is passionate and funny, his observations acute and he doesn't hold back on self-reflection—both congratulatory and wry.

Born in 1911 in England, he was the child of a German immigrant to London and an English mother. His early childhood was influenced by state policy during World War I when the family fled to the US for a few years to avoid his father's internment. Spate's background was decidedly un-academic but he excelled in literature and geography at school. He went on to study at Cambridge in the 1930s where, along with so many other students at that time, he became a Marxist and member of the Communist Party.

Oskar completed an historical geography of London from 1801-51 for his PhD and had various teaching jobs before being advised in 1937 by his supervisor, partly because of his political affiliations, to take a job at the University of Rangoon in Burma in the Department of Geography and Geology that had recently been established by British geologist/geographer Dudley Stamp. In an interview later in life Spate recalls how exhilarating and intellectually stimulating it was "to be in a country with an old and high culture, although it was derivative of India and China, in which everything did not go back to the Greeks and the Bible" (Powell 1992). This cultural difference fascinated and intrigued Spate.

The University had recently become independent of the University of Calcutta, and there was a strong move to nationalize the faculty. As Spate notes in the same interview “the university began with a student strike, and then had a strike one year for no other reason than to commemorate last year’s strike (laughing). And I remember one of the slogans was “We want first class men, not refuse from England” Well I suppose I was both” (Spate 1992).

Spate’s academic research during his 5-year stint in Burma focused on the economic geography of Rangoon and was published in a number of academic articles. His travels around Burma afforded him the opportunity to amass a compendium of information which he put to good use in a series of information booklets, the Burma Pamphlets, produced in Kandy for the Allied Forces of the South East Asia Command during 1943-4. Spate joined the British Army in Rangoon in 1941 when Japan entered the war and was wounded in the first Japanese air raid on Rangoon in 1942. He was evacuated to India to recover and was surprised to find out how seriously he had been injured:

A bit of a shock from Shepherd—told me that I would never do another 30 miles route march as my heelbones were broken... However nothing to prevent me leading a normal life (vague) and it didn’t matter as I was a geographer and not a soldier. Well I never have done a 30 mile routemarch, so that doesn’t worry me—but how about Field Weeks? Or days like Kalaw-Pindaya or Tythe? must learn to ride a horse. Also means no more active service—I must admit I am not greatly cast down at this, but I would have liked to see a bit more of it while I was in!

Diary April 18 1942 underlining in the original

After a period of recovery spent reading novels, learning Portuguese and writing poetry he began work again for military intelligence as a censor and later headed up the Burma Division of the Inter-services Topographical Department, in New Delhi and then Kandy, Ceylon.

Spate’s experience of India during the war became the basis for his ‘magisterial’ book *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography*.¹⁷ This 877 tome was published in 1954, with a second edition and translation into Russian published in 1957 and a revised edition with collaboration from A. M. Learmonth and a chapter on Ceylon by B.H. Farmer, published in 1967. The sheer volume of material it covers is remarkable. It drew on hours of research conducted in the library of India House when Spate was lecturing at the London School of Economics in the late 1940s, as well as observations made during travels by rail and car around India during the war—a kind of fieldwork through the moving window. For example, on a visit to Madras and Tambaram Christian College in 1943, Spate writes:

Interesting drive: even in these plains, so thickly populated, there are huge areas of “cultivable waste”—much of it laterite and v. marginal, but could be used at best for intelligent pastoralism, if such a thing existed in this country.

Diary August 26 1943

These observations were overlain upon an extensive grasp of the topography and geomorphology of the India-Burma landscape gained through his years of work with the Inter-services Topographical Department during the war. During war physical geography comes into its own with the need for detailed maps to guide campaigns. Spate spent

months drawing useable maps based on aerial photographs, pre-existing colonial maps and field photographs. He writes of producing one particular map:

...apparently the planners like the little “quickie” I turned off for them—so much so that they want it refurbished up for the Supremo [Supreme Commander of South East Asia Command, Louis Mountbatten] himself. A good thing as we will be able to stiffen it up a bit—I don’t want any blood, real blood, on my head.

Diary September 14 1944 [insert added]

Burden lugged me off to the planners; they are certainly “thinking big” as Louis [Mountbatten] said. I dug out 12 photos which were much approved of—6 of my own, 2 out of the 4 they chose to “sell the idea” one being especially useful. V pleased by this. It sounds a terribly risky thing to me; but it certainly doesn’t lack imagination! I hope to God they know what they are about. Anyhow, makes one feel that one is really in the thick of things. It’s a big responsibility, but as it is on matters on which I am competent that doesn’t get me down.

Diary September 30 1944 [insert added]

It is very likely that this map covered parts of northern Burma that Spate was familiar with. In the Southeast Asian theatre of war the march of Japanese Imperial forces into China through Burma (once they had defeated the British in Rangoon and Mandalay), aimed to meet the coastal invasions that had forced the Chinese government into the interior. The Chinese combined Communist and Nationalist Army were forced to destroy the Burma Road, a 1,500 km feat of engineering through the eastern Himalayan Plateau that linked South West China to Burma. In an attempt to resupply the Chinese army 5,000 US engineers were deployed to build a new connection—the Ledo Road (also known as the Stilwell Road).

According to the exhibition notes at the Trenchong War Museum, when the road got into the complex topography of the Naga Hills in northern Burma, the harsh climate and intensified Japanese attacks produced reluctance on the part of the US Department of Defence to proceed.¹⁸ But building was accelerated in October 1944 and the road was completed in January 1945. This may have been Louis’ big thinking project that Spate’s map was needed for.

All this is to say that while Spate had a great command of the geography of Burma and India, he had less experience as a grounded field worker who might have rewarded me with insights into community economic practices. Nevertheless, there are some reflections on survival practices and surplus distribution that I have been able to discover. To some extent all are situated within two overarching concerns--population growth and the direction that development should take.

