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Geopolitics at the margins? Reconsidering genealogies of critical geopolitics[☆]

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A B S T R A C T

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Critical geopolitics has become one of the most vibrant parts of political geography. However it remains a particularly western way of knowing which has been much less attentive to other traditions of thinking. This paper engages with Pan-Africanism, and specifically the vision of the architect of post-colonial Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, to explore this overlooked contribution to critical engagements with geopolitics. Pan-Africanism sought to forge alternative post-colonial worlds to the binary geopolitics of the Cold War and the geopolitical economy of neo-colonialism. The academic division of labour has meant that these ideas have been consigned to African studies rather than being drawn into wider debates around the definitions of key disciplinary concepts. However Nyerere's continental thinking can be seen as a form of geopolitical imagination that challenges dominant neo-realist projections, and which still has much to offer contemporary political geography.

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We, the people of Tanganyika, would like to light a candle and put it on the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, which would shine beyond our borders, giving hope where there was despair, love where there was hate and dignity where before there was only humiliation. *President Julius K. Nyerere on Tanganyika's independence, 1961.*

Critical geopolitics has become one of the most vibrant parts of political geography since the concept was first introduced by Gearoid Ó Tuathail in the late 1980s. From its initial concern with the scripting of global geographical political relations in the formal realms of statecraft, critical geopolitics has undergone a number of revisions and reworkings; broadening from the rarefied workings of statecraft to the ways in which hegemonic geopolitical narratives are established in wider society, and shifting from a focus on the statements of (male) political elites to the embodied experiences of scalar politics by a range of people and publics.

However, through all of this, and although not the initial intention,¹ critical geopolitics remains a particularly western way of knowing which has been much less attentive to other traditions of thinking through international politics and the role of the nation and citizen within these narratives. I wish to return to the 1960s

and 1970s and to the discourses and practices of Pan-Africanism which sought to forge alternative post-colonial worlds to the binary geopolitics of the Cold War and the geopolitical economy of neo-colonialism – what I have referred to elsewhere as “subaltern geopolitics” (Sharp, 2011b, 2011c). Specifically, I want to discuss the geopolitical vision of the architect of post-colonial Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, who, as the opening quote suggests, offered a geopolitical vision of hope and inclusion, one that recognised shared precarity rather than sought to shut out difference. The geopolitics of the academic division of labour, so brilliantly explained by Pletsch (1981), has meant that Nyerere's ideas have been consigned to African studies rather than being drawn into wider debates around the definitions of key disciplinary concepts. I suggest that Nyerere's contribution to geopolitical thinking is significant; his continental thinking is a form of geopolitical imagination that challenges dominant neo-realist projections. While the optimism of the heyday of Pan-Africanism might have dissipated in the face of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes, such visions may still have much to offer contemporary political geography.

Genealogies of critical geopolitics

The study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialisation of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992: 192).

In an editorial in *Geopolitics* in 2010, Power quotes Perry's summary of the state of political geography 23 years earlier as

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still being largely relevant to the subdiscipline today: “Anglo-American political geography poses and pursues a limited and impoverished version of the discipline, largely ignoring the political concerns of four fifths of humankind” (Perry, 1987, quoted in Power, 2010: 433). Despite the global gaze of political geography, it is still, in many ways, subject to “parochial forms of theorising” (Robinson, 2003). Although, of course, there is much political geography based outside the west (see, for example, Sidaway & Simon, 1993; Slater, 2004), Darby’s (2004: 6) critique of the core concepts in international relations theory is equally relevant here: the “decolonisation of the international has barely begun” (see also Tickner, 2003). More specifically, James Tyner has argued that “Our geographies, and especially our political geographies, remain largely distant from non-European theorists and theories. Our texts on nationalism and identities, in particular, are woefully ignorant of Pan-African nationalism and other African diasporic movements” (Tyner, 2004: 343; see also Gilmore, 2008).

Slater (1998), following Chakrabarty’s (1992) insistence of the need to “provincialise Europe”, argues that it is necessary to go beyond an image of the Third World as a conceptually empty space to be filled with western knowledge, on the one hand, and as a place full of resistance to western ways and ‘indigenous knowledge’ on the other. Third World² scholars should be regarded as theorists in their own right, not only offering reflection on local conditions (see also Mignolo, 2002; Pletsch, 1981). Despite their suggestion of universalism, conventional western accounts of cosmopolitanism have tended to marginalise other expressions of transnational connection. Expanding on this point, Featherstone (2007: 434) outlines a subaltern cosmopolitanism which “emphasizes the multiple geographies through which different forms of cosmopolitanism are constituted [which...] permits a focus on the diverse forms of political identity and agency constituted through different forms of cosmopolitanism”. While his work focuses on rather more “unruly patterns of flows”, his description is also apposite for challenges such as Pan-Africanism which he suggests “evokes types of political activity that have contested dominant forms of globalization, but have eschewed, challenged or exceeded bounded forms of the local” (Featherstone, 2007: 435, 2012; see also Slater, 1998). The importance of recovering these alternative networks of global connection is to challenge even the most critical forms of cosmopolitanism in which, “it is the privileged and hospitable ‘we’ that extends the invitation to liberal planetary consciousness when cosmopolitanism is normalised as universality; cosmopolitanism itself becomes a ‘god trick’” (Jazeel, 2011: 84). The challenge is to recognise difference without rendering it purely as exotic.

