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**International aid and the geopolitical imagination after the Cold War: A case study of development aims and aid policies for post-Soviet Russia**

***Matthew Greenwood***

This thesis explores the extent to which international aid policies are informed by geopolitical imaginations. Based on an analysis of contemporary development programmes for post-Soviet Russia, the study examines two aid organizations working in Russia, and the varying degree to which issues of geopolitics underwrite their practice. The thesis demonstrates the inherent relationship between geopolitical imaginations and development strategies, as argued by Slater (1993) and Toal (1994). Drawing on Agnew (1998) it examines the universalisms and Occidental assumptions that characterize the modern geopolitical imagination and have led to calls for its revision. It concludes that geopolitical imaginations underpin much aid discourse and policy, hindering the development of effective strategies that respond to the needs of specific contexts in a shifting, multi-polar world order, and calls for greater critical evaluation with respect to the international aid discourse.

**INTERNATIONAL AID AND THE GEOPOLITICAL  
IMAGINATION AFTER THE COLD WAR: A CASE  
STUDY OF DEVELOPMENT AIMS AND AID  
POLICIES FOR POST-SOVIET RUSSIA**

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## List of abbreviations

<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CDA</b>	Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>CP</b>	Country Programme
<b>ECE</b>	East and Central Europe
<b>FSR</b>	Former Soviet Republic
<b>FSU</b>	Former Soviet Union
<b>G8</b>	Group of 8 nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GRP</b>	Gross Regional Product
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HDR</b>	Human Development Report
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>MCA</b>	Millennium Challenge Account (United States)
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NHDR</b>	National Human Development Report
<b>ODA</b>	Overseas development assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>US(A)</b>	United States (of America)

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## **1. Introduction**

During the Cold War, Russia's (and the USSR's) 'place' in 'the world order' was clear: it represented the Other to the United States and its allies in a bipolar international order in terms of political ideology, culture and society. Twenty years on, the way in which Russia is understood geopolitically is significantly less clear. While it remains an important player in international politics (Müller, 2009) and has returned to economic growth after the crisis of the early 1990s (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2005), it has also become a recipient of international aid due to a severe socioeconomic decline and the rise in social inequalities and regional disparity since the end of state socialism (see, for example, Smith, 1999; Hörschelmann, 2004).

In this thesis, I examine how international aid agencies have responded to Russia's changing geopolitical, social and economic position over the last ten years. The study responds to the call by David Slater (1993; 1994) and Gerard Toal (1994) to consider more closely the relationship between the geopolitical imagination and processes and theories of development. In more than 15 years since the debate between Slater and Toal was originally published, few researchers have addressed the relationship between development and the geopolitical imagination explicitly. The thesis begins to address this gap in understanding by examining how geopolitical imaginations inform discourses and practices of development aid. I critically examine how recent aid policies towards Russia have been guided by conflicting imaginations of universal development goals on the one hand and by essentializing, Occidental perceptions of the West's Cold-War 'Other', on the other hand. My analysis will show that development discourses and practices continue to be informed by, and in turn reinforce, hierarchical understandings of how the world is 'ordered', by whom and for whom. Thus, throughout, I will argue for the adoption of an increased critical perspective towards practices and processes of aid.

This thesis asks, therefore, a series of potent questions that remain insufficiently addressed in the literature. Firstly, to what extent does the modern

geopolitical imagination reflect an inadequate and inappropriate approach to understanding world politics (Agnew, 1998) and, as such, is in need of revision for the advancement of more collaborative international political relations, defined to a lesser degree by geopolitical bias? Secondly, I investigate the ways in which geopolitics and development are linked by their shared association with the discourse of security, drawing heavily on the work of Mark Duffield (1994; 1997; 2001; 2007). Similarly, based on the work of Jenny Edkins (2000), I question the degree to which practices of development are inherently political or, rather, cannot be said to be *apolitical*. Following this, I discuss the extent to which the current dominant aid paradigm, centred on the Millennium Development Goals, represents the most appropriate framework for overseas development assistance. Finally, if the MDG framework is shown to be problematic in the context of post-Soviet Russia, what are the rationales for its continued use and application in practices of development aid? Through the analysis of documents and publications from two aid organizations working in Russia I discuss the extent to which this continued prevalence of a potentially inappropriate framework reflects particular geopolitical imaginations and agendas.

The two case studies discuss the assistance policies and practices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), both working in, and writing of, Russia. The studies contribute insightfully to the central discussions that this thesis concerns, notably the linkages between geopolitics and development and the role of geopolitical imaginations in aid. The analysis centres on the contrasting ways in which each organization conceptualizes and theorizes development; the resulting differences and similarities concerning geopolitical imaginations allow for conclusions to be made with regards to best practices for aid.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the representations and understandings of Russia. The central aim of the research is to critically evaluate the ways in which geopolitical imaginations manifest themselves in processes and policies of

development assistance. Further, the research intends to show clearly that geopolitics is inextricably linked to theories of development.

### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted in order to address the aims and research questions of this thesis is ultimately grounded in discourse and in the textual analysis and reviewing of existing literature proceeding from the academic realm and publications from the two development assistance organizations outlined above. A small number of formal interviews also took place during the early stages of the project with fellow researchers working at the EU-Russia Centre in Brussels and the Royal Institute for International Affairs at Chatham House, in London.

The methodology chosen was, to some extent, dictated by the content of the research and barriers to other forms of investigation that the nature of the project presented. Language is one example of this case; similarly access to, and usability of, relevant materials from the Russian State. The objectives and aims of the project made certain research methods more appropriate than others, although as the focus of the thesis shifted over time, textual analysis developed into the prevailing approach.

Gee (1999: 11) writes: “language has a magical property: when we speak or write we craft what we have to say to *fit* the situation or context in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write *creates* that very situation” [original emphasis]. This quotation from Gee justifies the attention to detail applied to linguistics and forms of communication in the research for this thesis, particularly with respect to the reading of policy publications in Part II. Critical Discourse Analysis (as presented in detail by Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2004) seeks to explore the subtleties of language, as described by Gee, that carry embedded within them social and political perspectives and, crucially for this thesis, imaginations. Aitken (1997: 212) states that “textual methods [of communication] are social constructions and, as such, they take on the characteristics of their users”. Walliman (2006) notes the same: that the social context of writing affects the way in

which it is analyzed. Furthermore, as Fairclough and Wodak (1997) outline, this 'social production' of text is additionally a product of time; discourse is "always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically or subsequently (1997: 363). For all of these factors, textual and critical discourse analysis presented the greatest opportunity as a method to analyze fully the presence of (geopolitical) imaginations in (development) policy in post-Soviet Russia.

"Discourses are words and the way they are arranged" (Gomm, 2008: 297). In other words, to study discourse is to look beyond the superficial presentation of language to the social productions that have led to its formulation. Walliman (2006: 131) defines discourse analysis as a "language-based approach to examine how *versions* of reality are created" [emphasis added]. For texts do not merely present; they *represent*, embedded with a wealth of socially-specific imaginations. One of the strengths of critical discourses analysis (shortened by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) to CDA) as a research method is to avoid reading texts as innocent. Rather, texts are read as a product of socially, politically, culturally-induced motivation. However, social embeddedness is as true for a writer as for a reader, and the presence of imaginations on the part of a textual consumer is a weakness of CDA that must be recognized by those that employ it as a method of analysis. A reader (consumer) is as much a participant in a text as an observer to it. As Walliman (2006: 13) writes, "language is not seen as a neutral medium for transmitting information"; the same must be said for receiving.

It became clear very early on in the research for this project that one of the central aims of the thesis was that of bridging gaps in the literature, focusing on linkages. Materials were chosen on their merits for representing best the discussions surrounding a particular field or school of thinking. Many of these became 'landmark' texts for this piece (for example, Said, 1978; Toal, 1996; Agnew 1998). It was then the responsibility of this discussion to exemplify, in part through the study of a particular case, the already existing but insufficiently addressed linkages between the fields.

Texts were generally read at least twice: the first reading attempted to adopt an ontological perspective, while the second allowed for the influence of subjectivity with respect to the goals of the study. Because of the apparent segregation of the fields (within the literature), material was effectively 'coded' according to subject matter and the key theme of the thesis to which it would potentially contribute. Extensive 'memoing' (Walliman, 2006) also took place, in order to keep track of all ideas regarding linkages that came to light through textual analysis. In drawing these linkages between fields that have, as Toal notes, "conventionally [been] kept apart" (1994: 228), flow-charts, or networks (Walliman, 2006), were a key methodological tool so as to visualize the multi-dimensional connectivities of the subject areas. Escobar (1995) writes of 'regimes of representation' as sites of interaction and encounter that yield constructed representations. Towards the latter stages of the research these places of convergence, where imaginations and constructions are formed, became the focus of analysis.

As I have outlined, a small number of formal interviews took place at the outset of the project. These discussions in London and Brussels were focused around the changing foreign policy of Russia during transition in the post-Soviet era, an initial focus of this project. Whilst the overall trajectory of the research has migrated over time, thus rendering irrelevant many of the specific proceedings from these interviews, their contribution to my understanding of geopolitics in post-Soviet Russia was considerable, and this has influenced the writing of all aspects of this thesis. I have made a conscious effort, in writing of the way in which Russia is represented and imagined, to try not to misrepresent the Russian case myself, though, as I have explored above, my own subjectivity will, unavoidably, have rendered a completely objective discussion impossible. In light of a will not to misrepresent the Russian perspective without sufficient grounding in fieldwork, this thesis does not consider the Russian 'response'; however, in many cases it might be deemed insightful.

Considering Russian voices across all scales of political analysis within Russia should be a goal for future research in this field.

### **Format of the thesis**

In chapter 2, I offer an introduction to geopolitics and critical geopolitics, concluding by discussing the continued relevance of geopolitical discourse to the reality of contemporary international relations. I draw on the work of Toal (1996), Agnew (1998), and Dodds and Sidaway (1994), amongst other writers, to detail the ways in which geopolitics has evolved since its early usage as a term by Rudolf Kjellen and Friedrich Ratzel. Developing this, I draw on Dalby's (2008) paper that discusses the continuing significance of geopolitics, which contends that critical geopolitics must work harder to remain in tune with the realities of everyday political and popular culture. Engaging further with debates in critical geopolitics, Chapter 3 explores how geographical imaginations shape geopolitical discourses. I draw extensively on discussions presented by Said in *Orientalism* (1978) regarding the (imaginary) construction of foreign spaces, and on those writers, such as Derek Gregory and Agnew (1998; 2003), who employ Said's arguments in order to deconstruct international politics, such as in relation to the War on Terror (e.g. Gregory, 2004). In the latter sections of Chapter 3 I turn towards the geopolitical imagination itself, and the ways in which it is written. I briefly exemplify Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations" thesis (1993) as a post-Cold War effort to (re)conceptualize the world order, that works to uphold the modern geopolitical imagination. I examine the relationship between geopolitical imaginations and Russia in advance of a detailed case study surrounding Russia, geopolitics and development that follows in Part II of the thesis. Both Smith (1999) and Legvold (2009) argue that contemporary misrepresentations of Russian culture(s) are rooted in misunderstandings of Russian history, and the values and ideologies this has fostered. Whilst this has not, of late, led to serious instability or conflict, Legvold (2009) affirms that as Russia's role in the

international community continues to grow, the necessity for a reconceptualization of the Occidental geopolitical imagination will rise.

In chapter 4 I begin to connect this discussion of geopolitical imaginations to the specific issue of international aid as one facet of the global agenda for overseas development. I draw attention to those aspects of the international development programme that are inherently geopolitical, thus illustrating the potency and the reality of the relationship between geopolitics and development. I briefly detail the epoch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before focusing on the writings of Mark Duffield and Jenny Edkins in detailing the ever-growing linkages between development, politics and security. I argue that this confluence of security, development and political agendas has reinforced the importance of aid to donors for pursuing geopolitical agendas. I further show that the MDG framework continues to be based on universalistic assumptions and hierarchical notions of donor and recipient that are disconnected from the realities of contemporary development. The emerging critical question, therefore, is this: to what extent do frameworks and practices for aid uphold – either knowingly or unintentionally – essentializing views of the West that are grounded in the modern geopolitical imagination? In conclusion to the chapter, I propose that the prevalence of the MDG framework might be argued to constitute a form of geopolitical imperialism and that the structure of the MDGs that so clinically distinguishes the poor from the non-poor, or ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Said, 1978), serves to preserve unequal relationships of power between the developed and the underdeveloped.

Chapter 5 serves as a short review of Part I, during which I take stock of those questions raised and conclusions reached in the first half of the thesis, in addition to offering a short comment on potential limitations of the way in which Part II is framed. In Part II, I seek to find answers to the questions, or justify their asking, through a case study of development assistance in post-Soviet – and particularly post-Millennial – Russia. Following an introduction to Russia that details the conditions that brought

about the fall of the Soviet Union and the tumultuous early years of transition under President Yeltsin, I explore the work of the UNDP in Russia. Through a discussion of the organization's operations, and their appropriateness – or otherwise – to the Russian case, I return to those questions posed in chapters 3 and 4, concerning the shortcomings of the modern geopolitical imagination in relation to practices of aid in Russia under the UNDP, and the implicit relationship(s) between development, aid, and geopolitics. Chapter 8 presents an alternative case study of externally-led development operations in Russia, focusing on the work of the ICRC. The ICRC provides a valid comparison study to UNDP on account of its different foci and areas in which the organization works. This allows brief conclusions to be drawn with regards to the appropriateness of different programmes of overseas aid to the needs of post-Millennial Russia; more critically, however, it exemplifies the different ways in which geopolitics and geopolitical imaginations represent intrinsic components international aid for different organizations. I call for greater critical analysis and deconstruction of the 'new poverty agenda', grounded in an unchallenged adoption of the MDGs and of the underlying geopolitical imaginations and agendas in development assistance.

Having explored and brought to light the intrinsic presence of geopolitics and geopolitical imaginations in development theory I conclude the piece by highlighting again the importance of studying with sympathy to the linkages between these fields. I argue for greater attention to be paid to these interconnectivities within the academic and policy literature and that, although valid, discrete study does not offer a true and realistic representation of practice. I conclude further by asking to what extent contemporary geopolitical imaginations have changed since the end of the Cold War and, further, by examining Agnew's (1998) debate that questions which events or processes have the power and capacity to cause shifts in these constructed forms of knowledge? The tendencies towards Orientalism that I uncover in certain international aid policies indicate that political imaginations have, in some cases, failed to move

beyond those which characterized the bipolar world order during the Cold War; the binaries of 'us' and 'them', 'right' and 'wrong', 'familiar' and 'dangerous' or 'forward' and 'backward', as introduced in *Orientalism* by Said, continue to prevail in the modern geopolitical imagination.

I therefore repeat the call (after Toal, 1996; Agnew, 1998) for a reconceptualized geopolitical imagination. It is concerning that the imaginations that construct the world order remain, in some cases, rooted in traits of modernism that favour the powerful whilst subordinating others. Of greater concern still, however, is that these imaginary international relations are actively upheld and permitted to prevail through theories and practices of international development. I end the discussion with reflections on possible trajectories of further study in light of the arguments presented in this piece.

## **PART I – GEOPOLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **2. From Geopolitics to Critical Geopolitics**

Geopolitics, as both a term and a discourse has, as with many concepts in (political) geography, undergone serious changes and been subject to a host of mutations in its usage over time. As Dodds suggests, if one were to Google geopolitics, the search might return up to 7 million hits (Dodds, 2007), with “anyone brave or perhaps foolish enough to wade through even a fraction of [these]” potentially finishing none the wiser (ibid.: 4). In this section, I engage with Toal (1996), Agnew (1998) and Dodds and Atkinson’s (2000) discussions of how the term ‘geopolitics’ has changed over time, and the ways in which it continues to prevail. I review their writings and tailor contemporary (critical) geopolitical discussion to the purpose of this thesis, which is to examine the role of geopolitical imaginations in the policies of aid organizations operating in post-Soviet Russia. I will begin by offering a brief overview of the history of geopolitics.

The ideas of geopolitical discourse are rooted in the relationship between geography (or space) and power. They concern the ways in which the geographies of the world are made political by a continuous competition and struggle for power and hegemony. With such a close relationship between geography and power it is challenging to attribute a ‘beginning’ to the notion of thinking geopolitically. Nevertheless, the roots of geopolitical thinking are traditionally attributed to the era of European imperialist expansion, running from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, during which time regional hegemonic territories were established in competition and through the exploitation of less powerful spaces (Toal, 1996).

Friedrich Ratzel’s geopolitical thinking was based on the notion that the ability to expand and impose one’s ideologies and cultures on subordinate territories represented strength and, thus, reflected a hallmark of a powerful state. As such,

Ratzel's geopolitics formed a significant basis for the development of Nazi foreign policy, or *geopolitik* (ibid.). Ratzel's approach to ordering the world reflected Darwinism, and the concept of the 'survival of the fittest'. Exploitation of a foreign land was justified by attributing the process to natural laws of competition; the State was an organism and could not be contained in the face of a will to expand and conquer. However if, as Toal (1996) notes, Ratzelian thinking attributes the foundations of geopolitics to German *geopolitik* for its philosophies of exploitation and expansionism, then we must also recognize these similar traits in the imperial programmes of Portugal, Spain, Holland, France and, of course, Great Britain in the eras of colonialism.

So must we look to the fin de siècle, and to the age of new imperialism in Europe and the 'scramble for Africa', to the writings of Halford Mackinder in order to locate the roots of geopolitics? Toal cites sections of Mackinder's speech to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, in which he outlines a "new geography" (Toal, 1996: 25) that would, from thereon, be inextricably linked with processes of government and politics. For Mackinder, geography had moved beyond exploration for exploration's sake, or the "Columbian epoch" (ibid.: 27) of Hispanic-led discovery; few spaces remained uncharted by Europeans – of many descents – and, as such, the continued programmes of expansionism adopted a political motive. Resources, both natural and human, were exploited for the benefit of the colonizer, and a definitive world order, defined by relations of power and an associated hierarchy of states, arose (Agnew, 1998). Nevertheless, Agnew writes that the Hispanic voyages of discovery of Mackinder's 'Columbian epoch' must, too, be regarded as geopolitical endeavours, thus rooting geopolitics in the fifteenth and sixteenth century (ibid).

Although we can't locate a fixed beginning to the idea of thinking geopolitically, the term "geopolitics" first appeared in the texts of Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish political theorist writing in the late nineteenth century (Dodds, 2007). Kjellen argued that, of all

the political and socioeconomic processes operating within a State, *geopolitik* was the most important for its strong relationship with practice; for Kjellen, *geopolitik* best represented *realpolitik* (Toal, 1996). The greatest asset of a strong State was its territory and, as such, *geopolitik* was the most developed of all political processes. Other hallmarks of the State – namely *Demopolitik* (the politics of population), *Sociopolitik* (the politics of society), *Ecopolitik* (economy) and *Kratopolitik* (the politics of government and constitution) – were, for Kjellen, more theoretical in nature and concerned how a State *could* or *should* be, rather than simply how it *was* (ibid.).