Returning to London in 1945 Spate threw himself into job applications and canvassing for the Labour Party in the General Election. By now his politics had moved more to the centre—although the Marxist influences are still evident in this entry into his Diary on June 18 1945:

In evening canvassed in Lower Mortlake Rd: solid labour in little cottages; the moment they get bigger, with bow windows, all mixed up! A wizebit of practical Marxizm!

What particularly drew my attention is his report of a campaign meeting in Finsbury where he nervously made his first electioneering speech, and which ended with a contribution

from Frederick Le Gros Clark (known as Bill Clark) who had set up the Committee on Malnutrition in 1934 in Britain, and was later to be a consultant to the newly formed Food and Agriculture Organization. Clark was from an eminent medical family, and had wanted to be scientist, but had been wounded at the end of the First World War and became a prominent social scientist specialising in school feeding programs and the importance of nutrition. After commenting on his own performance and that of the previous speakers, Spate goes on (in his diary entry of June 25th 1945):

Old Le Gros Clark [he is 53 at the time], whom I remember from 10-12 years ago, spoke last. Blind and with only one hand, he just stood and spoke slowly and reflectively of Churchill's place in history—would it be Lloyd George's and had Winston possibly wondered in his heart whether he might not even now change. "Too great a man for the Tory party" with its tradition of disloyalty....And how Britain if it was to be great must keep in step" in this country of the common man.

It was wonderful and kept us entranced. The point is that this was really a piece of serious historical moralizing, NOT an electioneering speech, but reminiscences among friends. And it held this ordinary working class audience as nothing else did. Fat Webster [a fellow electioneer] entranced like a child at the play. I, feeling that this grave voice could go on forever, so beautiful the flowing and so intensely felt the thought. Nothing partisan, only the feeling of England's history. That held our audience---ordinary working people, whom people like Burden [conservative party candidate?] and his idiot supporter Dean despise, whatever they say in public.

It was inspiring. And so wonderful a close. And oh how marvellous it is to be back in the moment again, despite all the cynicisms and difficulties and wearinesses there will be. Caught the last train from Hammersmith (got a lift there) and home feeling so happy, I felt like swinging my stick at the lamp in the station. Bed after spam and sausage rolls, raspberries and brandy (and no tea and no supper!).

Diary June 25 1945 underlining in the original [inserts added]

This feeling for the 'common man' is a constant theme in Spate's notes. But his exhilaration at the thought of remaking British society after the war contrasts starkly with his gloomier reflections on the prospect of feeding the growing population in India. Spate's 1952 article in *The Listener* is titled "Can India's Millions be Fed?" The paper starts with a scientific assessment of how inadequate the grain ration just introduced in India will be (in calorific terms) to support moderate and heavy work. It goes on to review arguments for and against extending the area of agriculture via large scale irrigation and dam building projects to bring land into use, or attempting to intensify the production on already existing agricultural lands. Spate displays a keen understanding of peasant farmers' lives and constraints, an appreciation for how "farming systems of the delta, in their long evolution had become admirably adjusted to natural conditions" —and a scepticism regarding the promises of mass irrigation, more dams and intensification incentives. He writes of the Indian farmer (1952:567):

Much criticism of him is ill-founded: his light plough which only scratches the soil, for instance, is frequently abused by those who do not have to carry agricultural machinery on their shoulders, but it conserves soil moisture, and there is no doubt that in many areas deep ploughing would lead to the most disastrous soil erosion.

As Dan Clayton (2016) has also pointed out, the pressing issues of population growth and food scarcity were a major preoccupation of western tropical geographers. Spate was part of a cohort of scholars whose experience of poverty both in the UK and abroad was deeply affecting. In his Listener piece we catch glimpses of the internal debate he may well have been waging in his own mind. On one hand there is his great respect for social reformers like Bill Clark whose scientifically based welfare politics focused on nutrition and calories was being projected from Britain to the world, and whose desire for betterment was translated into large development projects that would produce more food via agricultural improvements. On the other, there is his experience of the dignity and difference of Asia's common men and women, and the well-honed ways they had of eeking out a precarious existence in difficult environmental circumstances. At various moments we get a glimpse of his keen eye for the mechanisms by which survival is negotiated and his impatience with external interferences that undermine these negotiations.

An example of this kind of observation comes in a footnote to a discussion of tribals in the section on "Religions and communities" in *India and Pakistan*. Spate writes that tribesmen in India have been exploited, degraded and relegated to "the lower stratum of Hindu society", unless they have been "rescued from that by a Christianity which too often consists largely in destroying all that remains of a once-integrated material and moral culture" (1967:161). His footnote reads:

For instance, by banning animal sacrifices among the Kachins of Burma; as the diviners proportioned the sacrifice to the known wealth of the individual, from a buffalo to a chicken, and as the victim was communally consumed, suppression of this custom cuts down the meat-ration and accentuates economic class-cleavage.

Here we see Spate aware of community economy transactions that maintain social habitats by enacting a form of redistribution---albeit still with some class differentiation.¹⁹

Another example of this dilemma comes from a chapter published in a 1968 volume honouring the memory of Dudley Stamp, entitled "Mandalay and Rangoon: The Old and the New in Burma". Spate had recently revisited Burma after an absence of over twenty years as part of an Australian delegation to a Regional Meeting of Colombo Plan nations. Concerned about the current economic crisis in Burma, he writes:

A big factor in this is certainly natural calamity: about one-seventh of the 1966-67 crop was lost by flood. More important was the failure of procurement policy—over-centralized offering no real inducement to the peasant to sell, failing to provide anything like enough consumer goods, so that in remoter areas at least there have been severe shortages. So the peasant black-marketed, grew less paddy and ate more himself, fed it to the ducks and improved his protein intake that way.