Similar discussions have also been taking place in international relations theory, which has been characterised as equally struggling to think past Western IR, to paraphrase Bilgin (2008; see also Guillaume, 2007). Among the challenges to classical realism is Mohammed Ayoob’s project of proposing a “subaltern realism” which highlights the dominance of subalterity: “It is the common experience of all human societies that these are the elements that constitute the large majority of any members of any social system” (Ayoob, 2002: 40–41). Certainly in the post-colonial era, the vast majority of violent conflicts have taken place in the territory of subaltern states, even when dominant states have been involved in, or indeed have been the driving force behind, conflict. Ayoob’s (2010: 129) perspective offers a different set of principles for international relations; as he puts it, the “tension between the hegemonic and subaltern perspectives of international order can be summarised in the following fashion: While the former emphasizes order among states and justice within them, the latter stresses order within states and justice among them”.

Ayoob’s realism is one which acknowledges the interdependency of international and domestic politics, but insists that,

despite the importance of other scales of political activity and identity, the state is still the preeminent actor, and thus the goal for Third World societies; after all, Third World societies came into post-colonial being as states – however false their boundaries – and have had to struggle for independence. Thus, subaltern realism is a critique of conventional realism which considers only the experiences of the Great Powers as having relevance to the unfolding of world events. Realist champion Kenneth Waltz famously argued that ‘Denmark does not matter’. Such accounts serve to perpetuate the western-centrism of IR theory as they are complicit in hiding the myriad ways in which international politics is made and remade. The alternative is not to suggest that Denmark – and Tanzania – always matter in and of themselves, but is instead to challenge the ontological basis of much IR and geopolitical theory. John Agnew (2007) has argued that IR has been dominated by US and European understandings of the state and world-economy and so has argued for the need for attention to be given to the geography of knowledge in international politics:

Such geographies, however, are not ends in themselves. The point is to understand the ontological bases of knowing from perspectives that do not either privilege a singular history of knowledge associated with a specific world region (a typical relativism) or presume conceptions of knowledge that implicitly or explicitly assume their own self-evident universality (a typical positivism) (Agnew, 2007: 139).

Instead, Agnew (2007: 146) highlights the fact that “knowledge is made as it circulates; it is never made completely in one place and then simply consumed as is elsewhere”.

Recognising these tensions, Ayoob’s concept of “subaltern realism” presents an apparently oxymoronic pairing of terms, tying together a position of structural weakness with a dominant way of seeing, ordering and organising the world and it is this tension that I wish to bring to ‘subaltern geopolitics’ too. My intention is not to appropriate ‘subaltern’ nor, in some grand gesture, to claim to offer up some conceptual space for the term. Rather, by combining the notions of subaltern – a presence relegated to the lower orders – and geopolitics – a dominant form of knowledge that has attempted to order and regulate – I seek to present a term with the same kinds of internal tensions and contradictions intended by “critical geopolitics” (but perhaps now forgotten given the ubiquity of the term (see also Dalby, 2010)). Subaltern geopolitics aims to draw out a complex and entangled geographical imagination which recognises that western thought has always been – and must always be – so much more marked by its apparent other than has been recognised, just as the history of contact and exchange means that the idea of an unchanging other presence is an equal fiction. However, so much of the ‘subaltern’ has been silenced in global discourse, where only the concerns of the great states are noted. So, subaltern geopolitics is an attempt to write against a logic which is always and everywhere tending to write a ‘universal,’ to see instead how things might look otherwise if we admitted that Denmark *did* matter (to return to the famous example), that women matter, that during the Cold War, non-aligned states mattered, that various imaginations of Pan-Africanism matter. It is not, then, an argument for the inherent value of any one projection but instead for the need for a political geography that is open and engaging with a number of voices.

While studying political resistance and opposition to statecraft is clearly important, it is necessary also to consider the ongoing struggle over the role of the state as this formal politics must not get completely overlooked as critical scholarship looks to ‘alternative’ spaces of politics. The postcolonial grounding of subaltern geopolitics offers a challenge to those accounts which simply reject the state and formal politics, recognising the ongoing lived importance of such ‘scales’ while simultaneously highlighting their

social and spatial construction. This then represents a post-colonial sensibility structured around the figure of the hybrid (Bhabha, 1994), and especially the concept of ‘mimicry,’ which is defined through strategy, subversion and survival; it “may be a way of ‘doing’ world politics in a seemingly ‘similar’ yet unexpectedly ‘different’ way” (Bilgin, 2008: 6). Mimicry does not suggest the Other wishing to become the same, or that it is radically different, but instead destabilises these binarised categories. It sets a different path from anti-geopolitics which “represents an assertion of permanent independence from the state *whoever is in power*” (Routledge, 1998: 245, emphasis in original).

Thus, unlike anti-geopolitics, subaltern geopolitics does not position its subjects outside of the state and associated institutions. It shares the “utopian” instincts of progressive geopolitics (Kearns, 2008, 2009) but with a desire to keep open to a range of voices what such utopias might be (Sharp, 2011a). It is a positioning that recognises the possibility that political identities can be established through geographical representations that are neither fully ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ (hooks, 1990), and thus seeks a model of political subjectivity to challenge that perpetuated by dominant western geopolitics that does not rely on otherness (see, for example, the contributions to the special issue of *Geoforum* on Subaltern Geopolitics: Harker, 2011; Koopman, 2011; Sharp, 2011b, 2011c; Smith, 2011; Woon, 2011). Hence, in my use of the term ‘subaltern’ I want to return to the original military meaning of this as “a lower rank” (Childs & Williams, 1997: 333)— neither the commander, nor outside of the ranks — an interpretation that I think finds similarities with Ayoub. This recognises the entangled nature of global political relations but in such a way that does not deny “the asymmetry of power relations and the reproduction of subordinating modes of representation” (Sharp, Routledge, Philo, & Paddison, 2000; Slater, 2004: 194). A revisiting of post-colonial Tanzania is illustrative of such subaltern geopolitics.