Mackinder subsequently adopted the term *geopolitics* in his ‘new geography’ and it became a widely used word in global political discourse. It served as a way of conceptualizing and structuring global space that had seemingly shrunk and become inter-connected through the new imperialism and the onset of an international capitalist economy. As Toal writes of Mackinder’s thinking, “the potential of geography to arrest the relative decline of British power and renew the idea of empire was crucial” for Mackinder (1996: 86), thus inextricably linking geography, government, politics and power. Similarly for Ratzel (1844-1904), and subsequently Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) the tying together of space, politics and power under *geopolitik* was fundamental and became synonymous with foreign policy in Nazi Germany. However, as Toal (1996) explains, although informed by the writings of Ratzel and Haushofer, the degree to which these influenced the policies of Adolf Hitler is often over-exaggerated.

Of course geo-power was not a new concept and was prominent in regional geography from the middle-ages (Toal, 1996); the difference in fin de siècle and early twentieth century geopolitics, as Agnew notes, was the internationalization of politics across space and the increased importance of scale, ranging from the Global through the International, National and Regional, to the Local level (Agnew, 1998). Just as struggles of geo-power had previously operated at regional and national levels, so an increased competitiveness arose between States for global hegemony. The result was

a spatially biased, international hierarchy of nations led by the 'powerful' states of the West. This situation has often been described as 'Westphalian', after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 that is "commonly held to have ushered in the role of European states in shaping international politics" (Dodds, 2000: 37); that is to say, it emphasized the importance of a strong nation state in international politics, and this was both a political philosophy and empirical point that favoured Western European nations. As Dodds continues, the idea of the 'Westphalian system' is often aligned with 'political realism', a branch of philosophy that emphasises the state as the only legitimate political actor. Realism further discredits idealism for its optimistic and naïve outlook, and legitimizes expansionism and territorial struggle by arguing, from a Darwinist perspective, that "human beings [are generally] intent on self-gratification rather than collective improvement" (ibid.: 38).

As they explore its evolution, both Toal (1996) and Dodds and Sidaway (1994) describe the importance of the writings of French political philosopher Michel Foucault to contemporary understandings of geopolitics. In particular, they cite Foucault's critical and deconstructive approach to geopolitics that sought to question the objectivity with which the field was viewed. For Foucault, processes of power were inseparable from discourses of knowledge; knowledge "could not be analysed [in terms of] consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power" (Foucault, 1980 cited in Dodds and Sidaway, 1994: 516). Put differently, Foucault saw knowledge as something that was to be used, rather than simply possessed. In his later writing Foucault developed the concept of *governmentality*, quite literally 'the mentality of government'. Here, government does not represent 'big G' government, a name or a noun describing a leading group in a party-political State; rather, it refers to 'little g' government (drawing on Hart's (2001) concept of little-d development), signifying the processes, assumptions and decisions involved in governing, inevitably embodied with exertions of power and

generalizations of unknown or misunderstood spaces and peoples. Drawing on elements of Foucault's work, in 1978 Edward Said published *Orientalism*, a landmark text that questioned, challenged and aimed to deconstruct the fundamental systems of power and knowledge that sought to perpetuate the prevailing Occidental (Western) dominance in international politics in the post-war era. Born in Jerusalem in 1935, he served as Professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University and, following his death, Said was described as "the outstanding representative of the post-structuralist left in America" (The Guardian, 2003). Following the thinkings of Foucault, Said developed discussions that further explored and critically evaluated the history of the power-knowledge nexus, in order to explain the ways in which such a spatial-cultural bias had come to prevail in the international order. He challenged and exposed the ways in which the Occident (the powerful – the West –) had historically subordinated, exploited and constructed the Orient (the non-powerful – the Rest –) through *its* systems of 'knowledge' and 'understanding' *developed in the West*. I use inverted commas here to denote the constructed nature of this 'knowledge'. While knowledge implies truth, Said's concern was to reveal the ways in which knowledge is always formed within a cultural and political environment, and knowledge claims therefore carry with them many presuppositions, echoing Foucault's philosophy. All knowledge claims are therefore historically contingent, situational and incomplete. This includes the way in which we see and understand our place in the world, described by Said as *geographical imaginations* (Said, 1978). In a chapter of *Orientalism* entitled "Knowing the Oriental" (pp. 31) Said illustrates the way in which the knowledge claims of imperialist British officials revealed a broader geographical imagination that concerned not only the way in which the British saw themselves, but also others: "There are Westerners and there are Orientals. The former dominate, the latter must be dominated" (pp. 36). According to Said then, *to know* is, in some senses, *to own*; in 'knowing the Orientals' officials acquired ownership of society and space. Said continues, however, that this was less an "indication of their particular

viciousness [but rather] an indication of how streamlined a general doctrine had become” (ibid.). He cites a piece written in 1908 by Lord Cromer, then the British Consul in Egypt, which serves to exemplify the linkages between power and knowledge. Cromer objectifies the Egyptian population(s) as “subject races” (Said, 1978: 36), lacking in logic and understanding. Said explains that Cromer was less concerned with making his subject races understand his ruling – because of a perceived gulf in logic – than merely readily accepting it. Said therefore concludes that “knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (1978: 36). As many writers such as Derek Gregory, Toal, and Foucault and Said themselves have subsequently discussed, such conclusions beg the question of *what constitutes knowledge?* For knowledge is not something that is simply ‘out there’, a series of understandings regarding the world that can be uncovered and subsequently known; knowledge is related to power because it is subjective, and reflects not only the embodied political desires of its possessor or creator, but the political circumstance in which it was formed (Toal, 1996). For Cromer, ‘knowing the Orientals’ did not denote comprehensive understanding of culture, mentality, or history; rather it signified represented a knowledge that was sufficient for his, and for British interests in the colony (in Lord Cromer’s case, Egypt), and was used by Cromer to reinforce his own identity, political strength and position of power (Said, 1978).

This notion of Cartesian perspectivalism, of seeing the world as a stage with its processes merely theatrical performances, observed and interpreted from some separated and distanced position, is central to Mackinder’s nineteenth century geopolitics. Toal terms it Mackinder’s “geopolitical gaze”, legitimated by Mackinder through his belief that exploratory geography had reached the end of its lifespan and, with this, the world had become “known, occupied and closed” (Toal, 1996: 27); as such, therefore, one could detach oneself from all that was known in order to interpret and, critically, *use* knowledge about the world and its territories. To foreground and to

challenge the inadequacies of such a belief is one rationale of a 'critical geopolitics' that emerged in the late 1980s and the 1990s in response to the geopolitical assumptions circulating during the Cold War. Critical geopolitics, as Agnew explains, must be distinguished from what he terms "historical" geopolitics (2003: 6), and must be read as a programme to expose the "hollow claims of particular geopolitical writers to having found the 'truth' in world politics (ibid.: 6). Equally, Agnew continues, critical geopolitics seeks to expose the "representational bias" (ibid.: 6), and the *geopolitical imagination(s)* (to which I will turn shortly), present in the foreign policies of states. Dodds and Atkinson (2000) note that, "throughout the 1990s [...] studies have multiplied and critical geopolitics has propelled geopolitical themes to the heart of debates in contemporary human geography" (2000: 9). Heavily influenced by Said and Foucault, Slater (1993) notes that "a number of political geographers" – he cites Toal, Agnew and Dalby – began to work within a "more discourse-orientated approach to global aspects of the geopolitics of power" (1993: 420).

Said was, arguably, the first critical geopolitician; indeed, Dodds and Sidaway state that "if there is a single text that has influenced the existing geopolitics literature more than any other, it is probably Said's *Orientalism*" (1994: 516). Said's deconstructive approach to the processes and the language that sustained a prevailing, biased world order characterized inspired writers such as Toal, Agnew, Slater, Simon Dalby and many others to uphold the "Foucauldian insistence that one should explore the power/knowledge nexus" and "overhaul" previous understandings of geopolitics (ibid.: 516).

Whereas in the 1990s debates surrounding critical geopolitics developed rapidly, of late questions have been raised of its continued relevance (Dalby, 2008). More specifically, Dalby (2008) calls for a review of the way in which those discourses of critical geopolitics that developed during the 1980s and 1990s continue to be relevant to the contemporary international political condition. By no means does Dalby deny

the importance of a critical approach to geopolitics: “critical geopolitics can surely have a useful role to play” (2008: 431) in understanding international relations. However, he reminds readers that “the critical geopolitics engagement in popular culture perhaps needs some further extension” (ibid.: 431), drawing attention to the importance of maintaining a relevant relationship between theory and practice.

What is the relationship between thinking critically about geopolitical discourse and the practicalities of political life? Citing the work of Toal and Agnew (1992), Painter (1995: 148) writes that it is “through discourse that [foreign policy] is made meaningful and justified”. This thesis therefore argues that ‘geographical imaginations’ have an absolutely central relationship to practice, because they work to help legitimate decisions to go to war, as well as how and why we should ‘help’ others in different parts of the world. But, as I will go on to show, the decision to ‘help’ and provide aid to others is not as innocent as it may seem: the practice of aid is often based around presuppositions about the way in which politics should be organised, what it means to develop properly, and what freedom should look like.

Toal and Agnew (1992), in their bid to conceptualize the emerging critical geopolitics discourse, introduced geopolitics as two-tiered, as both ‘practical’ and formal’ (Toal and Agnew, 1992; Dodds and Atkinson, 2000). For Toal and Agnew, this resembled an ‘on-the-ground’/‘in-the-office’ dualism, whereby geopolitics was influenced both by practitioners of statecraft (practical) and intellectuals of statecraft (formal). I suggest that a similar, two-tiered geopolitics continues to operate, where there is a direct link between the way in which discourses of aid are *practiced* and *imagined*.

As a result of the advent of the international War on Terror geopolitics has undergone something of a renaissance. If clarification was needed that geopolitics continues to operate as fervently as ever in policy, the securitization of politics, as explored by Duffield (2001; 2007) and on which I will elaborate in Chapter 4, offers just this. As

NATO forces fight the Taleban in Afghanistan to fight for “international security” and continue to search for Osama Bin Laden along the Afghan-Pakistani border, a cognitive obsession with distant spaces, the notion of territory and demonstrating power overseas all predominate foreign policy. Historically, this has been seen in the expansionist policies of the ancient and new imperialist epochs, and it remains evident in the contemporary politics of the War on Terror.

Those understandings generated by the critical approach to geopolitics must continue to be applied to the realities of everyday political life; critique must be grounded in the context of contemporary, relevant situations of international (geo)politics. I sympathize with the views of Toal and Agnew concerning the importance of discourse and recognize the importance of critical evaluation to geopolitics. By the same token, however, I share Dalby’s (2008) concern that the continued engagement of new studies of critical geopolitics with everyday, popular culture is imperative to its worth as a method of political analysis.

In the aftermath of the ‘birth’ of critical geopolitics, and in its early years, the reality of the everyday was, to a certain extent justifiably, overlooked in favour of an exciting voyage of self-discovery in the founding of a new branch of critical theory. Twenty years on, however, lone references to political speeches and policy documents will not suffice in a study of geopolitics; rather, such accounts must be fully immersed in context – or at least attempt to be so – whereby they must seek to apply those new understandings emerging from new critical analysis to contemporary discussions of policy and political practice. Whilst potentially a significant challenge, the importance of linking theory to practice cannot be too greatly exaggerated for geopolitics.

### **3. Imaginary Geographies and the Geopolitical Imagination**

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) achieved landmark status for its exploring of two key areas that have come to symbolize critical geopolitical discourse, namely the challenging of Cartesian perspectivalism, and the development of thinking regarding imaginary geography. In the first instance, Said followed the philosophies of Foucault and Jacques Derrida whose writings proposed that the world cannot simply be 'read' from a distance; that is to say that, in reading and understanding processes that operate within all systems on any scale, one cannot detach his or herself from those systems and, further, must recognize that his or her readings and writings are contributing to their very development. Ultimately, we are all embedded in the processes that contribute to the continual development of our world, and the Cartesian perspectivalist notion that the world is a stage that can be observed and understood from some detached, mythical place, or is some blank canvas onto which we can 'project' images from a distance, is a falsism. As Gregory phrases it, "representations are never merely mirrors held up to the world; they enter fully into its formation" (2004; xiii). Said applied this thinking to global geopolitics; in particular, in *Orientalism*, Said focuses on relations between the Occident (the West) and the Orient, an imaginary foreign exotic land that represents almost a complete opposite to the familiar. Said localizes this for his study in the Middle East, although he could as successfully have exemplified the Sahel region, the Far East, or the islands of Indonesia. He challenges the underlying acceptance of the World Order as a system whose structure is comprised of pre-determined relationships of power that have historically been accepted without contestation. Said seeks to deconstruct these systems, to reveal their historically constructed nature, and challenges the normative power 'relationships' that have traditionally flowed unilaterally from North to South, West to East, Occident to Orient and, in turn, questions the authority of a world

system that witnesses the subordination of certain states or cultures by those in positions of greater power.

Central to Said's critique of the international system and its political structures is the notion of imaginative geography. Geographical imaginations are rarely simply ideas about foreign, or even simply alternative, geographies. Rarely are they passive, nor are they often innocent or apolitical. Rather, they are cognitive constructions of how a distant place might, or should, be (Said, 1978). Said and Gregory (1994; 2004) have both written of the ways in which conceptualizing ideas about foreign lands is inextricably linked to the production and reaffirmation of identity of the self. In *Orientalism* Said shows that, by constructing an imaginary Orient, based on limited knowledge and understanding, the powers of the British colonial programme were able to create a distinction between "us" and "them". Said writes,

"it is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality. A group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call 'the land of the barbarians'" (1978: 54).

In this passage, Said contends that certain fictions can attain a sense of cognitive reality. In constructing a boundary – whether, as in the example described by Said, physical boundaries marking territory, or cognitive designations – one immediately distinguishes oneself from the 'Other(s)'; this 'Other' can occupy a real space or, equally, a space that is largely fictitious, made real only by the mind. Said continues to explore this idea, noting that the relationship between "us" and "them", or "ours" and "theirs" does not require mutual acknowledgement, (ibid.). The very fact that one party has erected a physical or mental barrier suffices to maintain the existence of the boundary:

"It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours" (1978: 54).

Said's overall rationale for writing *Orientalism* was to challenge this process of erecting boundaries and accentuating difference between cultures. He wishes to expose the contribution made to the ongoing subordination of those spaces, territories, governments and peoples imagined and constructed as weak and backward by those that believe themselves to be powerful and sufficiently knowledgeable to control others: "for Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (1978: 43). It was, though, as much a tool – even a political project – as a process, whereby those in more prominent positions were able to reaffirm their own strength, and the strength of their identity, by offsetting this identity against a weaker, conquerable entity.

Gregory cites an essay by Robert Stam from 1992 in which he explores the role of the media in – and, the mediatisation of – the first Gulf War in 1991. "The media constructed what Stam calls a "fictive We" (Stam, 1992) [...] whose vantage point was carefully established to both privilege and protect the (American) viewer" through the implication of an innocent 'us' (America) and a demonized 'them' (Iraq) (Gregory, 1994: 204). Following on from those ideas put forward by Said in *Orientalism*, and subsequently other writers, Stam suggests that by re-affirming 'ourselves' via the media as democratic, just, organized and knowledgeable, this newly constructed and allied 'We' could unite against 'them' that were undemocratic, unfair, disorganized and ignorant. Irrespective of the plurality present within both Americans *and* Iraqis, the American media had concluded, in short, that 'we were one "We"' and 'they were one "they"', and that 'we' were right and 'they' were wrong. Largely, this negative affirmation of identity is built on the belief that 'we are we because that is who we are' and that 'we are we *because we are not them*'.

This affirmation of 'we', of 'us' and 'our' identity reflects a nationalist understanding of identity and difference. Michael Billig writes of 'banal nationalism', a concept that "suggests nationhood is [constantly] near the surface of contemporary

life” (Billig, 1995: 93), and that a national identity is re-affirmed everyday not through grand ceremonies, gestures or phrases, but “small words [...] that offer constant reminders of the homeland” (ibid.: 93). In other words, the embedded, subconscious, geographical assumptions and imaginations of which I have just spoken contribute not only to ongoing re-affirmation of the self against others (what I would like to term *negative identity*), but also a continual sense of national – or indeed regional, local, or familiar – solidarity (*positive identity*). Billig rejects the claims of post-nationalists such as Francis Fukuyama, who writes of the decline of the nation-state in a neoliberal, post-Cold War global environment (see, for example, Fukuyama, 1992). For nationalism is not just some ‘out there’ notion that can be bought into out of choice by willing individuals (or discarded by the unwilling); it is dynamically produced and reproduced through all “the embodied habits of social life” (Billig, 1995: 7) via, as Gregory (1994) exemplifies through Stam, the media, or other forms of popular culture.

In part, Said wrote *Orientalism* in order to expose the negative political and social consequences of imagining a distinctive and singular “us” and “them”, a “West” and a “Rest” and, as this discussion will highlight, this reasoning has founded Said’s objections to a host of attempts to order, or structure, the world and its (geo)politics. Returning to the analysis of *Orientalism* (with Billig’s thoughts on banal nationalism firmly in mind) Said is ultimately writing of the ways in which the Orientalist mindset constructs, represents, demonizes, and distances itself from a metaphorical Other, in order to reaffirm ‘our’ (the Orientalist’s) strength as an entity, whether the collective ‘we’ represents a nation, a religion, a culture or a family. This ‘othering’ is based on preconceptions, embedded thinking and imaginary ideas about what the Other thinks, does or desires and is present across all scales of analysis. The notion of the geopolitical imagination (developed by Agnew) is therefore directly linked to Said’s work on geographical imaginations: it refers to the ways in which nations and

governments offset themselves against fellow states in order to define their place in an imaginary hierarchy of nations, or the world order. As Agnew states, the practices ongoing in contemporary world politics are driven by imaginations and ‘understandings’ of “the way that the world works” (Agnew, 1998: 7). Both Said and Agnew note that this imagining and engaging with Other spaces is, however, very often politically motivated; we *imagine* and cognitively *create* as much for the purpose of enhancing understanding and engagement across space as for self-affirmation, and restating a view of ourselves as superior.

Agnew’s examination of the (modern) geopolitical imagination is worthy of further comment. He states that the rationale for writing *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics* was to “identify the major elements of this long-dominant approach to world politics – the modern geopolitical imagination – and to show [the ways in which it] was then projected on to the rest of the world and into the future in theory and practice of world politics” (2003: 2). The “angle of vision” (ibid.: 2), as Agnew terms it, offered to the understandings of international relations is overwhelmingly biased towards those in the most dominant geopolitical positions. For the geopolitical imagination is, ultimately, a visualization of world politics. Agnew’s greatest issue with the geopolitical imagination is the prevalence of its ‘modern’ characteristic. He defines ‘modern’ as “the imaginative ability to transcend the spatial limits imposed by everyday life and contemplate the world [...] as a picture” (2003: 15). The modern geopolitical imagination therefore reduces the complexities of international politics to a single-visioned entity that can be easily read, and the hierarchies of power it projects comfortably understood. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the modern geopolitical imagination continues to prevail in certain overseas aid policies in post-Soviet Russia, and the ways in which Russia’s unique geopolitical position (as I will continue to explore) reinforces those claims made by Agnew (and others) that these imaginations and constructions must be rethought and reconceptualized to overcome their essentializing and Orientalist tendencies.

### **The geopolitical imagination and development**

In an exchange published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* over the period 1993-4, David Slater and Gerard Toal (Slater, 1993; 1994; Toal, 1994) shared an exchange concerning the relevance of geopolitics, and the geopolitical imagination, to theories of development. To uncover and further the discussions presented in this debate is one of the key motivations for this study. Therefore, before I explore the way in which the geopolitical imagination impacts upon representations of Russia, I wish to develop those arguments of Orientalism and the notions of a constructed “us and them”, for example, in the context of development, highlighting the key arguments that transpired from Slater and Toal’s dialogue.