(Spate 1968:167)

Again Spate shows a sensitivity to the practical and wily wisdom of people who have survival techniques at hand, out of the view of state authorities. Yet his orientation towards 'development' and his training in Marxian political economy is still evident in the subsequent observation that "what is needed is a Lenin with the moral courage to admit

mistakes and to adopt a New Economic Policy, giving the NEP-man, the private trader, a chance to reconstitute the distributive system” (1968:167)

A reading for difference alerts me to these moments when a certain confidence in the scientific solutions-oriented modernism of the coming ‘Great Acceleration’ falters. It encourages me to dwell with Spate’s keen observations of the interdependence of ecological and economic/technological relations and sense the presence of a robust knowledge commons, on the cusp of being rendered tenuous by being classified primitive. It is these fragments that constitute the fabric of another kind of latent economic geography. But Spate, clearly aware of what would be lost by modern technologies of development, was unable to fully value the knowledge commons that had supported survival, nor articulate another way forward.

Certainly, like Isaiah Bowman, he was enmeshed in State projects—mapping out the India Pakistan border through the Punjab, for example—but he was also a keen appreciator of cultural and economic difference and, unlike Bowman, quite sceptical of mainstream ‘development,’ as his cheeky design for the banner of the United Nations Development Program illustrates—to be carried by the Director General of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East and a colour guard consisting of the UNESCO director general “and a minister’s favourite nephew” (See Figure 1).

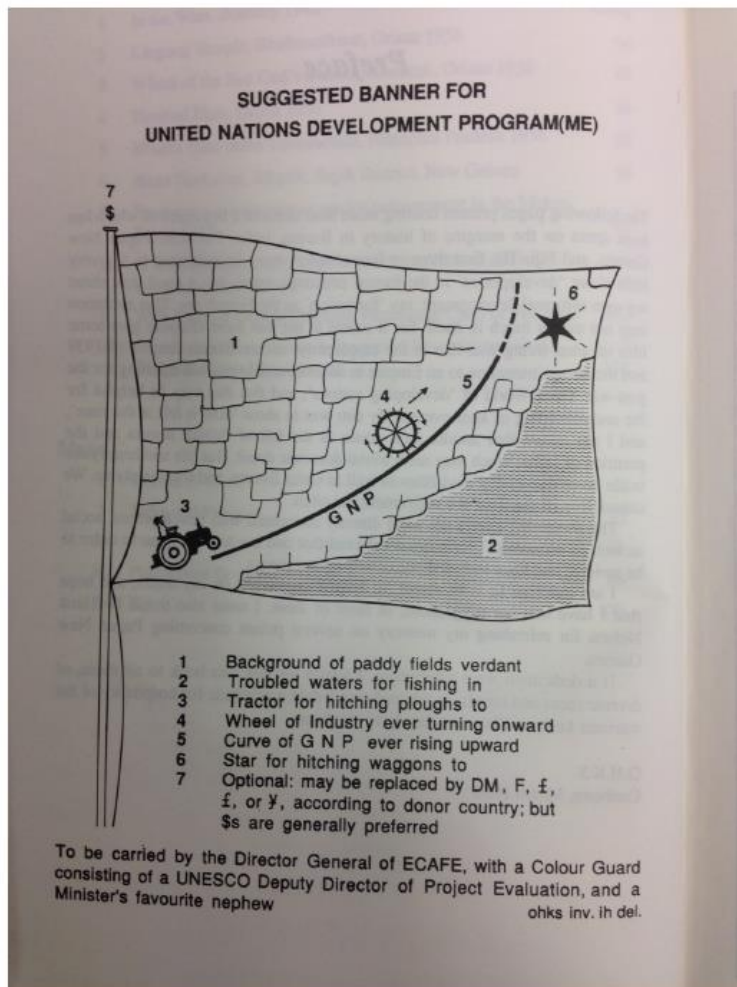


Figure 1 Spate's design of the UNDP flag

Figure 1 Spate's design for the flag of the United Nations Development Program
Source: Council

As for Geography, on his 1961 visit to Departments of Geography across the United States, Spate remarks on the vibrancy of the graduate programs that offered grounding in the literature and technical training which is so different to that of the largely "self-trained" British PhD experience. Invoking Neil Smith's millennial observations, he also comments on the funding of geographical research, noting "the munificent activities of the Office of Naval Research (ONR) and other defence agencies". He goes on:

The ONR, in particular, seems to subsidise anything: the ostensible objective is to build up a pool of trained researchers able to study anything needed in an emergency (whether anything will be left in the pool in the case of a real emergency, is not considered). However, it seems to me that what is needed is not so much people trained in the more or less mechanical assembly of data and (perhaps) able to draw a jejune general conclusion but critical minds; and what seems a rather uncritical shovelling of money ad lib is more likely to produce the former.

Spate, US Study leave report 1961 underlining in the original

I am still trying to fathom what to make of Spate and his tropical geographies. From what I now know I regret not having been more interested to find out more from him directly. I remember visiting ANU in 1980 to attend a workshop organized by Marxist geographer Dick Peet, a visiting fellow in the Department of Human Geography, on the internationalization of capital. By this time Spate had long abandoned Geography, seeing no role for his style of work within an increasingly quantitatively focused discipline. Having been Director of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies from 1967 to 1972 he refashioned himself as an historian, moved into the Department of Pacific History and began writing his *Pacific Since Magellan* trilogy. I'll never know if it was the politics of Establishment Geography or the rise of mechanically assembled data that caused the estrangement. Certainly he must have been amused by the earnestness with which 'radical geography' had begun to proclaim its newness.