Post-colonial Tanzania: *Binadamu wote ni ndugu zangu, na Afrika ni moja* (all people are brethren and Africa is one)

From the rubble of World War II rose a bipolar Cold War that threatened the existence of humanity. Hair-triggers on nuclear weapons alongside heated debates on poverty, inequality, and freedom threatened even those who did not live under the U.S. or Soviet umbrellas [...] Thrown between these two major formations the darker nations amassed as the Third World [...] Through the UN], aspects other than political equality came to the fore: the Third World project included a demand for the redistribution of the world’s resources, a more dignified rate of return for the labor power of their people, and a shared acknowledgement of the heritage of science, technology, and culture (Prashad, 2007: xv–xvii).

Julius Nyerere led Tanganyika to independence from Britain in 1961, with Tanzania being created from the union with Zanzibar in 1964. Although initially seen as close to the west (and especially Britain) because of the non-violent nature of the independence movement and the respect Nyerere attained internationally as a statesman, Nyerere was clear that Tanzania would avoid either of the Cold War blocs and was a prominent advocate of both Pan-Africanism and the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1967, the ruling party introduced the Arusha Declaration which promoted equality, self-reliance, ‘traditional’ African communal values, and the virtues of education and hard work. Paralleling Fanon’s (1963) warning of the “pitfalls of national consciousness” shaping newly-independent African states, the Arusha Declaration was a stand against the emerging indigenous elite, the *wabenzi*.³ The state would have ownership of the means of production while citizens were to have

“freedom of expression, of movement, of religious belief, and of association.” This was a declaration for Tanzania but was outward looking, stating also that Tanzania would seek liberation and unity for all of Africa — and Tanzania maintained this commitment in its subsequent status as a front line state in the fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

This placed the country at the forefront of Pan-Africanism, as a place which promised a genuinely new way of organising society, and a beacon for radical thinkers and activists from around the world. Nyerere’s thinking beyond colonial-imposed boundaries and towards a continental geopolitical imagination promised Africa a presence and voice on the new world stage. Many have commented on the importance of Tanzania, especially after the Arusha Declaration, in the geopolitical imagination of Pan-Africanism, giving it a “magnetic appeal to the Black World [...] Tanzania captured their hopes, it set fire to their imagination for its uncompromising commitment to human dignity, regardless of skin color” (Kariuki, 1979: 200). On visiting the country, US activist Angela Davis “proclaimed that Tanzania was an inspiration” (Kariuki, 1979: 205) while CLR James famously claimed that the Arusha Declaration was “the highest stage of resistance ever reached by revolting blacks”.

Initially Tanzania experienced impressive improvements in life expectancy and achieved nearly universal literacy (rising from a figure of around 15% at independence), although this was in large part the result of significant foreign aid. With the significant exception of the events leading to the union of Tanganyika with Zanzibar in 1964 (see, for example, Mwakikagile, 2008; Shivji, 2008), post-colonial Tanzania has been relatively peaceful, without the intertribal conflicts characteristic of other states in the region. Nyerere and subsequent presidents stood down at the end of their terms in office, and, again unusually in the region, continued to live in the country; there have been no presidential assassinations in Tanzania.

However Nyerere’s economic policies have been less successful. Commentators have linked this to a combination of, on the one hand, structural changes in the global economy and, on the other, the failure of collective socialism — with the exact combination of reasoning reflecting the ideological position of the observer. Despite the legacy of this failure, Nyerere was — and is still — held in high regard in Africa and around the world. His name is nearly always preceded by *Mwalimu*, the Swahili word for ‘teacher’ which conveys a particular sense of experience and wisdom. Young (2004: 47) argues that although “the Nyerere vision of the popular socialist polity failed by any measure in the policy realm, the moral rectitude of the *Mwalimu* preserved his image as a charismatic leader dedicated to the common weal”. After his retirement from Tanzanian politics, Nyerere led the Organisation of African Unity and the South Commission, and was regularly called in to negotiate regional disputes. His vision for a united Africa is perhaps his greatest legacy. However, it is not a legacy that has found a place in political geography.

Nyerere’s Pan-African geopolitics

... every possible attempt is made to squeeze African events into the framework of the cold war or other Big Power conflicts. The big question is always: ‘Is this or that African country pro-East or pro-West?’ These kinds of questions [...] are based on a very fundamental mistake — and, I would add, an unwarranted degree of arrogance! They imply that Africa has no ideas of its own and no interests of its own. They assume the exclusive validity of the international conflicts which existed when we achieved nationhood. They are based on the belief that African actions must inevitably be determined by reference to either the Western liberal tradition or to communist theory or practice. (Nyerere, 1969 cited in Nyerere, 1974b: 43).

Nyerere's was a geopolitical vision that recognised the shared precarity of the new post-colonial states, seeing this precarity as the result of both a militarised Cold War geopolitical system and a dominant and manipulative capitalist neo-colonial one. He pressed for Third World solidarity or, as he put it, a "trade union of the poor". While he was clear in recognising the significance of military power in geopolitical affairs, discussing the influence of quite conventional geopolitical discourse – such as proximity and "the facts of geography and history" – he was quick to emphasise that "the basic reality of that situation, the real cause of our military circumstances is our economic weakness." While military geopolitical power has carved up the Cold War world, he acknowledged that the 'big powers' can have their way without using military power at all:

The real and urgent threat to the independence of almost all the non-aligned states, thus, comes not from the military, but from the economic power of the big states. It is poverty which constitutes our greatest danger (Nyerere, 1970 cited in Nyerere, 2011: 5).