Slater (1993: 419) describes the Occidental mission to “subordinate and assimilate the Third World Other” through the adoption of development practice grounded in modernization theory. He continues later to state that “the terrain of our geopolitical analysis [...] can be constituted by the intermingling of global relations” (1993: 431), under which the discourse of overseas development must fall. In this exchange, both Slater and Toal are interested in the way that geopolitical imagination is *used* by those whose capacity, in terms of power, permits. Slater’s focus on the relationship between geopolitics and development theory reflects an under-theorized area of political discourse; his main concern, however, is the ways in which development is “framed” within the geopolitical imagination. Toal’s (1994) response supports Slater’s initial call, as I do, for continual analysis of the geopolitical tendencies in Occidental-devised theory. However, Toal takes issue with the scale of which Slater is writing – very much at the level of “meta-politics” (Toal, 1994: 228) – and, as such, notes that Slater’s argument, whilst drawing attention to the inequalities of global power, is actively upholding them. He argues that Slater is preserving an Occidental gaze, reinforcing the West as positive against any of the less-developed ‘Rest’ in a Cartesian perspectivalist, ‘us’ versus ‘them’, manner. Toal calls for a critical geopolitics that refutes the use of “perspectival frames” (1994: 232), and wholly

overcomes these orientalist, constructed segregations that, for him, do not reflect reality in the globalized era of continuous flows. In response, Slater (1994) challenges Toal that structure, in some form, is necessary in order to successfully conceptualize the international political system. He writes, “we need to be able to move in an analytical world where there are *some* nodal points of theoretical meaning which can help us to structure our explanations” (Slater, 1994: 233). As I will illustrate shortly, I maintain Slater’s perspective. Nevertheless, that Slater and Toal contend each other’s arguments on a scalar level is not the point either is ultimately concerned with making. Rather, both writers call for a more critical approach to the ways in which the geopolitical imagination is used, promoted and upheld in systems of international politics.

### **The influence of postdevelopment**

The convergence of theories of geopolitics and development has similarly been addressed by Arturo Escobar. A critic of modernist development theory Escobar writes from a postdevelopment perspective. Postdevelopment theory argues that ‘development discourse’, a series of theories practices and imaginations, has produced – constructed – understandings and situations of geopolitics and (under)development. The terms “Third World” and “underdevelopment” – and the associated negative connotations these carry – are examples of these constructions; Escobar (1995) writes of the reality that until these terms entered political vocabulary across all levels, many people living across the non-Western world were unaware of what it meant to be developed or, therefore, underdeveloped. James Ferguson addresses a similar point in his text, ‘Global Shadows’ (2006) that discusses representations of ‘Africa’ (as a collective, “single ‘place’” (2006: 1)) during the modern era. He notes that to think of Africa as ‘traditional’ rather than ‘modern’ is to overlook its individual cultural histories. And whilst, as Ferguson writes, “Africans lament that their life circumstances are not modern enough [...] they are speaking [...] about what

they view as shamefully inadequate socioeconomic conditions and their low global rank *in relation to other places*" (2006: 186) [emphasis added]. Escobar argues that these post-war terminologies of 'developed' and 'underdeveloped', created in the West, led to an extended gulf between what was produced (that which subsequently became 'knowledge' or 'truth') and what was actually existing: a gulf between truth and reality. He states: "reality [was] colonized by the development discourse" (1995: 5), and he raises the notion of development "as a regime of representation" (ibid.: 6); that is to say, development theories and practices serve to form a 'machine' that seeks to present a constructed entity. Further, he cites Mitchell (1998: ix) to offer a similar perspective, whereby Mitchell describes "methods of order and truth"; that truth is portrayed as the fruit of method reinforces its created nature. Ultimately, for Escobar, "development discourse [...] has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World (1995:8). The power of the West under modernity has effectively divided the world into two: there exists the 'real' and the 'represented', the 'exhibitions' and the 'eternal reality' (ibid.) and is overwhelmingly characterized by binaries and Cartesian Perspectivalism.

Postdevelopment, therefore, employs critical analysis of (modern) development theory. It looks to move beyond the post-war discourses of development through their "unmaking" (Escobar, 1995: 217), however difficult this process of challenging convention may be. For Escobar, "development unmade means the inauguration of a discontinuity with the discursive practice of the last forty years (ibid.: 217). This thesis shares the same goal of contesting – unmaking – traditional and uncritically accepted 'norms' in development, geopolitics and discussions regarding the geopolitical imagination. However, the difficulty with the terms *unmake* or *unlearn* (ibid.) is the implication that, in following through with this, those failings and mistakes made as part of modernist development discourse are, also, unlearned. To *relearn*, and *remake*, building on the lessons learnt from previous development theory would reflect a better terminology.

It is important, however, that in challenging convention, there exist no pre-conceived notions of theories regarding 'the alternative'. The goal of postdevelopment thinking is the embrace of alternative *thought* and *practice*, and a resistance to the construction of meta-theories that rely too heavily on representation. Escobar proposes postdevelopment discourse as an opportunity to rebuild a lost connection between truth and reality, and a chance to look outside traditional academic circles to a "new reading of popular practices" (1995: 223). It offers a new perspective and a greater appreciation of cultural difference and the existence of a hybrid society that, for Escobar, has been overlooked in literature.

Postdevelopment theory shares many aims and objectives with those of this thesis. This discussion will, however, draw more heavily on the previously introduced dialogue between David Slater and Gerard Toal, concerning the geopolitical imagination and development. There are two reasons for this that relate to the central aims and themes of *this* thesis in particular. The first of these concerns the role for (geopolitical) imaginations. Postdevelopment looks to move beyond a role for construction and imagination in theory and practice. The exchange shared by Slater and Toal, rather than accepting the rejection of imaginary construction debates its very existence and the scale at which the geopolitical imagination operates. This thesis does not, therefore, share the approach to (geopolitical) imaginations as presented under postdevelopment. It accepts, as Slater (1994) does in his response to Toal (1993), that structure is a necessary part of international politics and, with that, certain imaginary constructions. The thesis focuses more on the important discussion of the way in which these imaginations are *used*, by whom and for whom; it is concerned with the *management* of imaginations by academic and policy intellectuals, rather than their presence itself.

The second rationale for grounding this discussion under the specific debates of geopolitics rather than postdevelopment relates to Russia being the case in point.

Many of the issues raised by the postdevelopment school concern the politics of representation between the First and Third Worlds through ‘development’ during the era of modernity. It does not address, in the same way that a grounding in discussions of the modern geopolitical imagination will, the representational politics of the First-Second world interaction, and the legacies of this has left for political relationships in a post-Cold War era. More than exploring further the geopolitics of postdevelopment, this thesis explores the role played by development under a form of post-geopolitics, which seeks to explore the contemporary relationship and interactions between the West and those countries whose relationship during the modern epoch was defined by geopolitical, rather than development theory. I shall now turn to an examination of the geopolitical imagination and Russia.

### **Russia and the geopolitical imagination**

Many of the processes operating in the geopolitical imagination closely relate to those described by Said in his discussion of imaginary geographies, particularly in relation to the practice of Othering; the ways in which those practices informing and upholding the modern geopolitical imagination can be understood in terms of Said’s work are clear. The concept of distancing oneself from an unknown Other, and drawing on a dominant (geo)political position in order to use this distance to express supremacy is, undoubtedly, implicit in establishing an international hierarchy. Equally, the notion of affirming the strength of the self by actively constructing an Other as subordinate exudes clear linkages to Said’s discussions in *Orientalism*.

Agnew (1998) seeks, in part, to recapitulate previous geopolitical thinking. He outlines three Ages of Geopolitics – namely *civilizational*, *naturalized*, and *ideological* geopolitics – that have prevailed throughout modern history, whose agendas represented, respectively, European expansion post-Enlightenment, inter-state competitiveness of early twentieth century wartime, and political ideology of the post-1945, Cold War epoch. He states that since 1970 and the beginning of the downfall of

ideological geopolitics with the demise of the Cold War, together with the loss of an obvious Other (the USSR) for the leading global hegemon (the United States), international geopolitics and the geopolitical imagination has been in limbo as a host of writings and thinkings concerning its future have risen and fallen. The situation remains potent today where a series of opposing political-economic ideologies, including Islamic Extremism, have arguably come to represent new, dangerous Others, a scenario that, for some policy intellectuals on the right and, especially, far right of the political spectrum, once again legitimizes the very modern, *West vs Rest* imagination. By fabricating Other(s) as a 'danger' to the values and principles of Westernism, the *Rest(s)* is (are) distanced by the West, echoing the system of polarities that characterized the Cold War. The 'uncivilized', demonic Soviet Union has, for some, been replaced by terrorists or fundamentalists that have come to represent the perilous Other. Equally, alternatives to the dominant politico-economic model, such as market socialism in China, seemingly continue to successfully evolve and challenge this prevailing system. Agnew (1998) calls for a 'new' geopolitics and an associated geopolitical imagination that is grounded in the inadequacies of attempting to draw on theories from the modern epoch in an international political climate that is increasingly underpinned by postmodern practice. The modern geopolitical imagination, Agnew writes, "is no longer sufficient and needs to be replaced by a different approach to understanding the world's political geography" (Agnew, 1998: 10).

The case of Russia vindicates these calls for a revision of the way in which the world order is imagined. Robert Legvold currently serves as the Marshall Shulman Professor Emeritus in Political Science at Columbia University in New York, and has published extensively on the topic of Soviet and post-Soviet foreign policy (for example, Legvold, 2006; 2007; 2009). Legvold writes in a recent essay, concerning the need for a changed political dialogue between the United States and Russia, that

the ways in which the world and its spaces are constructed through the geopolitical imagination are outdated, misleading and, to a certain extent, derogatory (Legvold, 2009). He shows that a series of intellectuals writing of Russia and its politics have recently increased attention towards overcoming those modern imaginations of the world, and particularly, for Legvold, those of Russia as a dangerous, unknown Other:

“specialists [such as] Anders Åslund, Thomas Graham, Andrew Kuchins and Steven Pifer [...] note that Russia is not the entity it was in the 1990s (no longer prostrate and struggling to be like the West, it alone part of it) and neither is the world (no longer dominated by a United States that could tackle scattered secondary security threats with just a little help from a few friends)” (Legvold, 2009: 81).

The fact that the world is no longer as it was is a fact that either escapes certain right-wing proponents of the modern geopolitical imagination, or forces them into denial. The arguments and discussions presented by Agnew that call for a reconceptualization of the geopolitical imagination are concerned less with the temporality of the world order, focusing more intently on the Orientalizing and essentializing processes that its modernist outlook yields. Nevertheless, as Agnew explains, in order to understand the prevalence of the modern geopolitical imagination we must first comprehend which events have the power to cause a shift in imagined understandings, and which do not. Agnew suggests that the trajectory of the geopolitical imagination is unpredictable (Agnew, 1998). In discussing the Russo-American relationship, Legvold (2009) similarly acknowledges the challenges involved in overcoming that Cold War, modernist imaginations that remain both within the intellectual circles of statecraft and in wider American society. “Too many Americans mistakenly believe that Russia's leaders are incorrigibly antidemocratic and bent on bludgeoning Russia's neighbours [...] and causing trouble for the United States” (Legvold, 2009: 83). Legvold is correct in his analysis that, although likely the most challenging scenario for the Obama administration, both governments and their societies must overcome “the [Cold War] assumptions underlying each side's position”

(*ibid.*: 89) for a relationship that is both just and profitable; that is to say that those imaginations of Russia from within America and, naturally vice versa must be carefully scrutinized and, where appropriate, whole heartedly rejected as either dated or wholly incorrect and unjust – or, indeed, both.

With these examples in mind I support Agnew in his argument that calls for a revised geopolitical imagination. Whilst it is true that the way in which Russia is constructed and subsequently perceived is flawed for its temporal misunderstandings, exemplified by the quotes from Legvold regarding the prevalence of Cold War imaginations, a revision is overdue because of the Oriental-Occidental binary that this construction provokes. During the Cold War, the modern geopolitical imagination prevailed to essentialize the ideology and the politics of the West, and to demonize the Other (the Soviet Union) (Agnew, 2003). The purpose of this thesis is to show that these imaginations continue to exist as part of overseas aid policy in Russia, thus upholding those systems that presume a superiority of the occident and an inferiority of the Other. The challenge, as I will show in the case studies in Part II, is that as Russia continues to develop economically, politically and socially, the way in which it is imagined is becoming dualistic. It is precisely this dualism that makes Russia a unique and interesting case whose relevance to this discussion is extensive. Russia is being increasingly embraced as a developed nation in programmes and systems of international aid, recognized for its capacity to assist overseas in situations of severe underdevelopment, particularly in those countries of the Former Soviet Union that retain a geopolitical importance (Legvold, 2007). The modern geopolitical imagination that is upheld in the policies of certain aid organizations working in Russia, that represents Russia as passive and inferior to the occident must, therefore, be reconsidered, not only for its traits of orientalism but for its misrepresentation of the Russian case.

Agnew writes that, “in times of flux, conventional wisdom is more open to scrutiny” (Agnew, 1998: 2); there can be no denying that the ‘knowledge’, systems or orders (spatial or otherwise) portrayed as normality by the modern geopolitical imagination are overdue close examination and reconsideration. The Russian case clearly highlights that a challenging of ‘convention’ is overdue. However destabilizing it might appear to challenge embedded wisdom and thinking, the rationale for such a process must be found in the contradictions between modernism and postmodernism, between the simultaneous rejection and embracing of an Other, that clearly continue to prevail in Russia.

Of course, in practical terms international politics requires structure, in some form. Nevertheless, post-Cold War attempts to theorize and order world politics, such as the previously mentioned “Clash of Civilizations” thesis (Huntington, 1993) are dominated by projections wrought with “modernist assurance” (Toal, 1996: 243) with regards to geopolitics; that is to say, many such conceptualizations of the world order uphold those imbalanced relationships of power in international relations that were prevalent during the modern era. Therefore, of greater importance than the debate concerning structure is one which draws attention to those imaginations implicit within this structuralism, and the ways in which a modern perspective allows for not only the prevalence of these constructions but their *use* in upholding unequal relationships of power.

The discussion now turns to an exploration of processes of international aid. In the following section I will examine the ways in which geopolitical imaginations inform practices of international development assistance. In particular, I examine the way in which essentializing, Orientalist perceptions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ continue to underpin aid and development discourses, reinforcing those hierarchical understandings of how the world is ‘ordered’, and the assumed superiority of the West. My discussion will lead on the one hand to a call for a revision of these imaginations, and on the other hand for closer examination of the way in which they are *used* and taken up by various aid

organizations. The case studies of organizations working to provide development assistance in Russia in the post-Soviet era reveal that a desire to uphold the Occidentalized geopolitical imagination from within the West must be critically evaluated; this will constitute a first step towards rethinking exactly what aid is perceived to be and how it should best be delivered.

#### **4. – International aid discourse and the role of geopolitical imaginations**

This discussion now turns its focus to a critical reading of development assistance, and the ways in which processes of international aid are understood and written. In writing this section of the piece I have faced significant difficulty. Not only is it morally challenging to criticize the largely well-intended work of development workers and volunteers, but the sheer complexity of global aid flows will almost always leave any critical writing that seeks to discuss the shortcomings of the aid discourse as a whole – of which there are many – open to critiques of generalization, misunderstanding, and normativity. Nevertheless in researching and writing this thesis, particularly in light of the case study of post-Soviet Russia that follows, I feel strongly that it is necessary not just to raise questions of the way in which international aid theory is written, and its corresponding practice functions, but to continually re-evaluate its effectiveness and impact. This chapter will look to readdress previously proposed linkages between international aid, politics and security. It further expands its attention to the aid discourse as a whole, seeking to uncover its shortcomings that have come to light, in part as a result of reviewing aid literature and policy, and in part through the case study of two aid organisations working in Russia in Part II. My claim is that certain trajectories of aid flowing in Russia are narrow-minded and tunnel-visioned, too reliant upon the framework of the Millennium Development Goals that was both designed and intended to function under a global political system that differed greatly from that of today. This point is made with reference to the impact of 9/11, and the changed geopolitical climate that proceeded from this, on the flows and frameworks for international aid. In this chapter, I draw on the work of Mark Duffield and Jenny Edkins, regarding the relationship between development, aid, politics and security, to discuss these perspectives. Further, I introduce the discussion that explores the extent to which frameworks and aid policy might, consciously or otherwise, seek to preserve prevailing (occidental) geopolitical imaginations, and imaginary global

structures and systems; a greater exploration of this case is presented throughout the Russian case study in Part II. In the first instance, however, and in order to understand the contemporary situation, it is important to note the ways in which understanding for, and processes and flows within international aid have changed since its early beginnings.

### **Aid history, politics and the political**

“Aid is charity. If it is not charity it is not aid. It may be enlightened self-interest; mutual defence; a boost for the export trade; a sop to a troublesome ally; it cannot be aid” (Zinkin, 1978, cited in Burnell, 1997a: 3).

In exploring the history and development of the notion of international aid I will draw largely on the account offered by Roger Riddell in his 2007 text *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* ‘Modern aid’, or aid as it is understood today, is traditionally considered to be rooted in the Marshall Plan for postwar recovery and reconstruction in a war-torn Europe post-1945. Designed by George Marshall as Secretary of State for the US, the plan offered financial assistance to European states to rebuild infrastructure, economies and societies. Following the Marshall Plan, in 1949 US President Truman explained in his inaugural address that those countries that were able must work to aid states in need of assistance for development.

The notion of providing aid overseas was, however, not a novel concept. Aid that took the form of transfers of knowledge from so-labelled ‘developed’ countries to ‘unenlightened’ or ‘dark’ countries was characteristic of the Enlightenment; links to geopolitics are clearly apparent here, recalling the Orientalist programmes of ‘knowledge transfer’ described by Said, such as those of Lord Cromer in Egypt, that I have presented in the preceding chapter. Many voluntary or church-based organizations that represent the birth of contemporary NGOs were built through these overseas missions (Riddell, 2007). Of the now renowned providers – Riddell exemplifies OXFAM, Christian Aid, CARE and Save the Children – many predate the Marshall Plan and the beginning of ‘modern aid’. Indeed, Riddell reminds his audience

of the ways in which British, French and other imperial governments provided for their colonies overseas during the 1920s and 1930s. Truman's speech, therefore, should be seen as more of a call to action for those governments that had the capability to assist overseas (*ibid.*), and an advertisement for the benefits of pooling resources to assist the underdeveloped in an early form of multilateralism.

It has been argued that aid and politics were intricately linked during the Cold War (for example Dalby, 1990; Woods, 2005; Edkins, 2000). Whilst Burnell (1997a) actively downplays the role of the political in influencing aid flows, Ngaire Woods, in contrast, sees politics and the political as implicit features of aid, particularly during the 1970s after the initial drive towards a singular, coherent global assistance programme. The difference between these points of view is stark. Burnell writes that "the political value of aid to donors will vary from case to case, but overall judgement is that aid's worth as an instrument of leverage can easily be overestimated" (1997a: 26), whereas Woods describes the Cold War patterns of almost "purely geostrategically led aid" (Woods, 2005: 408). Echoing Woods, Duffield infers the importance of political strategy in overseas development, as he writes that "one notable effect of the collapse of the Cold War has been the decline in strategic importance of the West's former Third World allies" (Duffield, 1994). Further, Duffield cites Griffin (1991) in writing that "aid flows tended to reflect the requirements of strategy, and were largely unconnected with the degree to which countries were poor or not" (quoted in Duffield, 2001: 35). The politics of international relations is therefore implicit to processes and flows of aid.