Joe Spencer and reading for difference in China and the Philippines

Joseph Earle Spencer was an American geographer based at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) for much of his professional life. He was a consummate field geographer and his books on the Philippines and shifting cultivation provide a treasure trove when reading for economic difference. His personal archive consists mainly of typed letters to colleagues and index cards that record field observations. It is much less extensive than those of Oskar Spate but still affords a wealth of insights into another passionate and committed tropical geographer. Other insights into Spencer's life have been contributed by two of his PhD students (and co-authors early in their careers) Ron Horvath and Gerry Hale.²⁰

Joe Spencer's life also spanned the 20th century from 1907 to 1984. He was born in Missouri and spent his early childhood years on a farm in the San Fernando Valley of California. Perhaps stimulated by this experience, he sustained a lifelong interest in agriculture and land ownership. He studied as an undergraduate at what was to become UCLA, and was advised at the end of his degree to head to Berkeley to work with cultural geographer Carl Sauer, rather than to the more environmental determinist departments at Clark or Chicago, where he was offered fellowships. He enrolled at Berkeley for a PhD with Sauer but resisted offers to research in Latin America (where many of Sauer's students worked). He audited courses on Asia and completed field work for a PhD on culture, growth and change in the Mormon settled Middle Virgin River, Utah.

With everything but the dissertation written, he headed to China with this new wife in 1932, hoping to find a university job, but instead landed a position with the Chinese Government as an Assistant District Inspector for the Salt Revenue Administration in the Ministry of Finance. In China a salt tax had traditionally acted as a de facto poll tax and was a reliable source of government revenue. As Spencer writes:

Salt and iron became government monopolies, more or less, several hundred years before the opening of the Christian era, and salt has ever since provided the central authority, the province, the military feudal lord, the outlaw holder of a transportation route, the local political unit, and, of late, the national government with a steady source of revenue. (1935:353)

After the establishment of the Chinese Republic the new national government allowed foreign powers to reorganize the Salt Administration so that it could raise funds to repay Reorganization Loans to foreign creditors. Westerners were employed along with Chinese to staff the Salt Inspectorate. Spencer's work for the Salt Administration over 8 years took him "through rural areas, in small towns and put him in contact with small merchants and traders" as he inspected salt production sites and assessed local economic conditions.²¹ As he writes in a letter to Gunter Mahler, he also observed the rise of support for the communist party and the undermining of the powers of the Salt Administration:

In the early spring of 1937 (before the Sino-Japanese War began in July) I became aware that much of the rural peasantry of Szechwan (where I then was) was becoming strongly disenchanted with government in general (since their land reforms programs never got from paper plans [sic] into action) and were becoming imbued with the belief that the "People's Party" (in fact the Communist Party) were carrying out their plans in fact...As I put this together with other kinds of evidence, by about December 1937, I figured it chiefly just a matter of time before the deluge...I stuck it out until the late spring of 1940, for various reasons; I then quit my job because I no longer could maintain administrative and fiscal discipline in my district.

Letter to Gunter Mahler May 10 1972

Spencer returned to the US and taught as an instructor at UCLA before being "drafted" into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Washington as a civilian intelligence officer in 1942. In September 1943, he writes:

I was suddenly commissioned a Captain, [in the Army of the United States], and shipped off to India in charge of a detachment of uniformed intelligence officers, setting out an Office of Strategic Services layout ranging from Kandy Ceylon to Sian [Xi'an] north China. Spent the rest of the war commuting over the hump administering intelligence operations for my branch of OSS.

Letter to Ernie 1 September 1967 [inserts added]

I like to imagine that Joe and Oskar might have met in Kandy at some stage—though have not stumbled across confirmation of this in Spate's diaries. Certainly they were both engaged in supporting the joint Chinese, American and British campaign against the Japanese in northern Burma and South west China. The 'hump' that Spencer refers is the constellation of parallel mountain ranges between Assam where the American base was located and Yunnan Province where the Chinese forces were engaged in battle, stranded with supply routes to the east and west cut off. The mountains were so high that the planes literally had to fly up and over the hump, often in wild weather, with the result that casualties were extremely high.

As the war progressed Spencer moved from India to Kunming in China and then to Chungking (Nelson 1985). No doubt the knowledge he gained from 8 years of travelling around seven Salt Administration districts in central, western and south western China was highly valuable in this campaign. This field knowledge might have contributed to the bombardment of "his superiors with caustic letters detailing the folly of making regulations in Washington and expecting them to be applicable in wartime Asian posts" (Nelson 1985:597). After the war he had no interest in staying connected to the military. In a letter Spencer writes:

Once out of the army, in 1946, I refused to get involved again, despite all sorts of research commission inducements, so I have operated strictly as a civilian since then. Refused to have anything to do with the CIA in the postwar era. I ended the war a Lieut. Col. before VJ day, with no post-hostilities promotion to buck up the rank, but I just prefer my independence, independence within limitations, that is.

Letter to Ernie 1 September 1967.

In his own words, Spencer had become proficient in low level spoken Chinese, could read a Chinese newspaper and was “beginning to use documentary Chinese, but at the end of World War II, I decided China was going Communist and, with my name on a Chinese blacklist for my Nat. Govt. relationships, I gave up my Chinese” (letter to Jack Knetch 1980).

Spencer turned to focus on the Philippines, spending a sabbatical there in 1948 and continuing to visit over the next few decades. His major tropical geography texts were *Land and People in the Philippines: Geographic Problems in Rural Economy* published in 1952, *Asia East by South* in 1954, and *The Philippine Island World: a Physical, Cultural and Regional Geography* with Frederick Wernstedt in 1967. These are avowedly cultural geographies based on many months of on the ground field work. They provide a wealth of scattered glimpses into community economic practices—sometimes inflected with a paternalistic tinge, other times with documentary appreciation.