Nyerere's ambition was to overcome this poverty by developing national economies in such a way which does not "run the risk of being sucked into the orbit of one or other of the big powers" (Nyerere, 1970 cited in Nyerere, 2011: 6). The establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Nyerere's philosophy of Pan-Africanism was based upon a clear challenge to classical military power geopolitical principles. In a speech in 1970, Nyerere scripted non-aligned south-south geopolitics as an alternative to the 'clear and opposing power blocs' of the Cold War. Referring to the first non-aligned meeting of 1961, Nyerere claimed that:

... just by the fact of meeting – asserting the independence of either bloc, the member states of that conference were taking an important political action: they were announcing that a refusal to become an ally of either side was not a temporary aberration of a few states! It was an important new international development, which the big powers could not ignore. [...] The conference members did not claim to have great armed forces, and their meeting did not mark any change in the military 'balance of power'. But, *the conference declared the existence of boundaries to the exercise of that military power*. Its members made clear that they were not going to be willing participants in the Cold War struggle. The dangerous game of threat and counter-threat which was being played between the big powers and their 'allies' or 'satellites' no longer involved every nation of the world (Nyerere, 1970 cited in Nyerere, 2011: 2; emphasis mine).

Illustrating well Ayoob's (2010) reflections on the differences between dominant and subaltern states, Nyerere's subaltern geopolitics regarded the international as unaccountable – but not unaccountable to all, just to the states of Africa and the South. His speeches revealed the nature of western geopolitical power as being based in military and economic domination – forms of violence that he was quick to challenge. He often replied to those who accused him of being undemocratic with his one party state that their obsession was with other states' democracy while accepting the international as totally undemocratic:

In the world at large, however, there is neither international democracy nor any clear centre of authority at which the poor can direct their protests. For example, when the world price of copper falls by 50 per cent in one week, the national income of Zambia drops like a stone; its workers will protest (perhaps violently). But they direct their anger at the government of Zambia, which has no power at all in this matter. What else can the workers do? They cannot affect the decisions of this vague

thing called the international 'market', even though what poor Zambia has lost some wealthy countries have gained. The poor of Zambia are without influence in this matter. But the government of Zambia has no influence either. [...] The rich and powerful countries of the world preach democracy to the poor nations and when it suits them they are liable to apply sanctions against those countries which they designate as undemocratic or acting against human rights. But the same preachers of democracy at the national level fight actively against any kind of democracy at the international level. (Nyerere, 1999: 585–586).

Nyerere's example perfectly illustrates Archibugi's argument that democracy at a country-level is meaningless if in a truly global world there is no democracy beyond country boundaries (in Painter & Jeffrey, 2009: 90–91). Furthermore, from the marginal position in the world system from where their subaltern geopolitics were scripted, it was all too clear to Third World leaders how power worked in this global system. While Tanzania's path to independence was characterised by non-violence, Nyerere did not eschew violence (as his commitment to offering shelter to anti-colonial movements from southern Africa who used violent tactics demonstrated). He was all too aware of the violence in the world order into which Tanganyika and then Tanzania had come into being:

... peace by itself is not enough for the human spirit if it means just an absence of violent conflict [...] peace and human justice are interlinked, and should be interlinked ... Those of us who are free to develop ourselves and our nation have no right to demand that the oppressed, the victims of discrimination, the starving and the persecuted, should acquiesce in their present condition. If we do make such a demand we are ourselves becoming their persecutors and their oppressors. The peace which exists while such human conditions prevail is neither secure nor justifiable (Nyerere, 1968 cited in Nyerere, 1974a: 1–2).

This was not then simply a vision of non-alignment as neutrality, instead, he argued that it is, "or certainly ought to be, a policy of involvement in world affairs". Nyerere realised that African leaders had to seek this out wherever possible, and to be proactive in order to hold off the manipulation of their weakness by external forces:

African unity is essential to the continent as a whole and to every part of it. Politically we have inherited boundaries which are either unclear or such ethnological and geographical nonsense that they are a fruitful source of disagreements. And such disagreements, if allowed to develop, would lead to a waste of scarce resources in the building up of national armies (Nyerere, 1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967c: 212).

The way to achieve this, he argued, was to use African nationalisms as a building block to a united Africa. The international was a space of neo-colonial capitalism where economic and military power ruled. Nyerere rejected this logic and sought to change it through the forms of connection that could come from Pan-Africanism. As the countries of Africa gradually gained their independence from Europe, Nyerere recognised the danger of the weakness of each leading to possible interventions by one or the other of the Cold War superpowers. He wrote of his fears of "The second scramble" for the continent, where the superpowers would use their influence to incite conflict between the newly-independent states, arguing that "the weaker amongst us are regarded as no more than pawns in the Cold War conflicts" (1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967b: 205). And yet, Nyerere recognised the power of nationalism as a means of uniting the disparate tribes and ethnic groups in each newly-independent African state, to assist in moving beyond conflict for power and resources towards unity.

When addressing the role of the Tanzanian state and its citizens, Nyerere's vision included a nationalism that would unite Tanganyikan, and later Tanzanian, people despite tribal, religious, linguistic or ethnic differences. "In Tanzania, it was more than one hundred tribal units which lost their freedom; it was one nation that regained it." (Nyerere, 1969: 44) It was not a bourgeois European form of nationalism, but instead an outwardly looking one.

Having come into contact with a civilization which has over-emphasized the freedom of the individual, we are in fact faced with one of the big problems of Africa in the modern world. Our problem is just this: how to get the benefits of European society – benefits that have been brought about by an organization based upon the individual – and yet retain African's own structure of society in which the individual is a member of a kind of fellowship (Nyerere, 1960).

Thus, Nyerere's was an "alternative modernity" (see Moore & Sanders, 2001), drawing both on concepts from traditional African society – most notably ideas of interdependence and classlessness in his idea of *ujamaa* – and those from modern western thought. Although his vision was for a united Africa, it was the concept of nationalism that he drew on to develop the building blocs of identity – first Tanzanian and then Eastern African. He recognised the challenges of post-colonial nation-building in terms of overcoming the divisions of tribe, religion and ethnicity that had been ignored in the colonial process of territorial division. So, while we can see the relevance of Benedict Anderson's (1983) ideas of "imagined communities" being drawn upon in the construction of the Tanzanian state, this was an outward-looking community-building, and not one based on defining Tanzanian-ness from what was outside and different. Nyerere actively promoted Swahili as the national (and regional) language, "a widely understood and increasingly popular language which was neither identified with any one tribal group nor with the colonial power [which] was a great asset to the nationalists" (Mytton, 1983: 114). As Chatterjee (1986) has argued for post-colonial India, Tanzanian nationalism embodied this contradiction producing "a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination [...] also accepted the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based". The internal spaces of *ujamaa* were to be mobilised through the public 'modern' spaces of governance and national expression.