Of late, the development and overseas assistance discourses have adopted an empowerment-based, poverty-centred approach, often termed the 'new poverty agenda' (for example Woods, 2005; Black and White, 2006). However, as Riddell (2007) writes, the growth of NGOs, together with the wisdom of some World Bank and UN officials during the 1970s reflected a similar concern with the reduction of poverty.

This ‘convention’ proved susceptible to new thinking in a manner that has become typical of the aid discourse over time:

“The impact of this [poverty-focused] thinking on aid-giving was quite dramatic ... To the present day, donors have successively swung between the extreme views that development aid is best deployed to assist poor people directly, or that it is best deployed in accelerating and helping to shape the process of wealth creation, contributing to poverty alleviation more indirectly” (Riddell, 2007: 32).

For better or for worse, this remained true at least until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century when, as this discussion will argue, the discourse perhaps *should* have been more reactionary to changing international relations when in fact it has, for the large part, persevered with a singular approach to aid based on the MDGs.

The 1980s saw a shift towards the other extremity (as Riddell puts it) in development wisdom, as American and European support for neoliberal economic policy predominated. Economic determinism characterized by policies of Structural Adjustment dominated aid flows, and the economic conditionalities attached to many loans or grants meant that actual levels of ODA fell (Riddell, 2007). Conditionality is defined by Burnell (1997b) as a condition of exchange; that is to say that aid is provided in return for something, in a relationship that implies positive exchange for both donor and recipient. In reality, it might be argued that to attach such a fundamental conditionality as support for and adoption of a particular branch of macroeconomic theory represents a form of political imperialism, whereby the capacity of the aid provider, whether multilateral or bilateral, to set the terms of engagement is as much part of the provision of aid as it is a restatement of the relationship of power between donor and receiver. Indeed, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, conditionality became recognized not just as economic, but further in political terms. Duffield writes, “development aid was increasingly tied not only to progress with economic liberalization but to the creation and support of democratic and pluralistic institutions as well” (Duffield, 2001: 30); as such, development

assistance had not only become an effectively normative process, in which recipients were subject to a host of economic conditions, but further it had established itself as a forum for the continual restatement of the inequalities of power between the provider and the recipient.

The growing prevalence of NGOs throughout the 1980s and 1990s brought an increased confidence in multilateralism (Riddell, 2007) and, combined with a new optimism following the end of the Cold War, led commentators to suggest that, along with “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992) the world had reached the ‘end of political aid’. Riddell notes that these assertions “proved to be mirages” (Riddell, 2007: 38). The 1990s did see a fall in ODA designated as ‘development’ aid, as official flows for emergencies increased. Riddell outlines two reasons for this. Firstly, he describes the fall in politically motivated aid resulting from the decline in bipolarity that characterized the post-Cold War fallout, together with the increased necessity for aid funds to be directed towards conflicts in newly independent states in East and Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Secondly, Riddell cites increased natural disasters as a factor for increased emergency funds. However, both Edkins’ and Duffield’s writing challenges this thinking by suggesting that aid practices cannot be understood straightforwardly as responses to *natural* events. They question the naturalness of emergencies, arguing that situations of emergency can rarely be understood as detached from politics (see the following section on complex permanent emergency), thus maintaining an association of aid and the political (Edkins, 2000; Duffield, 2001).

The decline in development aid during the 1990s was accompanied by the (re)introduction of thinking concerning the importance of targeting poverty at a more grassroots level in situations of underdevelopment, ultimately giving rise to a ‘new poverty agenda’ (Black and White, 2006). However, as Riddell (2007) shows, this wisdom was anything but ‘new’ (following the findings of the Pearson Commission in 1969 that proposed many of the same programmes and targets for development as

1990s thinking). Such a focus towards poverty, empowerment, gender and ‘little d’ development (after Hart, 2001; Power, 2003) founded wisdom that led to the 1996 OECD publication “Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The contribution of Development Co-operation” (OECD, 1996) and, subsequently, the drafting of the Millennium Development Goals at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. The MDG philosophy has continued to prevail in flows of development assistance throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This thesis aims to raise discussions concerning the role of geopolitical imaginations in aid flows. Through the case studies of two international aid organizations working in Russia that follow in Part II, I will examine the MDG philosophy to explore those geopolitical imaginations that underpin its rationale and its policies, and allow for its sustained dominance in trajectories of development assistance.

### **The era of the Millennium Development Goals**

With the MDGs finalized by early 2001, and associated initial funding and strategies for their attainment firmly in place by June of the same year (Riddell, 2007), it is somewhat surprising that the events of 11 September 2001 in Manhattan and Washington DC have received such little attention in the literature surrounding the Goals. The attacks on the United States on 9/11 projected the world order into an unprecedented state, resulting in “nothing less than a total reorganization of world politics” (Agnew, 2003: 1). The MDGs were designed to be implemented under an international geopolitical climate that preceded the War on Terror and, as such, discussions that critically evaluate their continued relevance and appropriateness after 9/11 are necessary. By evaluating in this way, we can explore those imaginations that underpin the MDG philosophy, and the degree to which these assumptions and geopolitical constructions contribute to the prevalence of a system that *might* not represent best practice for aid.

As I noted at the outset of this chapter, it is morally challenging to raise questions regarding such targets that work to offer hope towards the end of poverty for millions across the world. Nevertheless, to critique and scrutinize conventional wisdom is a positive trajectory for understanding. 'Best-practice' is both subjective and temporally volatile and, as such, must be continually evaluated over time in relation to different and dynamic geographies.

The goals are subject to annual review and evaluation, although this assessment relates only to the degrees to which targets have or have not been attained, or are on course (or otherwise) to be achieved by a fixed date. Of those writers that have called into question the overall concept of the Goals (for example Amin, 2006) a majority have focused their critique on questions of the flexibility or attainability of individual goals across different spaces, or the broader notion of target-setting for development (as exemplified by Black and White's, 2006 volume). Little has been made of the ways in which the changed geopolitical climate that followed 9/11, characterized by the 'War on Terror', affected the direction in which international aid was moving at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Therefore, the degree to which the MDG framework remains appropriate must be assessed. Similarly, the role that has been played by geopolitical imaginations in upholding this singular vision for development assistance must be explored. Mark Duffield is one key author that has argued for more attention to be paid to the relationship between development and security. For example, he suggests that geopolitical considerations impact upon the ways in which development assistance is allocated and distributed (e.g. Duffield, 1997; 2001; 2007). Similarly, Woods (2005) has written of a significant shift in the politics of aid-giving that has witnessed states returning to bilateral programmes of assistance, closely tied to foreign policy. (I will return to both of these points shortly.) Drawing on these observations, it is again surprising that the framework of the MDGs has not been re-evaluated to accommodate the changed climate of international relations post 9/11. The MDGs were designed in *and for* a political climate very different to the

contemporary experience. Annual evaluations are, by their nature, focussed on year-on-year targets, and accept without question the wider conceptualizations under which the achievement of goals is (or fails to be) facilitated. Of these wider processes, this thesis finds focus in the deep presuppositions, imaginations and constructions on which the MDG philosophy and its continuance might be argued to rely.

Richard Black and Howard White's text (2006) entitled *Targeting Development: Critical Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals* is a welcome addition to the literature that seeks to raise questions concerning the MDGs. A notable omission from the book, however, reflects the concern outlined above: the environment from within which critique of the goals takes place has itself changed over time, and the way in which this shift has influenced critical perspectives remains unaddressed. The discussions are, for the most part, momentary, taking a snapshot of the international poverty situation or the progress of a particular goal in order to conclude whether or not the goals-based paradigm for development represents best-practice. Progress as Black and White's text (2006) may be for those wishing for the adoption of a more critical approach to the MDGs, the papers in the volume do not discuss the way in which poverty is affected by external events. Poverty may change without 'the poor' in question necessarily becoming poorer or richer, but rather due to external events. For example, the world's poorest did not, for the most part, become substantially poorer or wealthier (in terms of resources, capital, basic-needs or other) between September 10<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup> 2001. However, some poor were inevitably *made* poorer, and some were made less poor over this short period as the international perspective on underdevelopment and poverty came to be understood to a much greater extent in terms of its contribution to global instability and insecurity. Not only does this vindicate the pre-9/11 writings of Duffield but it also serves to exemplify the power of political *imaginations*.

Unintentionally, the above discussion might be viewed as proposing poverty as a wholly imaginary and constructed entity; the harsh realities of situations of absolute

and endemic poverty across the world highlight that this, clearly, is not the case. However, I wish to make two points in response to this. Firstly, as Said (1978) noted, the capacity of powerful nations to construct imagined understandings of foreign spaces is great and, as such, the notion of a constructed form of poverty that is underwritten by geopolitical considerations is a valid concept. Secondly, the power of external events to shift prevailing understanding must not be underestimated; furthermore, it is imperative that the extent to which these events do or do not have profound effects on wisdom is evaluated. Agnew (1998) writes that geopolitical imaginations are largely fixed and most events do not have a profound effect; equally worthy of discussion is the unpredictability of which events do and do not impact upon deep-rooted imaginations. Agnew's assertion, therefore, must be continually evaluated in relation to specific situations, one of which is offered by the changing perceptions of poverty. Black and White's volume (2006) must, of course, be welcomed for adopting a critical perspective towards the MDGs. Nevertheless, though it does not pretend to be so, it cannot be viewed as comprehensive; on many more levels than those proposed in Black and White's discussion can we find flaw in the continued hegemony of MDG-based wisdom in development assistance.

The introduction to Black and White's (2006) volume discusses the practice of setting targets in development, and explores the MDG targets in relation to wider development and political discourse. They write, however, that "the targets have already arguably been overtaken for some, especially in the US Administration, by new concerns to tie development assistance to security issues in the post-11 September 'war on terrorism'" (White and Black, 2006: 2). Woods (2005) also notes this trend. She explains in detail that a tendency to (re)align aid – and more widely, overseas development policy for 'donor' governments – with the politics of (national) security is a significant characteristic of the post-9/11 era, although the relationships and linkages between these two discourses were, in addition, hallmarks of the Cold

War period (Dalby, 1990). Through this realignment of aid with concerns of national security, the role for geopolitics and geopolitical imaginations in policy, and the tendency towards the protection of national interests via Orientalist constructions must be analyzed.

So, just how interlinked are the seemingly detached concepts of security, (under)development and aid? Dalby writes of the Cold War, “the concept of security is central in international relations” (Dalby, 1990: 30); development assistance was a popular strategy under foreign policy invoked by both hegemonic states during the Cold War, as part of a wider attempt to preserve security and ‘order’ in the world as interpreted by the opposing ideologies of the USSR and the USA. Whilst Dalby’s linking of security, development and, more widely, geopolitics in 1990 represented a method through which he was able to conceptualize and theorize the politics of the Cold War more broadly, the foundations on which this theorization was based continue to play out in contemporary international relations. The work of Duffield focuses largely on exploring and conceptualizing these linkages, and in particular the ways in which they come to light in conflict zones, and zones of ‘complex emergency’ (Duffield, 1994).

### **Development, Security and Complex Permanent Emergency**

The linkages between instability, (in)security and underdevelopment have been highlighted by both Duffield and Edkins. Prior to the Millennium Summit, Duffield wrote that a radicalization of development, that incorporated a greater focus on processes of security, was necessary (e.g. Duffield, 1994; 1997). He highlighted the post-Soviet conflicts in the newly independent states of Eastern Europe as examples of where seemingly permanent insecurity was leading to situations of gross underdevelopment. Duffield states in his text addressing the very notion of ‘the merging of development and security’, “underdevelopment has become dangerous” (Duffield, 2001: 2); “development is ultimately impossible without stability and, at the same time, security

is not sustainable without development” (ibid.: 16). As I will show, drawing on Edkins (2000), the inherence of politics – in the form of, for example, poor governance, the unequal distribution of resources, political-ethnic segregation – to situations of underdevelopment immediately links influxes of aid with the (geo)politics of the provider, thus leaving donor assistance policy open to geopolitical imaginations. I will first explore those linkages between development, security and the concept of complex permanent emergency – that clearly exemplifies the relevance of the development-security relationship – of which Duffield and Edkins have written.

Development post-1990 was, and is, a different process to that which characterized overseas assistance, intervention and foreign policy during the Cold War. The ‘new poverty agenda’ must, crucially, be understood as only one facet of this radicalized notion of development. Development and security became inextricably linked, for Duffield, during the ‘new wars’ of the 1990s in Europe and the Former Socialist Republics, during which time a convergence between the agendas of an internationally expanding notion of ‘liberal peace’ – quite literally, peace in the name of de-centralized governance and liberalization – and conflict signalled that global politics had entered an unprecedented phase (Duffield, 2001). It became increasingly challenging for NGOs to adhere to an entirely humanitarian agenda and, as such, a form of political humanitarianism evolved (ibid.), whereby the activities of organizations that had previously focused almost wholly on the provision of relief shifted their foci towards conflict prevention, and the associated encouragement of sociopolitical reforms that this, in some cases, required. As ‘emergency’ situations grew to be understood as multi-faceted, multi-causal and more complex in nature, the term “complex emergency” entered the political terminology. As Edkins notes, “it is a contentious term”, not least because of its loose application to situations that are fundamentally political in nature, but are not recognized appropriately as such (Edkins, 2000: 131). Edkins’ reference to the loose application of terminology,

together with Toal's observation of a similar issue surrounding the term 'geopolitics' (as explored in Chapter 2), both highlight the ongoing semantic discrepancy in discourse that I have described.

Various forms of the term 'complex emergency' have appeared in writings since its introduction by the UN during the 1980s as a means of depicting the challenging nature of the crisis situations in the Sahel. In a paper published in 1994 Duffield speaks of (complex) "permanent emergency", in which he argues for a "crisis of developmentalism" that concerns the (in)appropriateness of development assistance in the early 1990s. Although this thinking by Duffield led to an adoption of the phrase "complex political emergency" (for example, Edkins, 2000: 129), the emphasis on the temporality of 'emergency' brought by the inclusions of the word *permanent* is important, I feel. The questions of "why is this emergency permanent?" or "what are the conditions that uphold this situation of emergency?" surely do lead us towards failures of political and/or socioeconomic systems. But to understand such situations in terms of time – and the way in which they have the potential to *change* over time – has profound implications for development assistance. Further still, an understanding of situations of emergency and crisis in terms of permanence must dispel any efforts to 'solve' the problem, for development is rarely as linear as a solutions-based paradigm would suggest. (Such critique resounds strongly with those voicing opposition to the notion of target-setting in development, as previously explored.) It is these situations of complex permanent emergency that have led to the blurring of discrete programmes of *relief* and *development* aid, as discussed by Duffield (2007), and the shift in the foci of the work of NGOs as examined above.

Edkins' understanding of complex (permanent) emergency is detailed through her study of famine in the Sahel. Throughout *Whose Hunger?* (2000) she seeks, ultimately, to repoliticize aid and shift convention away from ideas surrounding the naturalness of disaster situations. The goal of this chapter – indeed this thesis – is much the same: to raise questions of the role that (geo)political and the (geo)political

have to play in programmes of development and assistance. Edkins argues, as I have above, that development is rarely linear and, as such, is rarely successfully addressed by a Malthusian emphasis on technologization of the problem (in the case of famine, for Edkins) as advocated by Amartya Sen (cited in Edkins, 2000). Equally, she writes that programmes of relief are rarely the problem: the exertion of geopolitical power as part of the programme of containment and selective intervention from donors that characterized a new aid paradigm in the late 1990s (Duffield, 1997) cannot assume responsibility for the permanence of complex emergencies. Rather, for Edkins, development assistance is “undecideable” (2000: 148). It represents a series of choices and decisions made by those participants of the emergency at all levels; crucially, it also represents *un-choice* for those participants that remain out-voiced. This, for Edkins, *is* politics, and it is what ties aid and assistance unavoidably to the political. As she writes with reference to aid practitioners, “their claim to neutrality and humanitarianism must be continually questioned [for] their decisions *are just that* and their expertise is no more than a *claim* to knowledge” (2000: 151, *emphasis added*).

Edkins’ work in rejecting an uncritical acceptance of the work of aid practitioners can be developed to examine the Millennium Development Goals that currently frame and dominate processes of international aid. In which ways can the prevailing systems for aid, dominated by the MDGs, be deconstructed to expose the politics and geopolitical imaginations that might be argued to underwrite their agenda? Furthermore, proceeding from this, what geopolitical power relations might seek to *use* processes of overseas assistance to uphold their political bias? As the case studies that follow illustrates, there is significant worth in this thread of critical evaluation.

### **Motivations for aid, and the changing balance of multilateral-bilateral aid flows**

The account offered in the previous section thoroughly vindicates Woods' (2005) contention that foreign aid is both susceptible and inextricably tied to the geostrategic and security interests of the donor. Indeed, Gordon Brown stated in 2004 that,

“we understand that it is not just morally and ethically right that developing countries move from poverty to prosperity, but that it is a political imperative – central to our long-term national security and peace – to tackle the poverty that leads to civil wars, failed states and safe havens for terrorists” (Brown quoted in Duffield, 2007: 2).

As I will illustrate, an increasing predominance of bilateral aid flows over the duration of the War on Terror (*ibid.*) not only shows that aid and foreign policy are closely linked, but further it offers donor countries the opportunity to use strategies for overseas assistance that allow for the preservation of geopolitical imaginations and unequal relationships of power. A return to bilateralism (Woods, 2005), following the drive towards multilateralism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is therefore a key feature of the post-Millennial aid system.

Duffield (2007) examines the opposition to the prominence of the notion of security in development discourse. The Copenhagen School of International Relations, Duffield writes, discusses the ways in which the term “security” is becoming a lens through which development, poverty, geopolitics and aid are now understood; for critics, security is a buzzword, just as ‘sustainable development’ seemingly evolved into a fixation for politicians following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Further opposition to the securitization of development concerns fears that its thinkings go some way to legitimizing ideas of neoconservative intervention, and that too great an emphasis on a link between underdevelopment and international (in)security will all too easily justify military victimization of the poorest by the most powerful, all in the name of poverty (*ibid.*).

These oppositions are, to some extent, justified. However, the reality of the relationship between development and security is illustrated, for example, by the

situations of complex permanent emergency that proceeded from the new wars of the 1990s. Burnell, too, addresses the histories of aid in terms of donors' "security and commercial interests" (1997b: 117) in a paper that suggests his rebuffing of the importance of politics to foreign aid in his earlier 1997 text (cited previously, 1997a) was over exaggerated and irrational. These linkages remind us that development is rarely the apolitical notion that multilateral frameworks might, all too idealistically, propose.

As previously introduced, Dalby (1990) explores the relationship between geopolitics and overseas intervention (under the label of 'development' or 'aid') during the Cold War. As the Cold War ended, in much the same way as Fukuyama (1992) was naïve to proclaim 'the end of history' in a manner that reduced political temporality to a series of unrelated and disconnected epochs, it is fundamentally wrong to suppose that the geopolitics that had informed bilateral aid flows during the Cold War might simply disappear in tandem with bipolarity. For with the end of the Cold War, although foreign aid levels fell (Burnell, 1997b; Riddell, 2007), those political undertones that had informed aid trajectories prior to 1990, that were synonymous with the interest of donors, failed to disappear (Burnell, 1997b). Readings of overseas assistance in the 1990s, whether multilateral or bilateral, must be read as such. The provision of overseas aid is ultimately a product of the relationship of two influencing factors, as introduced in studies by McKinlay and Little during the 1970s and explored in a study by Maizels and Nissanke (1984): the balance between *recipient need* and *donor interest*. Maizels and Nissanke's paper, and the examples it presents from McKinlay and Little's studies, largely aligns 'donor interest' with patterns of bilateral aid, and 'recipient need' with multilateralism.