Like Spate, Spencer draws regular attention to the rate of population growth in the Philippines. In *Asia, East by South* he writes:

Too many areas within the Philippines already have too-high local densities of population consisting of rural peasantry carrying on an out-of-date pattern of life. Currently the population is increasing at one of the world’s high rates, at well over three percent per year, and the future projections look ominous for a society that still is basically agricultural. Principally a Roman Catholic country with no present incentives toward population restraint, the Philippines is a generally healthy environment in which the death rate is still declining as a young population increases its birth rate. (1954/1971:495)

Discussing the problems of the region, he worries that the “basic systems of agriculture have not changed adequately to accommodate greater populations” (49). Indeed, his cultural analysis leads him to conclude that aspects of the native economy are incompatible with the money economy:

Modern problems of rural tenancy, debt, and credit are the result of a growth in population and the shift to a money economy. They are the result of grafting occidental ideas and practices onto an Indonesian culture, and evolved during Spanish and American times. Features essentially sound in the original native economy were retained and have become harmful when translated into the patterns of money economy. (Spencer 1952:133)

Spencer’s 1966 book *Shifting Cultivation in South Eastern Asia* is a remarkable study of a form of agriculture that was repeatedly judged as primitive. Spencer is acutely aware of the cultural baggage associated with this judgement. In particular, he objects to the term “abandon” that is “applied to the shift of cropping from one plot to another” (1966:10):

The meaning of the word “abandon” given in most dictionaries is “give up with the intent of never again resuming one’s rights or interests in.” The great majority of shifting cultivators think in terms of the future group use of once-cropped land,

including use by descendants, and the return of land to the regenerative process is integrally a part of the developed concept of shifting cultivation. (1966:10)

His openness to economic rationalities other than those of the short term individual maximizer is notable. In this he displays an independence of thinking informed by keen observation that fuels a scepticism towards the mainstream economic orthodoxies of the times.

A particular interchange in the 1970s with Robert Huke, a younger colleague, touches on his distrust of the kinds of 'solutions' for feeding the starving millions that Spate referred to in his 1952 Listener piece and gives a sense of Spencer as a thinker and a personality. Robert Huke was associated with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) at Los Baños in the Philippines where the green revolution rice strains that were to feed Asia were developed and trialled during the 1960s. Huke writes with a puzzle he wants Spencer to shed light on:

As a geographer with a good deal of experience among peasant farmers in Asia I am sure you have some good ideas concerning the question. What do you think accounts for the failure of peasant farmers to achieve high yields? We have access to excellent data on communications and information flow, fine data on costs and prices, on availability of fertilizers and seed and on yield obtained from a wide net of test plots. But we have no good answers. What has been overlooked? Perhaps the secret lies in your article on tenurial history—which I enjoyed and for which I thank you.

(letter from Robert Huke January 2 1979)

Spencer replies not without some exasperation:

You ask: What accounts for "...the failure of peasant farmers to achieve high yield" of rice, in your case. Well, let me ask you back: What would happen to the extra yield achieved? That is, who gets it? Don't think me naïve at this point, when I ask: What GUARANTEE is there that the peasant farmer will receive the extra return to be gained by TAKING A CHANCE on a pattern of change when there are so many NONPEASANT elements involved? If a peasant farmer KNOWS he will get the return, he will work for it; if there is a CHANCE that he will get fleeced of the extra return, then why should he take a RISK?

He goes on...

For 400 years the peasantry of the Philippines have been urged to produce more, and for 400 years they have been fleeced by those who did the urging. The peasant farmer knows the long history of such things, and it is ingrained reaction not to take a chance on something DIFFERENT merely on the promises of OUTSIDERS. The Spanish in Laguna Province started urging the peasant farmers to produce for them in the 16th century, late, and someone has been urging them to do that ever since. What is so DIFFERENT about the IRRI gang of outsiders now urging them to produce more? I mean no insult to the IRRI in this, but in terms of the traditional village peasant farmer, the IRRI people are outsiders—from the "government" and the rich landowners and the government have always combined to fleece the rural peasant by outsiders—that is the whole history of the peasantry: being pressured by outsiders of some kind, with the results then taken away from them.

You asked if I had any ideas on the subject. Well, I guess I have demonstrated that not only do I have some ideas, but I have a pretty strong conviction about the problem.

I suspect that IRRI has a model of an Economic man stuck somewhere around in the Los Banos HQ, and thinks every tao (person in Tagalog) works like that model.

Hell—enough of this.

(Spencer letter to Huke March 14 1979 emphasis in the original)

Spencer's grasp of the wider political economy and cultural politics of power is a sophisticated one—and contrasts starkly with the abstracted modelling expectations of the IRRI scientists and economists. Above all his work displays a keen awareness of the problems facing the common farmer. He pays close attention to flows of surplus and the coerced appropriation of agricultural output and distribution. But this sensitivity to a distributional politics did not surface as much in his published work. To what extent the climate of repression in America during the McCarthy period and the Cold War affected what he published is unclear.²²

In later life Spencer described himself to an enquiring graduate student as follows:

I consider myself a cultural geographer first of all, with varied regional and topical interests. In research I am most at home in agricultural subjects, but I am not really enthralled by what one might call “contemporary problems in feeding the world.”

Letter to Gunter Maher May 10 1972

The passion with which he proclaimed his identity as a cultural geographer perhaps reflects internal struggles around disciplinary boundaries and orientations at the time. The qualification he makes indicates the distance he was keen to keep from the kind of development agenda that was rampantly transforming the Asia he knew. He certainly turned his hand to policy recommendations as in the final chapter “The Elements of a Program” of *Land and People in the Philippines* (1952). What is remarkable is how many of these involved bottom up strategies involving “cooperatives” and distributions to the have nots. For example, on the topic of land he writes:

A share of the peasant farm population should remain where it is, but a large number of the tenant farmers must move to other reserve areas where they can become landowners; and the landlord equity within the central plain must be liquidated in some fair and peaceful manner. (1952:240).