Although he promoted nationalism in Africa as a first stage (unlike Ghana's independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who wanted to go straight to Pan-Africanism from colonialism), nation-building was ultimately aimed at transcending the tribal and ethnic differences that Nyerere anticipated would tear apart independent Africa. For Nyerere, African nationalism, if played out in a conventional way, would fall into the hands of neo-colonial powers. Thus he insisted that African nationalism *must* be different:

As I have said once before, the role of African nationalism is different – or should be different – from the nationalism of the past. We must use the African national states as an instrument for the reunification of Africa. African nationalism is meaningless, is anachronistic, and is dangerous, if it is not at the same time Pan-African (Nyerere, 1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967a: 194).

Nyerere argued for the necessity that the "present boundaries must lose their significance and become merely a demarcation of administrative areas within a larger unit" (Nyerere, 1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967c: 212), but recognised that this was becoming more difficult by the day as African states used the trappings of nationalism in their attempts to overcome tribal rivalries.

The boundaries which divide African states are so nonsensical that without our sense of unity they would be a cause of friction. But we have no alternative but start from the position which we inherited after the colonial partition of Africa. There is no one country which does not include areas which would come under another political unit if any principles of political geography were considered, and numerous tribes live in at least two countries or have their origins in some other area of Africa. Yet for us to start making 'claims' on each other's territory would be to play into the hands of those who wish to keep Africa weak so as to improve their own relative strength in the future, and it might well lead us to the tragic absurdity of spending money on armaments while our people die for want of medical attention or starve for want of knowledge (Nyerere, 1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967a: 189).

The ultimate goal, he insisted, had to be "nothing short of a United States of Africa". He developed these ideas further in his article on "The policies and purposes of Pan-Africanism," published in 1963:

There is only one way in which Africa can stay outside irrelevant world conflicts and in which she can hope to deal with oppressing economic and social problems which now beset her people. The present boundaries must lose their significance and become merely a demarcation of administrative areas within a larger unit. This is an urgent and difficult matter; it becomes more difficult every day as the existing nation states fight tribalism by building nationalism. But there is, for the time being, the saving grace of an emotional unity, born during the independence struggle, and the universal recognition of the need for its development in political and economic terms (Nyerere, 1963 cited in Nyerere, 1967c: 212–213).

Doing subaltern geopolitics

Nyerere's views on the responsibility to others were put into practice in geopolitical discourse and actions at a variety of scales, reinforcing the Tanzanian leader's scripting of the scalar connections between individual and national responsibility and the wider political and ethical connections within with Tanzania was entangled. At the continental scale was Tanzania's responsibility to other Africans. Nyerere famously offered to hold off Tanganyikan independence until *uhuru* (freedom) was achieved by Kenya and Uganda, for he felt that freedom for his country would be meaningless while other East Africans were still colonised. Nyerere was also quick to back those fighting apartheid and white minority rule in southern Africa. After Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in November 1965, the Organisation of African Unity recommended that if Britain refused to crush Ian Smith's illegal regime, diplomatic ties should be severed. As perhaps the single most important front line state in the battle against racism and apartheid in southern Africa, Tanzania was quick to take this action despite this meaning the loss of \$22m in an interest-free loan that had been negotiated with Britain but not yet signed: "Nyerere admitted that the freeze on the loan threw Tanzania's First Five Year Plan off balance, but then argued that some principles were more important than short-run economic gains" (Kariuki, 1979: 193). In addition, one of the key events which created the desperate conditions of the Tanzanian economy in the early 1980s, forcing the country to go to the IMF and accept the conditions of structural adjustment, was Nyerere's commitment to fighting Idi Amin in Uganda.

At the same time, Nyerere's attention to the nature of nationalism ensured his model of geopolitics was firmly linked to the

bodies and identities of Tanzanian citizens. His understanding of the embodied consequences of colonialism (and the importance of a strong rejection of this system) echoed the ideas of Frantz Fanon (1986) and was apparent in his reflection upon early African independence:

When Kwame Nkrumah was released from prison this produced a transformation. I was in Britain and oh you could see it in the Ghanaians! They became different human beings, different from all the rest of us (in Bunting, 1999: np).

Nyerere's subaltern geopolitics was one that, while recognising the ontological realities of the scales of certain political structures – the boundaries of new states in Africa, the effects of the international economy – did not see these boundaries as natural nor inevitably containing. For him, security came not from bounding danger but by looking outward at shared conditions, shared precarity to this system. It highlights a clearly moral geopolitics (a strategy of power Larsen (2011) argues is often used by small states), within which Nyerere was all too aware of the limitations of state power available to him. Thus, his performance of sovereignty was one that constantly invoked moral power (instead of economic or military power) to claim global influence. This performance of sovereignty is one that is much more about normative ideals of the state than a description of the state itself: “*relative and negotiated – a strategy and a process – rather than something that is fundamental and absolute*” (Steinberg & Chapman, 2009: 284).