"The results generally confirm earlier studies that bilateral aid allocations are made largely (for some donors) or solely (for others) in support of donors' perceived foreign economic, political and security interests. By contrast, aid flows from multilateral sources,

as would be expected, are allocated essentially on recipient need criteria” (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984: 891).

In introducing these models for development aid, Maizels and Nissanke further evaluate the degree to which one prevails over the other, and the way in which this balance shifts over time. Burnell seemingly rejects studies of this nature, writing that “aid cannot be proven to have become more or less political with the passage of time” (1997b: 123). Whilst this is, in truth, a likely case – the ‘influence of politics’ is an unquantifiable form, – that Maizels and Nissanke suggest that the dominant model is reflective of the turbulent and dynamic global geopolitical climate is an observation more than worthy of consideration. Put more simply, the influence of the contemporary geopolitical climate on the motivations for aid must not be underestimated.

Indeed, such observations might face less criticism in light of the “shifting politics of foreign aid” as described by Woods (2005). That politics and geopolitics have been close to the centre of discussions of aid throughout the post-Cold War era must further serve to exemplify their persistent presence and ‘influence’. Woods’ discussion is based heavily around a theory of the “erosion of multilateralism” that is happening presently, evidenced by “increased bilateral aid budgets” (2005: 408) post-9/11. She observes a trend that, for the difficulties and complexities of coordinating aid multilaterally, suggests that donors are increasingly opting to channel their assistance through (in some cases, newly created) national institutions. Through bilateralism, donors achieve two goals that characterize the donor interest model. Firstly, such systems for aid allow governments to align overseas assistance with their national geopolitical priorities – and, more widely, foreign policy – in patterns that echo those of the Cold War. Secondly, bilateral channels allow the donor increased ownership of its aid and greater transparency of funds spent for the donating government. In such economically challenging times, where public spending remains

under intense scrutiny across the world, this may serve as a further attraction for bilateralism.

The case of the USA clearly exemplifies this pattern. As Woods writes, “a small and decreasing percentage of US aid tends to be channelled through multilateral institutions [...] [T]he US administration has made it clear that it prefers its own programme to existing multilateral approaches” (2005: 399-400). However, to what extent can such trends be attributed to a changed climate for geopolitics post-September 11, or to the significantly heightened profile of the relationship between (in)security and development that has already been discussed? Woods writes,

“Most of the increase in US aid has been destined for projects designed to serve the security imperatives prevailing in the wake of September 11 [...] a total of approximately \$32 billion over the past three years went to help countries on the front lines of Afghanistan, to build support for the war on Iraq or to fund the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan” (2005: 397).

She continues,

“Overall aid flows to strategically important countries in the Middle East/Fertile Crescent [...] and to Afghanistan and its neighbours [...] over the past three years are roughly equal to [US] aid flows to the rest of the world combined” (2005: 397).

Yet further evidence of the importance of geopolitics and geostrategy to US aid is the establishment of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) in 2002, a fund that is *specifically* for the allocation of aid *not* geostrategically motivated and, as such, is entirely detached from USAID, the main body for US development assistance. The list of eligible recipients of MCA funds, notes Woods, consists of states that traditionally have not received US aid; however, “practically, the MCA is not affecting aid or aid flows [insofar as] two years after its creation, no disbursements have been made” (Woods, 2005: 398). It is a token gesture towards inclusionary assistance that is, in reality, wholly overshadowed by the exclusionary, security-driven aid trajectories that predominate US overseas assistance.

The USA is the most potent case in point. However, the trends described above are by no means limited to the US. Japanese aid, the largest source of ODA during the 1990s (ibid.) is both shrinking and shifting its focus towards recipients in line with wider foreign policy initiatives, mostly in the geopolitically important East-Asia region. Between 1998 and 2002, 75 per cent of Japanese aid was received by Asia countries (ibid.). The UK, similarly, whilst holding a reputation for a proponent of multilateralism – for example, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) channelled 45 per cent of its disbursed funds through multilateral bodies in 2004 – has, in reality, diverted significant funds to low-income countries seen as geopolitical targets in the War on Terror; Pakistan, for example, received a 500 per cent increase in aid from DFID between 2001 and 2004 (Woods, 2005).

This return to bilateralism – notwithstanding a UK commitment to multilateral aid – is a clear indicator of the relevance of geopolitics to aid. The difficulty for the international aid system remains, however, that it is committed to a multilateral framework (the MDGs) that continues to operate in spite of an increasing prevalence of and favour towards bilateralism from donors. Returning to Maizels and Nissanke's study, a conclusion that can be drawn concerns the incompatibility of multilateral approaches to aid where donor interest is the prevailing motivation for assistance allocation. The result is one of inefficiency and malfunction in the multilateral system as donors' commitments to its institutions waiver. Therefore, a question that I wish to raise and will attempt to develop in the ensuing case-study concerns not only the continued viability of the MDGs as discussed above, but the extent to which the framework for the goals can truly be described as apolitical. Further, of what importance is the prevailing geopolitical imagination to the agenda that seeks to uphold the MDG framework?

In concluding this chapter, there are inevitably more questions in need of answering than were present at its outset. There can be little doubt surrounding the important

role that (geo)politics and the (geo)political play in influencing aid trajectories. Furthermore, as Edkins (2000) shows, more than merely influencing aid we must recognize that development assistance is *made* political by the very decision-making processes that informs its trajectory.

There remain, however, several unanswered questions. These are concerned less with the discussion of *whether* aid is politically informed, for conclusions can be drawn with regards to that issue from the discussion offered above. Rather than questioning the (geo)politics of aid and assistance, per se, these discussions concern the role of geopolitical imaginations in aid. The way in which the international aid system and those policies that inform its trajectories serve as a forum for the upholding of the modern geopolitical imagination, and its Orientalist constructions and assumptions, must be evaluated. In Part II, I seek to begin such a process of critical evaluation with respect to two aid organizations working in Russia. However, before proceeding to the Russian example, I feel it is important to take stock of the discussions I have explored thus far in Part I.

## **5. Reviewing geopolitics, the geopolitical imagination and international aid**

In reviewing those discussions presented in Part I, a multitude of debates have arisen concerning geopolitics, and the role of geopolitical imaginations in development and practices of foreign aid. As I have already explored in chapter 3, Slater (1993; 1994) and Toal (1994) briefly exchanged thoughts on the linkages between development and the geopolitical imagination in the early 1990s. However, one of the rationales for this thesis is grounded in a belief that this debate has not been sufficiently explored. The implicit connections between development and geopolitical imaginations warrant further examination, as does their relevance to policy, both of which I will examine further in Part II.

In Chapter 2 I brought together my discussion regarding the history and evolution of geopolitics with a resolve not to allow (in this discussion) for geopolitics to become too disconnected from the political realities of foreign policy. I cited an argument from Simon Dalby (2008) which stated that future studies of critical geopolitics must remain engaged with popular culture and everyday processes. Chapter 3 addressed the ideas of Orientalism, as proposed by Edward Said (1978) and developed by Derek Gregory (1994; 2004), and the ways in which these notions of Orientalism played a significant part in forming a hierarchy of nations, or the world order. Said suggested that to be Orientalist was to seek to uphold power relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by creating imaginary dichotomies that saw ‘us’ as developed, enlightened, knowledgeable, and ‘them’ as backward, dark, unknowing. Agnew (1998) develops Said’s ideas in his study of the modern geopolitical imagination, ultimately calling for a complete revision of this structure. The modern geopolitical imagination, for Agnew, continues to be too grounded in the structures representations and imaginations that defined the modern era and the Cold War, echoing (to a certain extent) the key aspects of postdevelopment theory (after Escobar, 1995). The exchange between Slater (1993; 1994) and Toal (1994) adopts a similar stance with respect to theories of

development: both authors call for further study of the way in which geopolitical imaginations are present and used in development. Later in chapter 3, I introduced Huntington's (1993) thesis that sought to review and revise the geopolitical imagination in terms of the world's 'civilizations'. Huntington, as I have shown, faced opposition from many writers, including those cited in this piece (e.g. Toal, 1996; Said, 2001) for his over-simplification of complex structures and his tendency towards Orientalism that saw all civilizations as secondary to the West. In spite of all of the criticism that Huntington faced, however, the 'Civilizations' thesis illustrates two key points: firstly, that a call for a reconceptualized geopolitical imagination is valid; and, secondly, that the West, and Western policy intellectuals, have the power to (re)create models of 'wisdom' that uphold those imbalances and inequalities that are intrinsic to the contemporary prevailing geopolitical imagination.

In Chapter 4, I raised the question as to whether the domination of the UN Millennium Development Goals as a governing structure for overseas development assistance in the post-Millennial era is justified. The programme of annual evaluations of progress towards achieving the goals is insufficient and does not seek to critique either the broader structures that uphold the goals or the geopolitical imaginations that underwrite their prevalence. Further, I sought to link Woods' (2005) observations concerning the "shifting politics of foreign aid" towards patterns of bilateralism with models concerned with motivations for the provision of overseas aid, as presented by Maizels and Nissanke (1984). Both of these discussions outlined the ways in which the changing international political climate can lead to fundamental shifts in understanding. Agnew (2003), too, has written of the shift in the geopolitics of the world order following the attacks of September 11. Drawing on this, therefore, I presented the argument that it is flawed for the MDGs not to have been subject to critique that analyzes the geopolitical imaginations upholding its dominant status as a model for the provision of aid. International (geo)politics represents a different entity to that in which the goals were proposed, agreed and designed to operate. That the

MDGs continue to dominate the ‘new poverty agenda’, in spite of their neglect of the relevance of insecurity to underdevelopment, is a situation that warrants examination. The power of the MDG framework to essentialize an Occidentalized world vision must be evaluated, and the predominance of the MDGs evaluated in terms of the geopolitical imaginations that might be argued to underwrite their agenda.

The discussions that must be taken forward into Part II, therefore, are based around the question of to what extent practices of development aid are subject to, and underwritten by, politics? To what degree do Occidentalized frameworks for development aid – for example, the MDGs – seek to construct barriers between ‘us’ (the theorists, the developed, the ‘donors’) and ‘them’ (the subjects, the underdeveloped, the ‘receivers’), as Said presented in *Orientalism*? And, further, to what extent do the geopolitical imaginations born out of these cognitive constructions prevail in overseas aid policy?

Duffield (1994; 1997; 2001) has led the field in writing of the growing linkages between development and (in)security; in a post-9/11 global society, that the MDGs continue to dominate the ‘new poverty agenda’, in spite of their neglect of the relevance of insecurity to underdevelopment, is a situation that warrants in-depth examination. The question that I posed towards the end of Chapter 4 must now inform the remainder of this piece: why does the MDG-led framework for development continue to prevail, in spite of the evidence that questions its viability in its current (and thus original) form, and to what extent can it truly be described as apolitical? Might the framework be viewed simply as another model, similar to Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’, that seeks to create imaginary barriers between ‘us’ (the theorists, the developed, the ‘donors’) and ‘them’ (the subjects, the underdeveloped, the ‘receivers’), as Said presented in *Orientalism*? As I noted at the beginning of Chapter 4, it is morally challenging to raise questions over a system whose overall aim is to alleviate situations of poverty. Nevertheless, only a holistic approach that

seeks to further expose the implicit linkages between (geo)politics, the geopolitical imagination and development will allow for any greater understanding and improved efficiency of the programme of overseas assistance.

Slater's use of development theory as an example is merely one situation where this examination is warranted. However, this example is of great interest. For, as I have shown in Chapter 4, to understand processes of development as *political* – even *geopolitical* – as Edkins (2000) presents with regards to the politics and power-relations of decision-making, only represents one facet of the relationship. Debates surrounding the way in which development theory is constructed to encompass those aspects of the geopolitical imagination that maintain unequal relationships of power, thus preserving the imbalanced international hierarchy of states, are under-represented in (geo)political discourse.

As I showed in chapter 3, post-Soviet Russia provides a unique and informative case that highlights both the need to revise convention regarding overseas aid and, moreover, the presence of political imaginations in assistance policy. Russia is both internationally embraced and kept at a distance through competing geopolitical imaginations, practically challenging the structures and assumptions of the modern geopolitical imagination as Agnew (1998) does in theory.

Part II of this piece is dedicated to a case study of development assistance in Russia following the end of the Cold War, with particular emphasis on the post-Millennial era. I examine the ways in which externally-led development assistance has operated in Russia, the policies and models that have been adopted (and their shortcomings, in relation to Part I of this thesis) and, crucially, the ways in which Russia is imagined and represented through the writings of the two organizations I explore.

It is important, before proceeding to Part II, to draw attention to certain limitations to the approach offered throughout the thesis, with particular reference to the framing of development and geopolitical discourse in Russia in the following

chapters. It must be acknowledged that whilst (geopolitical) imaginations and, more widely, imaginative geographies are individually and culturally subjective, as I have previously introduced, so must be their readings. This thesis, therefore, offers only one perspective on the subject; whilst this is a perspective that I believe warrants further exploration it is not, nor does it attempt to be, entirely comprehensive.

The analysis draws heavily on the ideas of orientalism and although this is a worthy lens for debates concerning Russia and the geopolitical imagination it is not without limitation. Toal (1994) describes an ‘Occidental gaze’, a biased perspective that reinforces the strength of the Occident against a weaker Orient. By framing Russia too greatly through the lens of orientalism, there is a danger of generating an ‘orientalist haze’, by which I mean that a will to frame the case from an orientalist perspective clouds the actualities of the relationship between Russian and the West; as such, the notion of orientalism might be argued to attract greater attention than it warrants. In aiming to resist claims of orientalism against the study, therefore, it is possible that the discussion could become too greatly anti-Occident, resulting in the neglecting of alternative perspectives. Further still, an orientalist perspective normalizes, to a certain extent, the relationship of power between Russia and the West (or, in the case of this study, international development organizations) into a stereotyped Occident-Oriental association. The same critique can be applied to the way in which the rationales and appropriateness of the UN Millennium Development Goals are questioned throughout Chapters 7 and 8. Too great an emphasis on the idea of the goals as an orientalizing structure might be argued to exclude other framings and interpretations, such as a resistance of the recipient to engage with a framework that sees it as weak or underdeveloped. Whilst the predominance of an orientalist interpretation is, I believe, appropriate for the aims and objectives of this section of the thesis – to explore the presence of and role played geopolitical imaginations in the theorizing and practices of overseas development aid in Russia – I

accept that this extent to which this approach is applied precludes alternative perspectives.

I begin Part II by offering a brief overview of the way in which the Soviet Union, and subsequently Russia, evolved and shifted during the Gorbachev and Yeltsin presidencies (1985-1999), with respect to its politics, socioeconomy and culture, culminating in the establishment of programmes of international aid.

## **Part II – THE CASE: RUSSIA, DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND THE GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION**

### **6. Introducing Russia**

Russia is depicted in much literature and through media channels as an exceptional country. With regards to international development and overseas aid, Russia's status as an economy in transition maintains this exceptionalism as it begins to emerge as a provider of international aid while continuing to receive assistance from external donor agencies for its own, domestic development agenda. The following section will introduce Russia, briefly detailing the ways in which the Russian economy has shifted under the country's transformation; I trace reform to the post-Stalin era of the 1950s and examine the costs of transition that resulted in Russia calling on the international community for development assistance in the economically tumultuous years of the Yeltsin presidency. I then turn the focus to an analysis of contemporary, incoming flows of assistance in Russia, focussing on the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in post-Soviet Russia. I examine in detail the programmes in which these organizations are involved, and seek to uncover the extent to which their programmes and policies are underwritten and informed by geopolitical imaginations. Following this examination, I seek to conclude by referring back to Agnew's (1998; 2003) call for a revision of the modern geopolitical imagination, as I explored in chapter 3, in light of its insufficiency and inappropriateness as exemplified by the Russian case.

#### **The Soviet Union**

The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 presented a welcome opportunity to rebuild, even remodel, the Soviet approach to economic development, although it was not until 1955 that new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Nikita Khrushchev moved to break with the Stalin's legacy, challenging those who continued to believe in Stalinist political and economic methods to reform by exposing

the social cost of his policies. Khrushchev was a communist with conflicting priorities to his immediate predecessors in that he was concerned not only with theorizing to provide for the masses but practically applying this theory. As such, under Khrushchev economic policy focused on agricultural reform, providing for the people and ensuring that basic needs were met (Neville, 2003). However, due to poor crop yields and heavy military expenditure during the Cold War, economic growth that had resulted from investment in productive agricultural techniques stagnated during the 1970s under General Secretary Brezhnev (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2005). Brezhnev's economic success oscillated under each of the Soviet Five-Year plans. The Soviet economy grew, although the rate of growth declined consistently at the height of the Cold War: while during the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1968-71) GDP grew on average by 5.2% per annum, at the beginning of the eleventh plan, between 1980-1, growth had slowed to just 2 per cent (ibid.). When Mikhail Gorbachev ascended to head of the Secretariat, the Soviet Union was in need of major economic and social reform.

In 1987 Gorbachev presented *perestroika*, an “urgent necessity” (Gorbachev, 1987: 17), and his answer to the need for reconstruction. Perestroika, for Gorbachev, represented the necessary structure that would enable a return to the forward-thinking ideas of Leninist Marxism in order to meet the developmental needs of the socialist society:

“Perestroika is an urgent necessity arising from the profound processes of development in our socialist society. This society is ripe for change. It has long been yearning for it” (ibid. pp. 17).

For Gorbachev, Soviet policy had foregone the roots and ideals of socialism found in the writings of Lenin in its strategies of industrial and economic competitiveness towards the Western world during the Stalin era and afterwards. Perestroika was intended to be a revolution, in the sense of reconstruction. This reconstruction brought with it *glasnost*, the encouraging of openness in society; in propelling this programme,

Gorbachev endorsed the publication of media condemning Stalinist ‘terror’, revisiting Khrushchev’s somewhat radical agenda of the post-Stalin epoch (Neville, 2003). Indeed, Gorbachev writes that “revolution requires the demolition of all that is obsolete, stagnant and hinders fast progress” (Gorbachev, 1987: 51).

Perestroika carried both one meaning and, seemingly simultaneously, a host of different connotations for Gorbachev. Technological modernization was deemed of high importance to a revived Soviet economy; equally, democratization “of all aspects of society” (ibid.: 32), which included elements of decentralization, was were key to a cohesive and efficient workforce. There was nothing economically radical that would revive a faltering system, and analysts of perestroika have since concluded just this; that political reform, characterized by an obsession with a return to Lenin, was significantly preferential to the necessary economic (Rutland, 1994). Rutland continues, writing that “while Gorbachev’s political liberalisation spiralled beyond his control, his economic reforms never really materialised” (ibid.: 139).