While his practical observations served to fuel a keen sense of the injustices around land tenure in the Philippines, these insights and commitments to the common man did not lead to direct support for the radical movements in Geography that his students were to forge. In a letter to Fraser Hart in 1976 he writes:

I have no tendencies, inborn or indoctrinated, to becoming a forecaster of doom. I am not out to join the viewpoint of the radical economists-anthropologists-geographers who see trouble in the world today as derived from “economic dependency” in the Third World as caused by Capitalistic exploitation of the world system. The later have constructed a fairly impressive structure of data, theory, and blame-placing. I am just looking at control over land in the long term and comparative patterns. I'd be a landowner if I could be, at present—but I guess it's fair to say that I would not farm it myself anymore, even though my heart has remained in the soil for all of my academic career.

Letter to Fraser Hart 22 May, 1976

Land ownership was dear to Spencer's heart in both scholarly and personal terms. I am speculating here, but perhaps it was this love of land that distanced him from a radical Marxist agenda in which private property relations were seen to be at the root of all evil.

Conclusion

As Neil Smith noted, there is more than one way to redraw the map of a global world. Maps are performative—they envision worlds and direct navigation. If we are to take seriously the need to radically change the way we are inhabiting this planetary home, then different maps of the world are needed. In my quest to draw an(other) map of Monsoon Asia I turned to Joe Spencer and Oskar Spate to see if I could, through their eyes, see community economic practices that have been left under-examined or dismissed as unimportant. I wanted to find out how did a knowledge commons become an absence? I 'met' two thoughtful scholars and keen observers of the complexity of the worlds they inhabited. Reading their texts for economic difference I found an ambivalence towards the inevitability of a modern (capitalist) development trajectory and useful observations about resilience practices.

This preliminary exercise has not afforded enough observations to actually produce a map—but there is material that is encouraging present researchers to look harder for community economic practices, ones that might be repurposed or deployed to strengthen resilience in the face of climate uncertainty and increasing inequality. The recording of contemporary diverse practices of economic resilience in Monsoon Asia is being undertaken by a hybrid collective of scholars and practitioners across the region (Gibson et al 2018).²³ We are documenting the transactions and relationships that are still undertaken across a variety of sites in an attempt to construct a non-capitalocentric economic geography that highlights common practices and their habitat maintaining capacities in Monsoon Asia.

The Anthropocene is, as Kathryn Yusoff (2017) has argued, “an epoch deprived of its future”. No longer is 'Man' the agent of history and planetary change, as has been the case since the beginning of this new geological era: planetary geophysical forces are now in the driver's seat and questions about how to live with this reality are increasingly pressing. In this paper I have read the work of cultural geographers Spate and Spencer, situated as it was within the first decades of The Great Acceleration, against the grain of dominant beliefs about population growth and modernization. Spate and Spencer observed firsthand the field of destruction that is the Anthropocene's past—the widening separation of the economy from the environment, the massive investment in Green Revolution technologies and ratcheting up of the modernization agenda, the de-legitimation of dynamic practices of ecological and economic interdependence. I have sought out glimmers of what might be a prelude to what comes beyond the Anthropocene when the hubris of domination has quietened and 'living with' has taken on a new form.²⁴

As with Spencer and Spate, and with many of my more recently passed on colleagues and friends, my conversation with Neil is ongoing. I think there are ways of generating a different map of Monsoon Asia, not a map of a triumphal new world order, nor a map of a dystopian landscape of exploitation and extraction, but a map that pieces together fragments of active contemporary practices, faintly remembered knowledges and

documentary gleanings. This is a map of community economies and ecologies that might help to perform other more equitable worlds and navigate the treacherous rising waters of climate change.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Department of Geography at St Andrews University and especially Dan Clayton for the invitation to present the 2016 Neil Smith lecture. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their helpful suggestions and corrections and to the Antipode editors for their patience. I am grateful for the input from various audiences who heard versions of this paper—in particular members of the Community Economies Research Network and the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. I acknowledge the financial support of an Australian Research Council Grant DP 150102285 which allowed me to conduct field work and archival research that contributed to this paper and the on-going collaborative input of fellow researchers Ann Hill and Lisa Law. All interpretations and errors are mine.

References

- Benjamin W (2006) On the concept of history. In H Eiland and M J Jennings (eds) *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 4 1939-40* translated by E. Jephcott and others (pp 389-399). Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
- Bowd G and Clayton D (2003) Fieldwork and tropicality in French Indochina: Reflections on Pierre Gourou's *Les Payans Du Delta Tonkinois, 1936*. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24(2):147-168
- Bowd G and Clayton D (2005) Tropicality, orientalism and French colonialism in Indochina: the work of Pierre Gourou, 1927-1982. *French Historical Studies* 28(2):297–327
- Clayton D (2013) Militant tropicality: War, revolution and the reconfiguration of 'the tropics' c.1940-1975. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38(1):180-192
- Clayton D (2016) Decolonization and the Problem of Geographical Order. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews
- Dobby E H G (1961) *Monsoon Asia*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books
- Driver F and Yeoh B S A (2000) Constructing the tropics: introduction. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21(1):1-5
- Forbes D K (1984) *The Geography of Underdevelopment: A Critical Survey*. London: Croom Helm
- Gibson K, Hill A and Law L (2018) Community economies in Southeast Asia: a hidden economic geography. In A Macgregor, L Law and F Miller (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Development* (pp 131-141) London: Routledge
- Gibson K, Astuti R, Carnegie M, Chalernphon A, Dombroski K, Haryani A A R, Hill A, Kehi B, Law L, Lyne I, McGregor A, McKinnon K, McWilliam A, Miller F, Ngin C, Occeña-Gutierrez D, Palmer L, Placino P, Rampengan M, Than W L L, Wianti N I, Wright S, and the Seeds of Resilience Research Collective (2018) Community economies in Monsoon Asia: Keywords and key reflections. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 59(1):3-16
- Gibson-Graham J K (2008) Diverse economies: Performative practices for 'other worlds'. *Progress in Human Geography* 32(5):613-632