Nyerere's geopolitical vision for Pan-Africanism thus anticipated Judith Butler's insistence that we reimagine the “possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss” (2004: 20). Rather than a western universalist, or masculinist, form of cosmopolitanism which “accepts normative framings of liberal democratic deliberation, and choice-making, self-reflective subjects, Butler sees subjects as endlessly (re)constituted through dialectical processes of recognition, within multiple networks of power” (Mitchell, 2007: 6). Nyerere's postcolonialism visualised and internalised this relationality across the imagined and material borders of the nation state. Nyerere recognised the disruptive topographies (Katz, 2001) in the construction of Tanzanian political community, stretched across state boundaries, but grounded in the recognition of their place in the remaking of identities and the possibilities of connection. Through this act of recognition, the self does not precede the Other but they are brought into being simultaneously, comprehending vulnerability and unequal power relations. Throughout, then, and unlike *negritude* or the international solidarities of the Black Panthers (for example, see Tyner, 2006), Nyerere's was a Pan-Africanism that was not defined by race; it was one that recognised nationalism as a process of rejecting divisive tribal and ethnic divisions which was not in any way incompatible with an African identity; it was an outward looking set of connections. He frequently insisted upon the inclusiveness of citizenship in first Tanganyika and then Tanzania: “This is a matter of simple honesty and of trying to live up to the reputation we have earned as being a country which is concerned with principles. This action is not taken ‘for the sake of people with brown or white skin,’ but for Tanganyika” he argued in January 1964 (Nyerere, 1967c: 259).

There is no question that Nyerere played a significant role in scripting the geopolitics of Tanzania's and Africa's role within the emerging post-colonial world order. As a figure most often associated with a deeply moral perspective – even by many of his political opponents – Nyerere's narration of the geopolitical system also included a call to subjectivity on the part of those hearing or reading his speeches and writings. As well as scripting an alternative to the geopolitical order of the Cold War binary, Nyerere projected a subaltern subjectivity which challenged the binaries of

Cold War geopolitics, of colonialism, of race and of political ideology. This paper is not seeking to evaluate Nyerere's policies; that has been done elsewhere (e.g. Legum & Mmari, 1995; McDonald & Sahle, 2003). However, it is important not to romanticise Nyerere's role. He and the ruling TANU (later CCM⁴) party wanted to create socialism in a hurry (Prashad, 2007) – they didn't have time to go through the stages described and debated by Marxists – as illustrated in the title of one of Nyerere's books, *We must run while they walk*. There were authoritarian acts: the insistence of the necessity of a single party state (although seats were always contested), agricultural collectivisation leading to the forced relocation of a significant percentage of the rural population in the late 1970s (Briggs, 1979), and other suggestions of strong arm tactics to ensure the leadership's vision was promoted. Nyerere was desperately trying to create African socialists from a population of uneducated peasants to take forward his vision of Africa and its place in the modern world order, and he believed that through education and the state run media his ideas would eventually take hold in the popular imagination; but at the start it was an inherently top-down affair.

Despite this, Tanzania and Nyerere's vision for it placed the country at the heart of a newly-emerging post-colonial internationalism. This is, of course, because the creation of post-colonial Tanzania was not only achieved through formal government policy. Tanzania emerged as a presence in the world order that had particular meaning: Tanzania became a Front Line State in the fight against Apartheid and white minority rule in southern Africa; it became a leading proponent of Pan-Africanism and the non-aligned movement; it became a place of return for African-Americans; and, particularly at the University of Dar es Salaam, a point of intellectual debate for radical academics and students. Tanzania – as a state in the world system and as a geopolitical presence – was established through all of these entangled scales and processes.

Geopolitical sites

The Arusha Declaration, Tanzania's status as a front line State in the liberation of Southern Africa and Nyerere's attempt to steer a new course of politics and geopolitics through its negotiation of a national, continental and global path was a heady mix. Although as the 1970s unfolded, cracks in the dream began to show, this vision continued to draw people from around the world into the 1980s. Tanzania became “a magnet then for anti-colonial activists and thinkers from all over the world” (Bunting, 1999: np). Some were ANC members fleeing persecution in southern Africa, some comrades came from Eastern Europe and Mao's China, and others came from the west, seeking an alternative to what they saw at home. Importantly, this was not seen as a move relating to development or to provide a helping hand in the Third World or in a developing country; rather, many of the intellectuals who were drawn to Tanzania came because they saw this as offering the future. There was a belief that a tectonic shift in political and ideological leadership was not only possible but immanent, and Tanzania was at the heart of this. Thus, there were a number of sites where subaltern geopolitics were performed beyond – and sometimes in tension with – the site of Nyerere's state geopolitics. Such sites included the training camps for southern African resistance movements, communities of African-Americans and cosmopolitan groups of academics, most notably at the University of Dar es Salaam.

The University of Dar es Salaam, located at *Mlimani*, a hill around 10 km from the centre of Tanzania's largest city, was one site of intense (geo)political debate in the early post-colonial years. Through research and teaching, staff and students on “The Hill”

explored and debated the geopolitical visions of new African states, and particularly that of their own leader, Nyerere. But it was also a beacon for radical thinkers and activists from around the world. In a recent interview with Giovanni Arrighi (2009: np) about his time in Dar es Salaam, the interviewer, David Harvey, starts off by saying that it “sounded like a paradise of intellectual interactions,” leading Arrighi to respond:

It was a very exciting time, both intellectually and politically. When I got to Dar es Salaam in 1966, Tanzania had only been independent for a few years. Nyerere was advocating what he considered to be a form of African socialism. He managed to stay equidistant from both sides during the Sino-Soviet split, and maintained very good relations with the Scandinavians. Dar es Salaam became the outpost of all the exiled national liberation movements of southern Africa—from the Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia and South Africa. I spent three years at the University there, and met all kinds of people: activists from the Black Power movement in the US, as well as scholars and intellectuals like Immanuel Wallerstein, David Apter, Walter Rodney, Roger Murray, Sol Picciotto, Catherine Hoskins, Jim Mellon, who later was one of the founders of the Weathermen, Luisa Passerini, who was doing research on Frelimo, and many others; including, of course, John Saul.