Gorbachev never succeeded in reforming and regenerating the Soviet economy, and in a similar vein, the entire Soviet system failed to recover from increased understanding of the liberalisms and prosperity of certain aspects of Westernism. Gorbachev suffered challenges to his authority, and that of his communist party, from his Prime Minister, Boris Yeltsin, and a coup d’état in August 1991, endorsed by Yelstin, weakened Gorbachev’s leadership; by the end of 1991 only seven states remained committed to the principles of the Union. On 26 December 1991 the USSR dissolved and Yeltsin proceeded to become the first President of the Russian Federation.

### **Yeltsin, and the challenge of transition**

Yeltsin was, as Gorbachev had been, charged with the recovery of a collapsing state. His immediate priority was the liberalization of markets and privatization of state-owned enterprises which, in an attempt to revive and engage public trust in what was

now *post-Soviet* politics, happened quickly. Yet these restructures occurred under the blanket of a failing, and increasingly corrupt system, in a country whose legacy of central planning had killed initiative and continuously obstructed efforts of private entrepreneurship (Nelson and Kuzes, 1995). Enterprises that were subsidized under socialism lost value rapidly when exposed to neoliberal conditions (Clarke and Kabalina, 1995; Ickes, 2005), and the lack of a stable legal framework to counter fraudulent activity under capitalism, together with the sudden exposure to the challenges of international markets and the capitalist system, brought about a deepening of the fiscal crisis that privatization was designed to overcome.

Riasanovsky and Steinberg (2005) comprehensively detail political, cultural and economic change under Yeltsin. Yeltsin was not an economist and, as such, ‘shock therapy’ in Russia, bearing hallmarks of the Balcerowicz plan in East Central Europe, was initially the project of Yegor Gaidar. Gaidar had worked under the Communist Party under the Soviet system but, after the dissolution of the USSR Gaidar, was appointed as economics minister in Yeltsin’s government (Lane, 1995). Economic reform saw the liberalization and markets and privatization of state-owned enterprises occurring simultaneously. The result of this was, in part, a “privatization lottery” (Ickes, 2005: 201), based around vouchers that offered shares in enterprises, the value of which was unknown. Further to this, however, vouchers for successful enterprises, such as those industries for natural resources including oil and gas, were sold by the federation to a small group of young, successful entrepreneurs (*nomenklatura*) in exchange for political favour, under what has been labelled *nomenklatura capitalism* (Duke and Grime, 1994). The process of liberalization therefore generated few winners and, furthermore, the state retained a level of control over the most politically and economically profitable enterprises. ‘Privatization’ in Russia was, thus, little more than a process of ‘destatisation’ of enterprise (Clarke and Kabalina, 1995), and did not inherently represent the decentralization of power.

Political reform was, similarly, occurring at the same time, and the developing Russian state failed to create sufficient institutions to cope with the reform and political-economic transformation that was happening. As a result, “the course of reform was uneven, protracted and created much suffering [...] economic problems greatly exacerbated Yeltsin’s efforts to create a working democratic political order, while political conflict often made effective economic reform difficult” (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2005: 614-6). While the basis of this failed transformation and associated suffering provoke further debate amongst economists (ibid.), the middle years of the Yeltsin presidency were characterized by economic decline, social dysfunction and civil unrest, worsened still by the first Chechen War of 1994. Although the war in Chechnya in 1994 did not set in motion (immediately, at least) a wave of conflict in the Caucasus, characterized by the desire of further disputed territories to cut their links to Moscow (ibid.), instability in the region continued to develop; the second Chechen War in September 1999, under the leadership of both Yeltsin and the incoming President Putin, and the Georgian War in South Ossetia in August 2008 both testify to this fact.

Towards the end of his presidency economic decline had brought about indebtedness on a huge scale: “wage payments to state workers were often unpaid, [...] gold reserves were being depleted [...] capital continued to flee the country, and the Russian stock market was plummeting as was the value of the ruble” (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2005: 624). During August 1998, the government defaulted on its outstanding payments and, consequently, foreign investors left, the Russian stock market collapsed and the country was refused further loans from the International Monetary Fund. The challenge for agencies working in Russia to promote economic development, restore social and political functionalities and assist in repairing the damage done by the two Chechen wars was, clearly, vast.

Over the course of the Yeltsin presidency, Russia was forced to call on international assistance of both bilateral and multilateral forms. Multilateral

organizations and the International Finance Institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) began establishing offices in the successor states of the Soviet Union and in ECE, with work centring on economic reform, market liberalization and, to use Clarke and Kabalina (1995) term, destatization. I turn now to examine the ways in which these organizations have been working in post-Soviet Russia. I look to the successes and failures of their operations in promoting ‘development’ and ‘transition’ and, most importantly for this piece, the ways in which their work, policies and publications have intentionally, or otherwise, actively constructed or sought to uphold geopolitical imaginations. I start by looking to the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## **7. The United Nations Development Programme in Russia**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the subsidiary body of the United Nations responsible for “advocating change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help build a better life” (UNDP, 2005: 1). In 2000, UNDP’s agenda for development became almost synonymous with working to achieve the UN-agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a collection of aims that would seek to reduce by half the global population suffering in absolute poverty by the year 2015. Since then, the organization has attempted to tailor the universal set of MDGs to specific contexts, to varying degrees of success. As I discussed throughout chapters 4 and 5, the MDGs have not been sufficiently subjected to a critical deconstruction of their aims and practices that seek to call into question their rationale(s) and the assumptions that characterize the structure. The ideologies that inform the goals have faced only sporadic critique; rather, analytical perspectives on the MDGs have centred on the successes of failures of their paths towards attainability, and the reasons for this. Whilst the overall framework has faced critique, this has largely been concerned with the practice of target setting for development (for example, Black and White, 2006), or for the non-consideration of context and place under the grand MDG philosophy (for example, Amin, 2006). From the perspective of the discussions presented in chapters 4 and 5, which explore the presence of and role for geopolitical imaginations in policies of development assistance grounded in the MDG structure, there is currently insufficient debate in the literature, although Samir Amin’s paper (2006) entitled “The Millennium Development Goals: A Critique from the South” does touch on these concerns. .

For UNDP the goals have seemingly come to represent *the* way for alleviating poverty or, more specifically, *the system* to apply in all programmes that seek to relieve situations of underdevelopment and suffering (Amin, 2006). Alternatives to the tradition seem to have disappeared and, with them, the appreciation and application

of geography and context that is so inherently crucial to the success of any development programme, as Amin argues.

The UNDP opened offices in the former Eastern Bloc and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1992. Although its bureaux weren't established in the Russian Federation until autumn 1997, when offices began operating in Moscow and Vladikavkaz, in the region of North Ossetia-Alania, UNDP had been actively engaged in programmes in Russia working out of its regional headquarters in Bratislava. Alongside its offices in Moscow and North Ossetia UNDP now also holds small project centres in St. Petersburg and Kamchatka Krai, on the Pacific Rim Coast (UNDP, 2006). Its operations have been defined by a series of Country Programmes that have, since 2000, sought to combat Russia's development needs by application of the targets of the MDGs, adapted for Russia as MDG<sup>+</sup>; the most recent of these is Country Programme (CP) 2008-10 which, according to its outlined strategies, seeks to move UNDP towards a role for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). This move reflects the general worldwide trend for UNDP operations in those developing countries and transition economies where individual governments have illustrated their capacity to promote development from within. Whether UNDP succeeds in this transition to an M&E role in Russia remains to be seen throughout the duration of the 2008-10 CP, although it is important to remember that M&E is not synonymous with passivity, and there remains a very active role for UNDP to play in assisting in Russia's politico-economic transition.

### **UNDP, development and transition**

In its introduction to its operations in Russia, UNDP acknowledges Russia's transition status, and the implications of this for development: "Russia offers a unique context for development work because of its current transitional stage"(UNDP, 2006). Whether it is this state of transition or Russia's greater exceptionalities that serve to

provide this unique context is, perhaps, worthy of debate in itself, although this is, regrettably, not the forum for that discussion.

Bradshaw examines the concept of transition in his book entitled *Geography and Transition in the Post-Soviet Republics*. He proposes that one set of imaginations that can be construed from the term *transition* is built around the notion of moving from “one steady state [...] to a new steady state” (Bradshaw, 1997: 4), where scenarios are structured into “before” and “after” (ibid.:5). Bradshaw is therefore noting that the term *transition* can, with great ease, be grounded in the notion of linearity, of moving from one state – point A – to another state – point C; in this understanding, transition merely represents another, albeit dynamic, state – point B – of no greater or lesser importance than either its origin or its destination. As Stenning and Bradshaw (2004) state, in the early years of post-socialism many questions surrounded the issue of how *long* it would take to change, implicitly carrying a set of assumptions. Firstly, this emphasis of the temporality of change assumed that transition was a finite process, and that, once completed, a state would no longer be transforming. Secondly, this understanding implied that this transition would be entirely both positive and linear, that change would be uni-directional and that it would reflect nothing but improvement. Thirdly, it made the assumption that transition conformed to a systematic structure, and that its model could operate irrespective of time, space or place.

As Stenning and Bradshaw (2004) note, these assumptions have come to be understood as overly simplistic and misrepresent political-economic change. In light of this developed discussion on the complexities of transition, therefore, it is surprising to continue to uncover statements in UNDP publications, as recently as 2006, such as this:

“While in the 1990s the challenge for Central and Eastern Europe and CIS was to embark upon an often difficult economic and political transition, the challenge of the first decades of the new century is to achieve the MDGs” (UNDP, 2006: 2).

The assumptions, misrepresentations and misunderstandings of transition in this statement are of great concern. We are presented with the implication that at the end of the 1990s all countries in ECE and CIS that were in transition following the dissolution of European socialism miraculously completed this complex process, eager and ready to move onto the next great task. Further, it appears that challenges for development and change are considered as entirely discrete and non-relational. The very notion that the MDGs merely represent a guiding paradigm within which transition is permitted, or facilitated, to occur is, seemingly, overlooked. And whilst UNDP would, almost certainly, be quick to reaffirm its commitment to social development and steady transformation, such a statement raises questions over the true, (sub)conscious assumptions regarding geographical and political transition present within the organization.

### **Transition in Russia and the geopolitical imagination**

Three further questions concerning UNDP's conceptualization of transition are worthy of note. The first concerns the balance between stability and progress in development, where progress must be synonymous with *change* (and, as such, can be both positive and negative). UNDP regularly writes in its publications of "Russia's transformation from a predominantly recipient country into a donor of international development assistance" (UNDP, 2005: 145). This dualistic notion that represents Russia in both the role of a donor and that of a receiver, and the implications of this construction for the modern geopolitical imagination, is something I will examine later in the chapter. Of greater import presently, as I explore UNDP's overall conceptualization of transition, is the implication through its publications that transformation is consistent and continuous; as such, the two 'roles' in dualistic understanding of development (of being a donor or a receiver) represent the only possible scenarios. As with the quote cited above, this suggests a commitment on behalf of the UNDP in Russia to the notion of uni-directional, linear change in development. However, the Russian

example of transition and development shows that to stop receiving direct monetary development assistance does not inherently suggest that a country is ready to donate – financially or otherwise – to other countries and situations in need. There is surely a need for a period of *stabilization* in transformation, during which time a country continues to positively progress and develop, but under its own governance. Graham Smith notes that transition in Russia warrants great care because of the complexities of simultaneously developing domestically and internationally (Smith, 1999), a process that he nevertheless sees as necessary because of the pace of change within the globalized system for international relations and capital. Similarly, Russian journalist Vladimir Posner charges us to appreciate that, in spite of its vast and rich history (which, as Smith (1999) explains, must not be overlooked in theorizing transition in Russia), Russia in its *democratic* form represents an historically unprecedented entity for politicians, commentators and ordinary Russians alike (BBC, 2008). To put pressure on Russia – or any transitional country – by theorizing transition in the linear fashion that Bradshaw (1997) warns against is to overlook this period of stabilization. Stabilization is necessary not only for Russia to establish its own society and its role in the international community but, just as importantly, for the international community to grow to understand contemporary Russia. UNDP itself states that “Russia would find it very difficult to start providing help to other countries on a large scale until it has resolved [its] domestic challenges” (UNDP, 2005: 135). I argue that this is a result of the Russian state not having been privileged, as yet, to such a period of stabilization as a component of its transition because of the pressure placed upon it by external organizations, such as the UNDP, to internationalize. By ‘stabilization’, I do not mean (necessarily) economic stabilization, one of the four components of the Washington Consensus for economic reform that centred on policies of normatively enforced structural adjustment (along with market liberalization, privatization and internationalization) (Stenning, 1997: 149). Instead, I refer to sociopolitical stabilization, during which time a country continues to receive external

assistance in the form of knowledge transfers and programmes of monitoring and evaluation of progress coordinated mutually between foreign organizations and the host government; this period would both stabilize social and political systems and foster an environment of *sustainability*. More recently, UNDP has begun to advocate this, both in its recommendation for the creation of a specific government department charged with assessing Russia's role in the international development community, and for its pledge to establish M&E programmes over the course of CP2008-10 (UNDP, 2007).

Secondly, I return to the relationship of the temporality and linearity of transition to which Bradshaw alludes. In imagining Russia as eventually completing transition (and accessing to the role of donor of development assistance), UNDP implicitly imagines that the process of change is finite. If this is the case, Russia – and all transitional countries conceptualized in this way – must, then, be transforming from one state to another; if there is an end (which stands for *correctness*), towards which developing countries are aiming, then there must also be a beginning (that symbolizes *incorrectness*), from which countries are trying to distance themselves. In fostering ideas regarding the ultimate goal of transition, UNDP, as the proponents of such change, must therefore have, by association, imaginations of the inadequacies of the previous system that underpinned the rationale for change. Such belief on the part of UNDP goes some way to explaining the pressure placed by the organization on Russia to develop its role as a donor; for UNDP this represents, at least in this case, successful transition.

Rarely does UNDP allude to these imaginations concerning what was fundamentally inadequate with the Russian system before the processes of modern transition began. There are, however, examples of frustration in UNDP publications when writing of the limitations of the Russian system for development as the organization perceives them. For example, concerning the influence of the legacy of

centralization over current migration patterns, UNDP appears both impatient and quasi-dictatorial:

“Government attempts to regulate internal migration processes were not fully successful in the Soviet period and can hardly be of any avail in the present situation. Despite this, some sections of government continue to believe that migrants should move “where required”, not where they choose” (UNDP, 2009: 14).

The quote continues in extremely matter-of-fact fashion:

“Migration is a self-organizing social process and the interests of national and social development require removal of all restrictions and barriers to migration” (ibid.:14).

The Orientalist construction of Russia is noteworthy. Russia is portrayed by the UNDP as backward and unknowledgeable regarding processes of liberal migration. The way in which UNDP represents Russia here echoes, to a certain extent, the way in which Said (1978) describes Balfour’s understanding of Orientals: “they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves” (1978: 35). In the case of Russia, ‘they’ are represented by the Russian government (as described by UNDP), and the ‘race that knows them’ is the external organization, in this instance represented by the UNDP.

I must at once make clear that I do not implicitly seek to defend the paternalist and centralized nature of the socialist state. Nevertheless, the relevance of imaginations and Orientalisms present in UNDP writings, such as exemplified above, must not be overlooked in attempting to understand the role for geopolitical imaginations in UNDP’s conceptualization of contemporary Russia.

In the National Human Development Report 2008 for Russia (NHDR '08), UNDP summarizes its introduction by stating that “not everything which we find disagreeable can be remedied” (UNDP, 2009: 1). What is meant this? On the one hand, this could be taken superficially: the problems of underdevelopment in Russia are deep and irreversible. However, this is unlikely. Alternatively, it might be

interpreted as a realization on the part of UNDP that its MDG-dominated model for development is insufficient for the problems Russia faces. However, it might also be understood in terms of geopolitics, in a recognition that certain trajectories for development and transition in Russia do not fit into the modern geopolitical imagination. Indeed, for whom are the problems being remedied? Throughout the course of an interview with a research fellow from the Russia and Eurasia programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House (who wishes to remain anonymous in writing this piece), the consensus often reached was that Russia, in many respects – culturally, historically, politically, linguistically – represents the *exceptional* circumstance. Its unique values that are the product of its histories and culturally embedded systems challenge singular, international political-economic models, such as the liberal market system, or multilateral approaches to development assistance that rest on a decentralization of power to externally coordinated organizations.

Legvold (2009), too, addresses this interpretation of the Russian case. He questions whether, for UNDP and the wider United Nations programme, the country's exceptionality stems from the fact that it *matters* in a multitude of ways (politically, economically, environmentally, militarily) to the organization and to the wider international agenda. In the contexts of both geopolitical imaginations and theories of Orientalism, Russia, although no longer representing the demonized Other as during the Cold War, cannot totally be embraced as one of 'us' because of its unique, historically charged exceptionalities. By the same token, however, it cannot be represented and constructed by the occident as an outright Other because its of economic and military strength, for example, or its endowment with natural resources. The Russian case therefore challenges the modern geopolitical imagination in that it fails to fall within the structures of that geopolitically-biased order.

I wish to draw attention to one further misrepresentation of transition in Russia on the part of the UNDP. The organization stated in 2005 that

“systematic transformation of Russian society has overcome former incompatibility of its values [...] with those of Western countries, helping lay a groundwork for Russia’s integration into the world economy” (UNDP, 2005: 138).

The implication is that the responsibility has lain, and still lies, with *Russia* to overcome *its* incompatibility of values with the West, and that this is a one-sided process: Russian integration is dependent upon Russia overcoming its difficulties with the relationship as it attempts to integrate within a fixed system. In other words, those geopolitical imaginations informed by Russian perspectives must be ‘overcome’ to fit into the prevailing, Occidentalized order. Legvold (2009) discusses this challenge with reference to the new development of US-Russian relationships under the Obama administration, writing (as I have previously cited) of the way in which many American understandings of Russia are still grounded in those Cold War imaginations that demonized the Soviet ideology. He continues to state that a successful and profitable bilateral dialogue between the US and Russia is only possible if the relationship is stripped to its core and its deep-rooted conceptions and imaginations fundamentally re-examined and challenged (ibid.). The signing of a bilateral treaty on nuclear disarmament between Presidents Obama and Medvedev in April 2010 (The Times, 8.4.2010) can only be sustainable if the two countries go further than simply ‘working together’. A resolve to understand those psychologies that inform each other’s perspective and geopolitical imaginations must form the basis for a successful dialogue.

Returning to the UNDP, of more fundamental concern is the implication that Russia must overcome *its* incompatibilities to make possible its integration. By contrast, UNDP must foster the integration of Russia *alongside* its culture, not by simply keeping it in tow or, worse, by actively seeking to reject Russian. Such integration is dependent upon the renunciation of the modern geopolitical imagination, for which Agnew (2003) has called. Similarly, transition in Russia must be recognized as a more challenging and lengthier process than has previously been permitted to exist in

Russia. The tendency towards linearity, ultimately a product of the modern geopolitical imagination for its singular, constructed vision of the 'end' of transition, must be overcome; as Smith (1999) writes, transformation must be understood not as temporally or politically bound, or defined by a universal goal, as modernization theory would promote.

### **The UNDP and development in Russia**

Theorizing transition in Russia does not fall immediately under the UNDP's remit for the country. Nevertheless, to evaluate the way in which transition is conceptualized by the UNDP reveals that geopolitical imaginations certainly do manifest themselves in the writings of this particular organization for overseas development. I will now briefly explore the specific work of the UNDP in Russia, which includes a return to the discussion surrounding the geopolitics of the MDGs, before returning to an exploration of further discussions concerning the presence of geopolitical imaginations in the policies of the organization working in Russia.