- Gibson-Graham J K (2014) Rethinking the economy with thick description and weak theory. *Current Anthropology* 55(S9 August): S147-S153
- Gibson-Graham J K (2016) 'After' Area Studies?: Place-based knowledge for our time. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34(5):799-806
- Gibson-Graham J K (2020) Reading for economic difference. In J K Gibson-Graham and K Dombroski (eds) *The Handbook of Diverse Economies* Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing (forthcoming)
- Gibson-Graham J K and Dombroski K (2020) Eds *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing (forthcoming)
- Gibson-Graham J K, Hill A and Law L (2016) Re-embedding economies in ecologies: Resilience building in more than human communities. *Building Research Information* 44(7):703-736
- Haraway D (2015) Anthropocene, Capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin. *Environmental Humanities*, 6:159-165
- Hollnsteiner M (1961) Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines. *Philippine Studies* 9(3): 387-413
- International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (2015)
<http://www.igbp.net/news/pressreleases/pressreleases/planetarydashboardshowsgreataccelerationinhumanactivitysince1950.5.950c2fa1495db7081eb42.html>
 (accessed 16/12/2018)
- Lahiri-Dutt K (2019) 'Academic War' over human geography: death of human geography at the Australian National University. *Antipode* 51 (3):858-877
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/anti.12496>
- Nelson H J (1985) *J. E. Spencer, 1907–1984*. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75(4): 595-603
- Plumwood V (2007) A review of Deborah Bird Rose's *Reports from a wild country: Ethics of decolonisation*. *Australian Humanities Review* 42:1–4
- Power M (2003) Geographers and 'the Tropics'. In M Power (ed) *Rethinking Development Geographies* (pp 45–70) London: Routledge
- Power M and Sidaway J (2004) The degeneration of tropical geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94(3):585–601
- Rimmer P J (2000) Spate, Oskar Hermann Christian (1911–2000). *Obituaries Australia* Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University
<http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/spate-oskar-hermann-khristian-927/text928>
- Robbins P and Smith SH (2016) Baby bust: Towards political demography. *Progress in Human Geography* 41(2):199-219
- Santos B de Sousa (2004) The WSF: toward a counter-hegemonic globalization. In J Sen, A Anand, A Escobar and P Waterman (eds) *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires* (pp 235-245). New Delhi: The Viveka Foundation.
- Sidaway, J (2013) Geography, globalization and the problematic of area studies. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(4):984-1002
- Sidaway J D, Ho E L, Rigg J D and Woon C Y (2016) Area studies and geography: trajectories and manifesto. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34(5):777-790
- Smith N (1984) *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

- Smith N (1987) 'Academic War Over the Field of Geography': the elimination of geography at Harvard, 1947-1951. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77(2):155-172
- Smith N (2003) *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press
- Spate O H K (1941) Beginnings of industrialisation in Burma. *Economic Geography* 17(1):75-92
- Spate O H K (1952) Can India's Millions Be Fed? *The Listener* 12 April:567-568
- Spate O H K (1954) *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography*. Bungay, Great Britain: The Chaucer Press
- Spate O H K and Learmonth A M (1967) *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography* Third edition. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.
- Spate O H K (1968) Mandalay and Rangoon: The old and the new in Burma. In C Embleton (ed) *Land Use and Resources: Studies in Applied Geography A Memorial Volume to Dudley Stamp* (pp 155-168). London: Institute of British Geographers Special Publication No 1
- Spate O H K and Australian National University 1934 (no date) *Papers of Oskar Spate, 1934-1989*. Canberra: National Library of Australia Archives
- Spate O H K 1992 Transcript of recorded interview with Dr Joseph Powell, 13 February. Canberra: National Library of Australia
- Spencer J E (1935) Salt in China. *The Geographical Review* 25(3):353-366
- Spencer J E (1952) *Land and People in the Philippines: Geographic Problems in Rural Economy*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Spencer J E (1966) *Shifting Cultivation in Southeastern Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Spencer J E with Wernstedt R (1967) *The Philippines Island World: a Physical, Cultural and Regional Geography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Spencer J E and Thomas W L (1971) *Asia, East by South* second edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons
- Steffan W, Broadbate W, Deutsch L, Gaffney O and Ludwig C (2015) The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration. *The Anthropocene Review* 2(1):81-98
- The Bamboo Bridge* (2019) J F Salazar (Director) and K Gibson (Executive Producer) Sydney: Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University
- Waters C, Zalasiewicz J, Summerhayes C, Barnosky A, Poirier C, Galuszka A, Cearreta A, Edgeworth M, Ellis E, Ellis M, Jeandel C, Leinfelder R, McNeill J, Richter D, Steffen W, Syvitski J, Vidas D, Wagemann M, Williams M, Zhisheng A, Grinevald J, Odada E, Oreskes N and Wolfe A (2016) The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene. *Science* 351(6269): 137-147

¹ Thanks to Dan Clayton for the invitation to present this lecture to, as it turned out, a somewhat shell-shocked audience on November 9th 2016 a few hours after Trump's US presidential election success had been announced.