Tanzanian theorists and the collection of academics that were drawn to the University of Dar es Salaam from around the globe, debated the ways in which this new world order could be made. Influential figure Walter Rodney made it clear that this was something to come from the grass roots of African society, that “every African has a responsibility to understand the system and work for its overthrow” (Rodney, 1972/2012: 28). It was an intellectual environment that proved unusually stimulating to those involved. Commentators have argued that Rodney’s “was an awesome vision, especially since Walter dared to say and believe that such a stupendous transformation must be initiated by Africans and other dwellers in the nether regions of exploitation and domination” (Harding, Hill, & Strickland, 2012: xvii). As Issa Shivji, a student of Walter Rodney and now one of Tanzania’s most prominent critical scholars, explained, “we thought globally. We thought in terms of epochs, not in terms of a tomorrow, not in terms of years, not in terms of decades, but in terms of epochs” (Shivji, 1992 cited in Shivji, 1993: 204).

The knowledge created at The Hill responded to Nyerere’s geopolitical challenge. Just as Nyerere’s subaltern geopolitics was challenging international boundaries, intellectual debate at the University was challenging conventional disciplinary boundaries. Emphasis was put on interdisciplinary studies, insisting that whether studying law, social science or science subjects, members of the university should have a wide and critical education. Shivji explains:

The great strength of that period, it seems to me, was the critical attitude. Nothing was taken for granted. Everything was subjected to criticism and evaluation. The intellectual at that time saw himself/herself as a social critic, not as a careerist, or simply an armchair contemplator or thinker. The spirit of the time, if I may summarise it in a phrase, was ‘doubt everything’ – not as a cynic, but as a critic [...] not simply as a contemplative philosopher but as an historical actor (Shivji, 1992 cited in Shivji, 1993: 211).

Conclusions

This paper has sought to reconsider the political interventions of Tanzania, as a new post-colonial state in the 1960s and 1970s, as

critical geopolitics. There was great political and intellectual foment in many African nations at this point and for many such societies, rather than representing marginal locations in the remaking of the second half of the 20th century, they actually promised the location of the real drivers of change. However, for a variety of reasons, including the “failure” in practice of many of the post-colonial leaders’ visions of new societies, and the impacts of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s, this challenge has fallen from accounts of geopolitics.⁵ And yet, there is much still to be learnt from the geopolitics of subaltern cosmopolitanisms, of which, as Gilmore (2008: 34) has argued, “Pan-Africanism is a long-standing, and by no means outmoded example”.

Recently there has been greater attention in the arts and social sciences on the significance of marginal literatures. In terms of Africa, as Mbembe (2001: np) has argued, the continent has been systematically omitted from social theory so that one “consequence of this blindness is that Africa’s politics and economics have been condemned to appear in social theory only as the sign of a lack, while the discourse of political science and development economics has become that of a quest for the cause of that lack.” Thus, as Pletsch (1981) so compellingly articulated, in the academic division of labour Africa has tended to be the site of development-based research, with much less focus from other parts of the discipline, and especially from political geography.

At the same time, postcolonialism has been critiqued for its armchair theorising and the fact that, for postcolonialism to become established, third world academics have had to take up residence in the first world. Yet, in the years following independence, Pan-Africanism and other subaltern geopolitics forged around non-alignment created grounded, embedded alternative reworkings of western political thought and practice. Ahluwalia (2005) has insisted that post-structuralism has its roots in North Africa, pointing to the fact that key post-structural thinkers such as Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida were born in Algeria “and spent formative years there” and Michel Foucault spent “an important sojourn in Tunisia” (Shilliam, 2009: np). Ahluwalia traces the influences of this grounding on the emergence of post-structuralism and a similar thing could be done for the influence of the post-colonial Tanzanian context on the thinking of such intellectuals as Walter Rodney, Paul Saul, Giovanni Arrighi and Terence Ranger.⁶ Such genealogies challenge the Eurocentric accounts we have of the emergence of different forms of modern political thought. As Shilliam (2009: np) continues:

...Eurocentrism is most evident in the unspoken assumption that we do not need to attempt to travel to the intellectual terrain of the non-West and interrogate its archive of thought in order to problematize the modern experience. It is not just that the non-Western thinker must be added into the existing archive of the Western Academy, but rather, than an engagement with the non-Western thinker might be necessary in order to reveal the boundedness of this Academy and thus open the way for more salient explorations of the making of the modern world order.

In countries like Tanzania, and especially in sites of active political theorising such as was found at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s, the ‘margins’ were seen – however briefly – as offering the future ‘centre’; people were drawn to Africa from around Africa and from both Western and Eastern superpowers. Thus, post-colonial Tanzania presented, for a time, a material ‘provincializing of Europe’ as Chakrabarty (2000) has put it, as intellectuals and political and resistant figures from north and south moved to participate in and learn from Nyerere’s Tanzania. So it was not a simple case of westernised knowledge coming to Tanzania and colonising debates; Nyerere reworked western political

concepts, especially nationalism, in an attempt to forge a modern African future, and many of the western academics and the debates they took back home were profoundly Tanzanian-ized.

These are not stories of internationalism from 'below' or 'outside', but are geographies that have been recast from the margins, from and by people who have been differently entangled with networks of domination and resistance, who can neither be seen as below or outside, but nor could they be seen as powerful, central or dominant. They do, however, challenge prevailing views that suggest the subaltern is always trapped in place, and is particular and 'other' to western travelling theories, and so present an important counter to accounts of internationalism, geopolitics and cosmopolitanism which place the subaltern, and political action emanating from them, as place bound (see also Featherstone, 2012). Tanzania's extra-territorial connections, of course, did not begin with European colonialism. As the Arabic, Hindi and Bantu contributions to Swahili attest, what is now Tanzania has long been connected to currents of trade and politics that have linked the cultures of East Africa's "Swahili coast" to the Gulf States and to India for centuries, in addition to the colonial connections to Germany and Britain (Sheriff, 2010).