According to its strategic publications, UNDP's mission in Russia reflects the five key areas on which the organization focuses globally, agreed in partnership with the Russian government. These areas of work seek development in the sectors of 1) democratic governance, 2) the stalling and eradication of an increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS, 3) economic growth, 4) environmental protection and 5) post-conflict recovery (UNDP, 2006). Through these, one assumes – although the link is rarely explicitly stated – UNDP seeks to achieve the development targets contained in MDG<sup>+</sup>. Table 1 compares the original MDGs agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 with those adapted for Russia (MDG<sup>+</sup>).

**Table 1 – the initial UN Millennium Development Goals, aligned with their affiliated goals under the MDG<sup>+</sup> strategy (adapted for Russia)**

<b>Millennium Development Goals (2000)</b>	<b>MDG<sup>+</sup> (MDGs adapted for Russia)</b>
1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	1. Reduce poverty and eradicate hunger
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education	2. Increase Access to Education
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	3. Ensure Gender Equality and improve the situation of women
4. Reduce Child Mortality	4. Reduce under 5 mortality
5. Improve Maternal Health	5. Reduce maternal mortality
6. Combat HIV/AIDs and other diseases	6. Combat HIV/AIDS, TB and other diseases
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability	7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
8. Global Partnership for Development	8. Participate in global development partnerships adequate to Russian national interests

Adapted from UNDP (2005) and UN (2005)

On reading recent bi-monthly bulletins from the UN in Russia it is clear that the work of UNDP conforms fairly rigidly to these five priority areas and, thus, to certain goals under MDG<sup>+</sup>. Over the period 2008-9 these bulletins reported on a variety of UNDP-led or associated programmes designed to promote economic growth in the Northern Caucasus (merging priorities 3 and 5), raising awareness of HIV/AIDS in conjunction with the Russian government (priority area 2), encouraging the promotion of decentralized development (priority 1) and, most recently in July-August 2009, wetland and biodiversity sustainability in the Lower Volga region, to the North-East of the Northern Caucasus on the edge of the Caspian Sea.

Nevertheless, UNDP's work is not limited to these five priority areas, illustrating, as I have in chapter 4, that the MDG paradigm for development is not all-encompassing. One area of specific concern for Russia is a growing demographic crisis reflected in its severely ageing population; the National Human Development Report (NHDR) for 2008, "Russia Facing Demographic Challenges" is dedicated to this cause, which highlights the severity of the situation. Yet, we have not seen a diversion from UNDP's main priority areas, and the 2008-10 CP does not explicitly seek to address this impending – this *happening* – collapse of the working population, opting instead to mitigate its effects. In 2005, the NHDR observed the alarming nature

of this evolving trend, stating that “[i]f current demographic trends persist, there will be four dependents per work citizen in Russia by 2025” (UNDP, 2005: 139). The report continues that “Russia’s employable population may decrease by about 10 million [...] in 2006-2018” (ibid.: 138). It is, of course, necessary to note that this is speculation based on current patterns. But it is, nevertheless, a worrying trend, and equally concerning is the absence of a specific part of the current CP dedicated to the cause, a document that was produced in the same year as the NHDR sensationalizing the issue. The applicability of the UNDP’s dominant framework is clearly called into question by this additional, very potent challenge of development in Russia.

The country suffers from a significant prevalence of HIV/AIDS, especially amongst youth; 80% of people living with HIV are under the age of 30 (UNDP, 2009c). Nearly 90% of new cases of HIV in the entire Eastern European and CIS region are shared between Russia and Ukraine, and this remains one of the only areas in the world where prevalence of the virus continues to rise (UNDP, 2009b). In Russia’s alarming mortality rate and its prevalence of HIV we have a society that is enjoying substantial economic growth, yet continues to bear hallmarks of countries and regions that are notoriously underdeveloped. Apart from India, Russia has the highest number of HIV infections of any European or Asian country; per 100 adults, Russian incidence is 0.3% above the world average, and is bounded in the table by Benin, Dominican Republic, Panama and Senegal (CIA, 2009). Additionally, HIV does not represent the only serious challenge to Russian health: the greatest global prevalence of tuberculosis is found in Russia.

Precisely because of its increasing economic prosperity, however, Russia is rendered ineligible for UNDP direct funds from 2010 (UNDP, 2007), meaning that the Russian government will be required to either fund domestic development programmes via public spending or by sourcing alternative external donors. However, by aligning itself with other donors and reorganizing its national budget Russia has

proved in recent years that it can foster economic growth while maintaining efforts and introducing certain reforms focused towards domestic poverty reduction.

Returning to the reading of Table 1, it is clear that, for the most part the overall goals have not been altered, adapted or contextualized at all. Does this mean that the UNDP's understanding of Russia is grounded in a reading that sees the country as underdeveloped, continuing to struggle to meet those basic standards of living defined by the MDGs, in spite of its acclaimed economic growth? This representation of Russia is far from inconceivable based on the evidence offered in Table 1. UNDP's reading of Russia, therefore, frames Russia both as a *receiver* of development aid and as an emerging assistance *donor*. I will return to this specific visualization of Russia shortly.

### **The geopolitics of the Millennium Development Goals in Russia**

In light of these statistics and accounts that document the wide variety of trajectories for Russian development, it is important to consider why international aid organizations – in this particular case study, UNDP – operate in the way that they do. Understanding what is – indeed isn't – being done is important, but to focus on the rationales for aid operations is of greater importance still. Particularly for this study, I am interested in questioning the role that geopolitical imaginations have to play in the formation of aid policy. The relevance of the discussions exchanged by Slater (1993; 1994) and Toal (1994) that argue for the implicit linkages between geopolitical imaginations and development is most apparent here. Largely, the questions that I wish to raise are these firstly, what are the geopolitical conditions that allow for the MDGs to continue to form the basis of UNDP assistance policy, despite apparent failings of the framework for Russian needs? Secondly, what does the UNDP's simultaneous construction of Russia as both a donor and receiver illustrate about the very real presence of geopolitical imaginations in development policy and, further, how does this reinforce Agnew's (1998) call for a reconceptualization of the modern

geopolitical imagination? Put differently, in what way does the organization's perception of Russia as both a donor and receiver of development aid simultaneously seek to embrace and reject Russia in the international community? I shall address these two points separately.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge that the UNDP has been working in the Russian Federation for the better part of two decades. During this time it has witnessed, and assisted in the management of, immense social and politico-economic change in both its positive and negative forms, and this discussion does not presume to challenge the intricacies, the principle or the value of the work of the organization or the UN foundation. Nevertheless, critical evaluation of the role for geopolitics and geopolitical imaginations in aid is overdue; the UNDP merely represents a case in point, and offers a useful point of entry into the discussion for its continued uncritical acceptance of the MDG framework.

That UNDP operations in Russia, and thus its associated aims and objectives, are so closely linked to the MDG/MDG<sup>+</sup> framework is of great concern. As explored in the previous section, the framework MDG<sup>+</sup> (the MDGs supposedly adapted and contextualized for the Russian case) shows little departure from the original structure. However, some of Russia's most serious concerns for development are not addressed by this structure, namely the Russian demographic crisis and the wealth of socioeconomic issues that have given rise to its existence. Further, as I will explore shortly in the case study of the work of the International Committee for the Red Cross in Russia, issues such as the repatriation of Russian nationals displaced during the Soviet era, the clearing of the minefields or the preservation of regional security and stability in the Caucasus and on the Afghan border, that serves as conditions for development to take place, are all complex barriers to progress that are unaddressed by UNDP.

It is not only too bold but largely unfair to suggest that the MDGs constitute a dated framework that fails to meet the needs of the world's poorest. However, it is equally so to presume that its systems can universally address the needs of all situations of underdevelopment. In Russia this is clearly the case. Why, therefore, is the MDG framework so uncritically adopted by the UNDP for the context of Russian development? What is the geopolitical motivation for its unreserved usage? One plausible response is that the Occidentalized system represents a forum through which the modern geopolitical imagination is allowed to prevail. As Bellamy Foster and Harnecker (2006), the editors of *Monthly Review* in which Samir Amin's (2006) critique of the MDGs was published, write:

“[the goals] were not the result of an initiative from the South, but were pushed primarily by the triad (the United States, Europe and Japan), and were co-sponsored by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. All of this has raised the question of whether they are mainly ideological cover (or worse) for neoliberal initiatives” (Bellamy Foster and Harnecker, 2006: 1).

The framework explicitly places a barrier and distance between the donor and the recipient, constructing a cognitive “distinction” between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (as described by Said, 1978: 54), and, as such, upholds those geopolitical power relations that characterize the modern geopolitical imagination. Whilst I am not explicitly proposing that this is the case, the call for a more critical approach to the rationales informing the MDGs, particularly in light of the Russian case, is most certainly justified in order to fully understand the geopolitical context in which the goals operate.

### **The donor-receiver dualism and the geopolitical imagination**

I now turn to the second question I posed above that asks to what extent the understanding of Russia as fulfilling the roles of both a development donor and receiver highlights that geopolitical imaginations are central to the UNDP's aid policy in Russia. Developing this, I question the ways in which this supports the call for a retheorization of the modern geopolitical imagination. I wish to focus specifically on

the ways in which, since 2005/6, the UNDP has begun to frame Russia as both a donor and receiver of overseas development assistance. Of course, the UNDP is not alone in this pluralistic reading of Russia; for the wider international community, the confusion of how to conceptualize Russia's place in the world – or, how to theorize a changing geopolitical imagination – is ever-growing. Equally, the role of Russia itself contributing to this dualistic understanding must not be overlooked. In June 2007 the Russian Ministry of Finance produced a Concept paper for “Russia's participation in International Development Assistance” (MINFIN, 2007), which stated that “present-day realities of global policy and economy, and Russia's status as a superpower, suggest that Russia could pursue a more active policy in international development assistance, including an increase in government spending for these purposes” (ibid.: 4).

As a result of this dualistic construction, however, serious questions and challenges arise. The problematic existence of the dual understanding is of a lesser concern than the geopolitical rationales of those that frame Russia as such. With Russia's role in the Group of 8 becoming ever more prominent, (a reflection of its successful economic growth under President Putin – see, for example, Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2005), and its foreign policy initiatives increasingly ambitious, as stated in the International Development Concept, through the writing of the UNDP there seems to be a growing *expectation* for the country to fulfil a role within the highest realm of the donor community (as I seek to illustrate below). This expectation again brings into question the ways in which the idea of transition is conceptualized by those entities and institutions encouraging Russia to develop its status as an international donor. The misunderstanding that, by reaching a certain ‘stage’ on its ‘path’ to development Russia is now fully capable of fulfilling significant donor responsibilities, and indeed that development is a finite process, must be overcome.

Throughout UNDP's publications on Russia we find a series of contradictory assertions. At the beginning of Chapter 7 of the National Human Development Report 2005 (NHDR '05) UNDP writes on the one hand that "middle income countries can play both roles simultaneously" (UNDP, 2005: 132), referring to the practice of giving and receiving development assistance. Yet, on the other hand, later in the report the UNDP writes that "Russia would find it very difficult to start providing help to other countries on a large scale until it has resolved [its] domestic challenges" (ibid.: 135), contradicting the previous statement. The report appears unclear of how to theorize Russian development. In 2009 in its bi-monthly bulletin of UN activities in Russia, the UNDP described the ways in which the World Food Programme (WFP) had appealed to Russia for financial assistance, and the Russian response of increasing its donation to the WFP budget from US\$15m in 2008 to US\$24.3m in 2009. With 4 of the top fifteen recipients of WFP aid packages located in Central Asia and the CIS, UNDP applauds Russia as a regional leader in reducing poverty and achieving the targets of the Millennium Declaration:

"Russia is increasingly making a contribution to solving the most acute global problems [...] This is particularly visible at the regional level, within the CIS context, where Russia plays the role of a regional leader, often setting the standard for achieving the Millennium Development Goals" (UN in Russia, 2006).

Whilst UNDP is quite clear in its understanding of Russia as "an emerging economy" (UNDP, 2007: 2) in a transitional stage of development, as Russia begins to develop as an international assistance provider there is a growing level of expectation placed upon its government throughout publications from the UNDP to fulfil its role as a donor to the maximum. In the National Human Development Report 2005, UNDP states that whilst "the international target parameter of Official Aid for Development (OAD) allocated by developed countries is 0.7% of GNP" (UNDP, 2005: 147), OAD in donor countries in 2002 stood at only 0.23%. Continuing, it declares that "Russia as a middle-income country [has] per capita GDP three-five times lower than donor

countries” (ibid.: 147), and will struggle to meet even the existing level of established donors within the next decade; if this is the case, then why do we find earlier in the report statements that challenge countries such as Russia to “complete the process of eradicating extreme poverty within their own countries and to join the ranks of donor countries at the same time” (ibid.: 132)? Such a level of expectation placed on emerging economies is to make fundamental assumptions, both about the ease of transition and about its likely course, neither of which, as Bradshaw (1997) has shown, can be taken for granted.

Why, though, are such expectations placed upon Russia? As I have previously shown, when addressing the Russo-American relationship of the Medvedev-Obama era, Legvold (2009) argues that Russia *matters* to the international community and its global political-economic agenda. Similarly, with respect to energy, there is a level of dependence on Russia's natural reserves, particularly gas. Further, as the American and Russian Presidents showed in April 2010, Russia remains a crucial stakeholder on the route to nuclear non-proliferation, and in the containment of nuclear programmes in, for example, Iran. Further still, the fight against terrorist insurgency in Central Asia and the Caucasus is dependent on an integrated Russia (Legvold, 2009). Therefore, by pandering to Russia's wishes to become a global contender, by constructing and framing Russia – intentionally or otherwise – as a power worthy of integration into, in this case, the scene for international development assistance, the potential for cooperation on such global issues is greatly improved.

However, in cooperating with Russia the international community, or more specifically the UNDP, is reinforcing Agnew's (1998; 2003) call for a reconceptualization of the modern geopolitical imagination. The modernist elements of this representation of international relations do not allow for policies that simultaneously promote integration (as a donor) and distancing (as an underdeveloped receiver).

As already seen, Russia faces a serious demographic and mortality crisis. It is challenged by, “an historically unique task of supporting high economic growth rates despite decline in population” (UNDP, 2009: 14). The report also addresses inter-regional inequality, stating that “almost every fourth constituent entity of the Russian Federation has per capita Gross Regional Product (GRP) less than half of the national average (ibid.: 17)”, and that “of 80 regions for which the Human Development Index (HDI) has been calculated, only 13 have per capita GRP higher than the [mean]” (ibid.: 17). Further exemplifying this disparity, those regions that do exceed the national average do so dramatically: for 2005-6, in the Tyumen region in central, Siberia, and area enriched with natural resources, the HDI rating is 400% greater than the average; in Moscow it is 200% (UNDP, 2007).

In representing the demographic crisis UNDP outlines Russia as a donor and receiver in the same geopolitical time and space. It states that “the new geopolitical configuration on the territory of the former Soviet Union and the start of depopulation processes in Russia have given rise to profound transformations in international migration processes” (ibid.: 14). Since 2007 there has been a decline in the repatriation of ethnic Russian nationals from clusters and diasporas within FSRs, following the period 1989-2007 where two-thirds of population growth in Russia was due to homecoming Russians. By contrast, and in order to fill this void in the non-dependent population, migration flows from FSRs to Russia for labour purposes have risen sharply. Russia is becoming demographically dependent on its FSU neighbours in the way that the successor states are equally dependent on its outflows of natural resources, for example. Yet UNDP speaks of Russia as a “regional leader” (UN in Russia, 2006), setting a benchmark for the development aspirations of neighbouring developing states. Russia is, therefore, not simply *imagined* as both a donor and a receiver; reality, too, reflects this imaginary construction. Within the same geopolitical space and time, Russia is both a provider of aid and a recipient.

For the UNDP, an assumption that is consistently made concerns the relationship between ‘donor’ and ‘developed’. In the aid literature few have critically challenged the embedded, assumed synonymies of ‘donor-developed’ and ‘receiver-underdeveloped’. Such synonymy is an imaginary notion born from the trends in development assistance of the post-World War II period of reconstruction, the era of new independence in the developing world and, ultimately, the North-South power relationships proceeding from the 1970s debt crisis. The perception that donors are situated only in the Global North, and receivers in the Global South, is both simplistic and fraught with assumptions designed to uphold the modern geopolitical imagination. The ideology-focused trajectories of assistance during the Cold War challenge this, as does the example I cited earlier concerning assistance in the form of a transfer of labour from the less developed countries of the CIS to the (economically) more developed Russia. Browne (2006), too, directly challenges the assumption that to donate is synonymous with being developed by examining flows of aid from, as he writes, “Southern donors” (2006: 122).

It is clearly possible to serve as a ‘donor’ in a non-monetary capacity. The picture painted by UNDP of Russia in the international donors’ market is one of a financial contributor, increasing its donations to the WFP in 2009, for example. Yet, as Legvold (2009) implies, to cooperate with an international agenda is also to donate oneself to its programme. He states, “it is not in [Russia's] national interest to see the West’s efforts to stabilize Afghanistan fail”. In cooperating with the international community in the fight against Central Asian insurgency and the Taliban, for example, Russia is *donating* resources, in terms of land, and regional knowledge.

The Russian case challenges the conventional (monetary) understanding of what might characterize a provider of development. As the UNDP’s 2008-10 CP states, for its rising per capita GDP, Russia will become “ineligible for UNDP regular funds beyond 2010” (UNDP, 2007: 3), signifying in theory that, monetarily, Russia symbolizes a country that can effectively provide for itself. Yet its levels of

underdevelopment and inequality in its regions, its still-rising prevalence of HIV/AIDS in youth, its impending fiscal crisis as a result of a population biased towards dependency place aspects of Russian Human Development, as I have shown, in the company of many traditionally ‘Southern’ countries (CIA, 2009). Therefore, Russia represents, at the same time, a host of relationships within the donor-developing-receiver-developed structure and, as such, directly challenges those assumptions apparently made by UNDP that Russia has the capacity to donate simply because of its economic status.

Cornwall (2007: 481) calls for a “constructive deconstruction” of development language, after Standing (2001) discussed a “linguistic crisis” in development (cited in Cornwall (2007: 481); the Russian case vindicates Cornwall’s call, for the semantic convention that aligns *donor* with *developed* and, perhaps more significantly, *underdeveloped* with *receiver*, are overwhelmingly dated. In a similar vein, much of the difficulty in understanding flows of aid can be understood in terms of the way in which donors and recipients are geopolitically imagined: the notions of “North” and “South” are, themselves, constructed entities that further reinforce geopolitical relationships of power.

The analysis of UNDP publications and programmes clearly shows that geopolitical imaginations have a significant role to play for the UNDP in representing Russia. Further, the dual imagination of Russia’s place in the international aid community challenges geopolitical imaginations to overcome the modernist, Oriental-Occidental binary that characterized the rejection of Russian integration during the Cold War. Those quotations from the UNDP in Russia, which suggest that it would be foolish and extremely difficult for Russia to offer assistance until it has overcome *its* challenges for *its* development, stand in direct contrast to those publications and statements in reports that clearly encourage the emergence of a donor programme. Recent evidence shows that the UNDP might be, perhaps, lowering its expectations of

Russia, with CP2008-10 significantly less pressurizing than its predecessors; however, proof is found in practice, and only time will tell whether UNDP has overcome its grounding in the assumptions of the modern geopolitical imagination with regards complexities of the Russian transition and participation in international development.