² Neil's extensive engagement with Bowman culminated in a masterful 557 page biography, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (2002). My engagement with Spate and Spencer is limited to the discussion that follows.

³ I agree with Kathryn Yusoff (2017) that the political meanings attached to the naming of the Anthropocene are of concern. She points, for example, to the erasure of colonial violence and specific responsibility when a planetary collective human subjectivity or politics of Earth Systems governance are invoked. My hope is that this reading of The Great Acceleration for difference contributes to the concept of communism “as a form of crisscrossing exposure” that she elaborates (2017:269).

⁴ Robbins and Smith (2016) present a related project that takes seriously the temporality and situatedness of thinking about economic development. They point to how rapid population growth first in Europe and then in Asia, and what appeared to be the unlimited growth of labour resources, inspired the grounding assumption within 19th and 20th century theories of economic development of constant and absolute growth (2016:4-5).

⁵ I get the feeling that the very different status of Geography in the US versus Britain always troubled Neil—in Britain there was some kind of esteem attached to the discipline—despite its pragmatic bent—whereas in the US it was barely recognized as an *academic* discipline for decades. The Bowman analysis goes some way to explaining this paradoxical phenomenon of two Empires with such a reliance on geographical power and yet such schizoid relations to geographical knowledge and its institutional knowledge holders.

⁶ My choice of Spate and Spencer is based on somewhat serendipitous encounters with these two scholars—institutionally (in the case of Spate who established the Department of Geography at the Australian National University where I once worked) and in the field (in the case of Spencer whose work in the Philippines I have drawn on in my own field work in that country).

⁷ See *The Handbook of Diverse Economies* edited by J.K. Gibson-Graham and Kelly Dombroski for multiple examples of each of these diverse economic practices.

⁸ Or in Herbertson’s 1905 designation of Major Natural Regions, ‘East tropical lands (Monsoon type)’ (Sidaway et al 2016:778).

⁹ For more on this second strategy see Gibson, Law and Hill 2018 and Gibson et al 2018.

¹⁰ Here I join a small cohort of cultural geographers who are interested in delving into these area studies texts and interrogating them and their authors for what they might reveal about the genealogy of current ideas (Driver and Yeoh, 2000; Power, 2003; Power and Sidaway, 2004; Bowd and Clayton, 2003, 2005; Clayton 2013, 2016).

¹¹ Australian Research Council Discovery Project 150102285 “Strengthening Economic Resilience in Monsoon Asia” conducted with colleagues Ann Hill (University of Canberra) and Lisa Law (James Cook University). As I feel the call to take more notice of weather and its role in material living assemblages, I am happy to retain the descriptor Monsoon Asia, especially as within its bounds are places where I have conducted or supervised field work—the Philippines, Indonesia, South West China, PNG, Korea, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand and East Timor.

¹² For example, the texts written by Spate and Spencer are still on the reading lists in India and the Philippines (Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, personal communication, and my own experience at the Department of Geography, University of the Philippines).

¹³ As James Sidaway (2013) points out Area Studies was by no means restricted to Geography but was a venture that many academic disciplines were involved in as the colonial era gave way to the cold war era.

¹⁴ It should be noted that the original research plan, that had to be curtailed for budgetary reasons, was to conduct a more extensive gleaning exercise drawing on the work of many more tropical geographers of Asia. The decision to focus only on geographers and not

extend the analysis to the work of other disciplines was made primarily in order to limit scope. A larger project of this type would benefit from the in depth place-based research of anthropologists, political scientists and sociologists.

¹⁵ Archival research was conducted on the personal papers of O.H.K. Spate in the National Library of Australia November 2016 and February 2017 and at the Menzies Library at the Australian National University, and of J.E. Spencer at the University of California Los Angeles Library in March 2016.

¹⁶ I just missed meeting Oskar Spate in Canberra where he died in 2000. I went to a small memorial for him at the Australian National University in the year after I moved to Canberra to ANU and went on to become the last Professor and Head of the Department of Human Geography before it was closed down in 2009 for cost cutting reasons (see Lahiri-Dutt 2019).

¹⁷ “Magisterial” is Peter Rimmer’s descriptor in his Obituary for Oskar Spate (2000)

¹⁸ According to text in the Exhibition at the Tengchong War Museum.

¹⁹ I note that in the Philippines where Christianity was introduced by the Spanish over many centuries this practice of sacrifice and redistribution was re-purposed as the yearly fiesta—a celebration of excess and surplus distribution fully sanctioned by the Catholic Church.

²⁰ Interviews with Ron Horvath on 22/05/2017 and Gerry Hale on 15/08/2017.

²¹ Quote from letter to Gunter Mahler, May 10 1972.

²² According to Gerry Hale who was a graduate student supervised by Spencer in the late 1950s and participated in the coffee room discussions that were held three times a day, he did not approve of the McCarthy repression and, perhaps because of his time in military intelligence, did not express opinions about colleagues and peers (Personal communication 15 August 2017).

²³ This paper is the outcome of a collaborative venture that aspires to change the way that Anglo geographic scholarship engages with Asia. See also

<https://communityeconomiasia.wordpress.com/>

²⁴ Living with natural forces is the theme of a documentary film I have collaborated in making. *The Bamboo Bridge* tells the story of a 1.5 kilometer bamboo bridge across the Mekong River in Cambodia that has been built and dismantled every year as the waters recede and then rise for more than half a century. My interest in this feat of vernacular engineering and the community economy that it brings into being was provoked by two clipped out pictures in Joe Spencer’s archive from the National Geographic Magazine—one was of a massive bamboo water wheel in Szechwan, the other a huge bamboo windmill in Southern China. They, and the bridge, bring to visibility the productivity of human-bamboo interdependence.