And thus, what we can learn from Tanzania should not only be of relevance to those with 'African interests'. In his call for a "small state geopolitics," Larsen (2011) insists on the need to understand the multiplicity of geopolitical visions because of the always-already entangled nature of different state geopolitics. Drawing on the recent "Mohammed cartoon scandal" Larsen (2011: 245) insists that Denmark *does* matter and that this was highlighted by this event as Denmark shifted from "the habitual self-image of being a paragon of virtue in world politics, a small state but a moral great power [to a situation in which] Danes too were now faced with the question: 'Why do they hate us?'".

Just as "small statehood" then is not simply a particular location, nor should "subaltern" be fixed in particular places. Instead, the subaltern can be understood as "located both outside (exterior to) and at the margins of (but still inside) a social and spatial formation, and, congruently, as both separate from, and as an effect of, power" (Clayton, 2011: 247). Larsen suggests that the power that can be drawn upon by marginal states is a moral authority, a power that has certainly defined post-colonial Tanzania's role – particularly under Nyerere. However, Mbembe (2003: 33) explains how the changes imposed by structural adjustment proceeded incrementally to undermine the authority of visionary Third World leaders such as Nyerere, destroying "the economic underpinnings of political authority and order in the 1970s, followed by the loss of value in local currencies in the 1980s". The penetration of individual economies by external agencies through the provision of aid, the desire to attract international investment and the power of western-dominated international organisations further erodes state sovereignty in the South and reinforces the very limited nature of sovereignty available (see Sharp, *in press*). Agnew (2005) has suggested that this is not a characteristic only of states in the south, suggesting that many states have much less control over their destinies than conventional models of the state would imply.

This suggests that perhaps this is exactly the time where a more ambitious geopolitical imagination is required. Whether considering the challenges of economies, technologies and biological threats that do not recognise state borders, or the geopolitics of climate change in the "Anthropocene", it would seem that moving from an idea of a geopolitics forged around the individual interests of states to a more inclusive vision, is essential (Dalby, 2012). This means that revisiting attempts to imagine collective geopolitical futures such as those offered by Pan-Africanism is invaluable.

This raises the question of what might be learnt from the conditions that facilitated these critical interventions in post-colonial

Tanzania, and how we might draw on these experiences to seek to recreate conditions of such optimism and hope. Prashad has argued for the importance of such visions and is pessimistic (perhaps overly so) about a future without them:

The demise of the Third World has been catastrophic. People across the three continents continue to dream of something better, and many of them are organised into social movements or political parties. Their aspirations have a local voice. Beyond that, their hopes and dreams are unintelligible (Prashad, 2007: xviii).

Such third worldism as explored by Prashad, outlined in the writings of Julius Nyerere and attempted through his policies, and lived by those living and working in places like the University of Dar es Salaam presents a kind of postcolonial subjectivity within which subjects are reconstituted through recognition of shared vulnerability, and a shared desire to challenge this situation and indeed to change it, rather than being an identity premised on the exclusion of otherness.

In his discussion of the geopolitics of Nkrumah's Ghana, White (2003: 110) argues that the narrative of a binary opposition between Cold War modernity and indigenous African society is a false one; rather Ghana was "laid at the intersection of multiple roads of modernity." Nkrumah's outlook was modern, but "his situation nonetheless left him with many ways forward, placing him at a site of 'creative adaptation' which Goankar describes as 'the site where a people 'make' themselves modern, as opposed to being 'made' modern by alien and imperial forces'" (cited in White, 2003: 110). The Non-Aligned Movement's alternative geopolitical vision for development was one such modernity, consciously rejecting the totality of either the Soviet or US projections of modern futures. And it was a moral geopolitics based around connection rather than a sovereign performance of exclusion. Tanzanian geopolitics have been (and, in some ways, continue to be (see Sharp, 2011c)) constructed dialectically in terms of the country's role in promoting diverse futures: an African identity, Cold War non-alignment, a Pan-African vision, and a place of radical, alternative thought for people from around the world. Most important is the recognition of shared vulnerability, and a shared desire to challenge this situation and indeed to change it, rather than being an identity premised on the exclusion of otherness. Nyerere recognised this global interdependence clearly. In his address to the United Nations following Tanganyika's independence from Britain, he said:

I do congratulate the British for taking yet a further step towards their own achievement of complete independence and freedom because I believe that no country is completely free if it keeps other people in a state of unfreedom (Nyerere, 1961 cited in Nyerere, 1967e: 145).

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Endnotes

¹ Initially introduced as an irreducibly critical concept, critical geopolitics was intended as a critique of knowledge rather than a form of knowledge itself (Dalby, pers corr., 2012). The ubiquity – and perhaps sometimes unthinking or uncritical use – of the term more recently has rendered it, in many cases, more of a subfield of political geography.

² I continue to use the term Third World despite the conclusion of the Cold War geopolitics that created the term, in recognition of the political reappropriation of the concept by political figures such as Nyerere.

³ So called because of their preference for luxurious Mercedes Benz cars.

⁴ TANU: Tanganyikan African National Union party. After the union with Zanzibar, it became the Tanzania African National Union party and later merged with the Zanzibar-based Afro Shirazi Party to become Chama Cha Mapinduzi (party of the revolution).

⁵ Mamdani (2011) has also pointed to the changing nature of academic practice in many African countries as a result of structural adjustment policies as contributing to a shift away from critical academic practice in many academic departments in East Africa.

⁶ In both cases, the list of characters is overwhelmingly male making a feminist investigation of the history of this period especially important.

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