The NHDR '08 concludes that “Russia is still at the very beginning of a long road” (UNDP, 2009c: 9). This conclusion is itself problematic. Not only does it require a thorough reconceptualization of the ways in which Russia is framed by UNDP as both a donor and a receiver in international development, but it also allows for an imaginative distance between UNDP (as the donor) and Russia (as the recipient) to be maintained. Although UNDP might be *factually* correct in representing Russia as both a receiver and a donor of aid – in as much as both inflows and outflows of assistance do exist in Russia – the organization’s motives and understandings that inform this belief are flawed. The implicit belief on the part of UNDP that Russia will ‘complete’ its transition, at which time it will have ‘developed’ and thus be in a position to assist poorer countries in their development, is damaging. Similarly, to imagine and to conceptualize Russia as an underdeveloped country maintains a distance between Russia (the receiver) and its donors (in this case, the UNDP) that is, at least in part, motivated by a desire to uphold the prevailing Occidentalized geopolitical imagination. We must question whether Russia, or any other developing or even developed country for that matter, will ever simply serve as *either* a donor *or* a receiver of assistance, or whether the reality is that such segregation of these ‘roles’ is impossible. Indeed, as Cornwall (2007) illustrates, such terms merely reflect constructed labels and are themselves embedded with geopolitical imaginations.

This reading of the UNDP in Russia thoroughly vindicates Agnew’s (1998; 2003) central claim that a revision of the modern geopolitical imagination, towards a new imagination that rejects those constructions and assumptions that seek to uphold

biased relationships of power, is overdue. The case study above reinforces this call by illustrating the ways in which geopolitical imaginations are produced through and represented in the policies of international aid, reinforcing both Slater (1993; 1994) and Toal's (1994) perspectives regarding the inherent relationship between processes of development and geopolitical imaginations. I now turn to the work of a second organization working in Russia, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in order to evaluate whether the presence of geopolitical imaginations in overseas development programmes in Russia is limited to the UNDP, or whether the findings of the case study above reflect a trend in the policies of other agencies.

## **8. The International Committee of the Red Cross**

In order to deepen the discussion regarding the role of geopolitical imaginations in policies for development assistance, it is useful to explore the activity of another ‘donor’ operating in Russia. To this end, I will briefly introduce the workings of the ICRC in Russia and outline its activities for assistance and relief. I will briefly discuss the similarities and differences between the overall policies for international development and assistance of the UNDP and the ICRC, as well as their specific engagements in contemporary Russia. I will then examine the extent to which geopolitical imaginations are played out under the ICRC’s agenda for assistance in Russia. It will become clear that those (geo)political imaginations present in the writings of the ICRC are considerably different to those discussed with reference to UNDP.

It is important to note at the outset of this ‘comparison’, however, that I am not seeking to literally compare the work of the two organizations (although, inevitably, comment will be made on the relative successes and failures of the work of the ICRC, as with UNDP). Rather, I wish to use the study of the ICRC to develop those evaluations made in the previous chapter regarding the relationships between development, aid and geopolitical imaginations and, after Agnew’s call, the need to retheorize the geopolitical imagination away from its modernist grounding. Also of interest is the difference in the representations of Russia conveyed by the different writings of the two organizations that foster contrasting imaginations of Russia and its place in the world order.

### **The ICRC in Russia**

A significant proportion of the work of the ICRC in Russia is concentrated in the North Caucasus region, and in particular in the regional republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, all of which share a border with the independent state of Georgia. This region is notoriously unstable in the post-Soviet

era, with land contested and peoples displaced, exemplified by the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. Nevertheless, in the last quarter of 2007 the ICRC halted its relief distributions in the region in order to shift its focus towards the development of vital facilities (ICRC, 2007). Effectively, this represented a move away from emergency relief aid towards assistance that fostered transition and human development:

“as reconstruction picked up, the ICRC moved from emergency aid to programmes aimed at recovery and sustainability, launching micro-economic projects for an increasing number of beneficiaries in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia” (ICRC, 2007).

According to the organization, this move reflected the successes of regional socioeconomic development in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, and signified a shift towards promoting sustainable living in place of a reliance upon emergency relief (ibid.).

The programmes coordinated by the ICRC in Russia are of interest, not only in that they are locally specific, but further that they do not fall what may be considered as the post-millennial aid paradigm that is centred on the MDGs and strategies of poverty reduction (Renard, 2007). Each activity or operation is associated with the specific needs of the peoples of the region in which the organization is working. As such, the way in which underdevelopment is theorized and represented by the ICRC is relevant to the situation, less governed by structure and seemingly disconnected from those relationships of power that, as I have argued, underwrite aspects of the MDG framework.

One of the main fields in which the ICRC works concerns the repatriation of missing and displaced persons following periods of conflict. This is a field of work that is particularly relevant to the inhabitants of Southern Russia and the North Caucasus following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to UN statistics, over the period 1989-2007 two-thirds of population increase due to migration was largely as a result of the repatriation of displaced ethnic Russians in Former Soviet Republics

(FSRs) (UNDP, 2009); such a statistic illustrates the size of the task faced by those NGOs engaged in this programme.

Another of ICRC's major operations is focussed on the clearing of landmines in the North Caucasus. In line with the Movement's overall Assistance Policy (2004), which states that "protection is a prerequisite for the success of any assistance operation" (ICRC, 2007), the ICRC sees a safe environment as the only plausible setting for progress and development. This thinking shows a level of continued engagement with academic literature, specifically with the work of Duffield (1997; 2001; 2007). That regional security and stability serve as prerequisites for successful development is not directly addressed by the MDGs, which focus more on the *problems* of underdevelopment than their root causes (Riddell, 2007). In spite of this digression from what has come to represent mainstream development policy (Renard, 2007) the ICRC remains committed to the individual needs of the regions in which it works.

A further element of the ICRC's work that distinguishes it from the UNDP is the attention given to the importance of permanence in development and transition. I have critiqued the way in which the UNDP conceptualizes transition for its tendency towards modernist assumptions such as linearity, short-termism and the notion of 'completion', the flaws of which are detailed by Bradshaw (1997). Rather than theorizing transition in this way, the ICRC instead draws on the work of Duffield and Edkins, directing its attention not only to emergency assistance but also to operations concerned with the relief of complex permanent emergency. The ICRC's Assistance Policy document (2004) is inundated with reference to 'complex humanitarian emergencies' and the interrelationships of development and (in)security. This focus on the importance of time and permanence is further illustrated by another quote from the Assistance Policy (2004) that outlines the ICRC's priority as addressing issues that "meet needs that are at once urgent and recurrent" (ICRC, 2004).

### **Geopolitical imaginations and the ICRC**

Quite clearly, the operations of UNDP and the ICRC, and their relative successes or failures, are, in large part, incomparable. However, the debate regarding the way in which geopolitical imaginations underwrite policy for development assistance, exemplified in this case in post-Soviet Russia, offers a stimulus for discussion. This piece is not intended to serve as a forum for debate regarding macro-level versus micro-level involvement from external agencies in development, or the legitimacy and validity of different types of aid programmes. Nevertheless, some reference to this debate is unavoidable, and the contrasting scale of operations allows for different readings of Russia and its place in the world order.

At the outset of the parallel discussion in the previous chapter, I stated that it is more important to critically evaluate the rationales for aid operations in recipient countries than to simply understand what is being actioned. In analysing the work of the ICRC, Russia – or, more specifically the North Caucasus – is presented as an underdeveloped region, yielding indices of development that are comparable to sub-Saharan Africa and the Asian subcontinent (CIA, 2009). In terms of the donor-receiver dualism that proceeds from the readings of UNDP publications, the work of the ICRC is both regionally and locally focused, and grounded in the notion of Russia as a recipient country. That other regions within Russia are significantly more developed, economically and socially, or that (as Legvold (2009) argues) the development of Russia matters to the international community, receives little attention from the writings and activities of the ICRC. What does this illustrate with regards to the role for geopolitical imaginations within the two organizations?

Without the framework of the MDGs to guide its activities and policy, the ICRC views Russia as underdevelopment in different terms to those put forward by the development goals. Rather than erecting barriers and distinctions between the ‘donor’ and the ‘receiver’ in a way that, as Amin (2006) claims, the MDGs do, the assistance policy of the ICRC promotes integration with communities and those that suffer in

situations of underdevelopment. Those misrepresentations that yield from the modern geopolitical imagination of which Agnew (1998) writes, and the geopolitical relationships of power on which it is founded, do not feature in this aspect of the ICRC's assistance policy for Russia. Neither are they apparent in other fields in which the organization works, such as the repatriation of displaced persons, the fostering of micro-economic initiatives designed at promoting self-sufficient transition and development, or the creation of a stable and secure environment for development through the clearance of landmines (ICRC, 2007).

Secondly, the ICRC itself states that it adheres to a remit under which it is confident in working: "the organization has opted to maintain a spectrum of core activities for which it possesses the internal capacity needed" (ICRC, 2004: 678). Said (1978) and Gregory (1994) have argued that the root of imagined understanding is found in the desire to fill a void in knowledge. This is subsequently made geopolitical when imaginations are used to promote (biased) relationships of power, or uphold those already existing. That the ICRC is committed to working within a focused core of activities, rather than to the aims of a grand framework, suggests that the requirement to construct knowledge is limited. And whilst, as Edkins' (2000) work would suggest, the conscious choice to remain grounded in a small field or work is itself 'political', it would be incorrect to label this geopolitical.

The influence of geopolitical imaginations on the work of the ICRC in Russia is significantly smaller than in the case of the UNDP, explored in the previous section. In focusing on Russia entirely as a recipient of aid, the ICRC avoids the challenging dualism that understands it simultaneously as a donor and a receiver. The relationship between the organization and those that it intends to assist in Russia is clear, and those fabricated barriers, designed to restate the balance of power between donor and receiver are absent from its work. Furthermore, for the organization's focus on the regional and local scale, the challenge of conceptualizing Russia's changing 'place in

the world’ – and, by association, the way in which its development might provoke shifts in the Occidentalized geopolitical imagination – is overcome, or sidelined.

### **Lessons to be learned from the ICRC**

As with the UNDP, the case study of the ICRC’s work for development assistance in Russia supports Agnew’s call, albeit from a different perspective, for a complete revision – indeed, rejection – of the modern geopolitical imagination. The successful overcoming of modernist traditions in processes of development assistance on the part of the ICRC in Russia illustrates that profitable aid dialogue and practice need not be defined by relationships of geopolitical power.

That organizations and donors work to different agendas in programmes of development assistance is clear from this discussion. This is not simply defined by the degree to which geopolitical imaginations prevail in their writings and policy, but further, as I have explored through discussions of transition in both chapter 4 and chapter 7, in their theorizations of development. In this respect, the writings of the ICRC appear more critically informed because of their engagement with relevant and contemporary academic literature. Because of this close familiarity with the literature, the organization overcomes tendencies towards modernism in a way that all of the critical geopolitics writers cited in this piece – Toal, Dalby, Slater, Agnew, Said, Gregory – call for. For example, In its 2004 policy concept for assistance, the ICRC draws on discussions concerning the challenges of complex permanent emergency and the relevance of (in)security and (in)stability to programmes of development; I have presented these in this thesis through the work of Duffield (1997; 2001; 2007) and Edkins (2000). Such engagement with the literature is not explicitly apparent in the work of the UNDP.

In light of both of the case studies of development assistance in Russia, the call for processes of overseas assistance to be more critically examined is certainly vindicated. The case of the ICRC presented above shows not only that alternatives to

the prevailing paradigm for aid, characterized by the Millennium Development Goals, are valid and profitable. Further, it illustrates that, by rejecting the structures of a grand framework, the reliance upon modernist constructions, and thus the prevalence of geopolitical imaginations designed to uphold biased relationships of power, are reduced. The ICRC chooses not to embrace the visualization of Russia as unique and dualistic, as representing both a donor and a receiver of assistance. Rather, its concern lies with the individualities of local and regional cases of underdevelopment that are specific to the Russian context, such as the repatriation of persons displaced during the Soviet break-up, or the preservation of a secure and stable climate for development through the clearance of landmines.

An array of conclusions regarding the manifestation of geopolitical imaginations in aid policy, the call to move beyond the modern geopolitical imagination (and the associated form this revised imagination might take), alternative models for development, the omnipresence of politics in development, the relationship of (geo)politics to development and the exceptionality of the Russian context can all be drawn from the discussion I have offered throughout this piece. However, as I look to offer and explore conclusions, the central questions of the thesis must take precedence.

## **9. Conclusion**

This thesis set out to explore the extent to which international aid policies are informed by geopolitical imaginations. Further, it sought to draw upon the, now dated, discussions of Slater (1993; 1994) and Toal (1994) that presented linkages between theories of development and geopolitics. One of the central aims of the thesis was to support and restate Agnew's (1998; 2003) call for a reconceptualization of the modern geopolitical imagination. The thesis further aimed to explore and illustrate the extent to which the field of geopolitics, imaginary geography and development shared interconnectivities that are rarely sufficiently communicated in the academic literature.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown that there is an overwhelming need to reject the modern geopolitical imagination in favour of a reconceptualized world order. This is the case not just because of the Orientalist, essentialized understanding of world politics conveyed by the modern geopolitical imagination— as explored in detail in Chapter 3 – but, further, because the model is insufficient and too simplistic to account for the complex nature of the multiple ways in which states integrate into the international community. The UNDP's dualistic understanding of Russia as both a 'donor' and a 'receiver' clearly exemplifies this point. Similarly, the application of labels such as 'donor', 'developed', 'receiver' or 'underdeveloped' in development discourse, as shown by Cornwall (2007) is another complexity that is over-simplified under the modern geopolitical imagination.

In response to attempts to structure global society in a post-Cold war geopolitical climate, writers such as Toal (1994; 1996) have raised questions over the necessity for an international order in any form, and the degree to which it is possible for such an order to exist without the exploitation of unequal power relations by those states whose geopolitical capacity allows. I contend this notion, following Slater (1994), Agnew (1998) and Legvold (2009) in proposing that, in a complex system of

international relations, there must be some form of structure that allows for the convergence of different theories and practices. The issue of the way that this geopolitical imagination is constructed, by whom and for whom, is far more challenging.

Geopolitical imaginations are individually, nationally, culturally subjective, for those factors that affect the way in which identity is offset against a host of 'Others' are geographically variable. This sympathy towards context is rejected by the structures of the modern geopolitical imagination. Therefore, rather than allowing for the modern geopolitical imagination to prevail through channels that allow for the exploitation of weaker states by those in greater positions of power – such as processes of overseas aid – conventional understanding must be challenged. A higher level of critical evaluation must be applied to both aid policy (including those overarching frameworks such as the MDGs) and wider development discourse. Further, development and geopolitics must be understood and theorized as discourses that are more connected than discrete. The modern geopolitical imagination, its assumptions rooted in Orientalism, its rejection of context and its exertions of geopolitical power by 'strong' states over 'weaker' states has dominated visualizations of world politics for far too long.

I argue, both in chapter 4 and throughout the case studies in Part II, that international aid is not apolitical. Assistance is closely linked to foreign policy and geopolitical motivations, particularly since 9/11, the advent of the War on Terror, and a return to bilateral patterns of engagement for aid (Woods, 2005). Edkins (2000) describes the ways in which the choices and decisions that are inevitably made with regards to international assistance are *themselves* grounded in politics. To make choices *is to be political* (ibid.), and processes of aid must be read as such.

The case studies presented in Part II vindicate, both individually and in comparison, the calls of both Toal and Slater for greater critique of the role played by geopolitical

imaginings in development discourse. I have highlighted examples of quotes from UNDP publications that appear heavily grounded in the Orientalist belief that the receiver represents a “subject race” (Said, 1978: 35), for example those concerning patterns of internal migration. That, as Smith (1999) notes, the dissolution of the Soviet Empire led to severe “internal fragmentation” (1999: 49) does not feature in the writings or assistance practices of the UNDP in Russia. Smith continues to explain that, with one in five inhabitants not ethnically Russian, the challenge of repatriation for many (though not all) persons to newly independent successor states was great in the early years of transition (Smith, 1999). The work of the ICRC that continues to address this issue highlights the continued existence of the challenge.

The uncritical adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the UNDP limits its activities in Russia to five key areas, none of which addresses the issue of displaced persons that is a characteristic of underdevelopment in Russia. Throughout both chapters 4 and 7 I raised the question as to whether the MDGs serve to uphold a geopolitical imagination characterized by Occidental bias, universalistic assumptions and Cold War hierarchies of geopolitical power, rather than supporting targeted, context specific aid and development processes. I suggested that the dominance of the MDG framework, with respect to the case study of the UNDP in Russia, might be understood in geopolitical terms, whereby the non-contextual application of universal goals for development represents a way for the unequal power relations of the donor-receiver relationship to prevail. I posed the question, ‘for whom are the problems being remedied’?

The UNDP’s conceptualization of Russia as both a donor and a receiver of international assistance, however, exposes the presence of geopolitical imaginings in aid policy. The simultaneous rejection (as a recipient of aid) and acceptance (as a donor) of Russia represents it, at one and the same time, as both ‘us’ and ‘them’. This clearly highlights the over-simplifications of the modern geopolitical imagination that is fraught with such fabricated distinctions and, as such, Agnew’s (1998; 2003) call for a

complete revision of those structures, and representations of the world they depict, is thoroughly reinforced.

The case study of the work of the ICRC in Russia illustrates both that there are profitable alternatives to the prevailing paradigm for overseas development, and that those policies for development that are disassociated from grand frameworks are less a product of geopolitical imaginations. The ICRC's objectives in their assistance to Russia do not inherently descend from the MDG framework, nor are they dictated by this.

The studies of the policies and practices of the two organizations suggest, therefore, that larger frameworks for development and assistance rely more heavily on assumptions and (mis)representations. I have shown that this claim is reinforced by Said's writing on imaginary geography, which explains that imaginations are constructed to fill gaps in knowledge; poor understanding, in terms of context, represents this void of knowledge in universalistic structures. Agnew (1998) argues that assumptions are made geopolitical by a desire to uphold modernist, Orientalist visualizations of the world. Conversely, the work of the ICRC is more grounded and less governed by structures. To evaluate the question of which approach to development represents better (not 'best') practice is not the central aim of this thesis; rather, this discussion calls for an increased level of critical evaluation when analyzing the activities, policies and publications of international aid organizations.

A further, significant aim of this thesis was to draw attention to the intrinsic and important linkages between the fields of study that have been presented – development, aid, (geo)politics and geopolitical imaginations. In Chapter 4 I presented discussions from Edkins (2000) illustrating the embedded relationship between politics and aid. Edkins argues that aid processes are products of choice and *un-choice*, which *is* politics. Equally, the case studies of aid organizations working in Russia in Part II highlighted the presence of geopolitical imaginations within theories and

practices of international aid. To think of aid apolitically or ‘ageopolitically’ is a flawed practice; likewise, to perceive practices of aid as beyond imaginary construction (and thus, because of the intricate relationship of aid and politics, as beyond *geopolitical* construction) is naïve and overtly simplistic. The thesis shows that, because of the significance of their linkages, studies of development, international relations, geopolitics and geopolitical imaginations that remain discrete and do not account for the importance of the inter-relationships with each other are, therefore, incomprehensive. This does, of course, not presume to invalidate prior work in these fields; it does, however, seek to convey the importance of a holistic approach to analysis in this area of study.

The thesis is equally successful in drawing conclusions with respect to its other underlying research questions: these addressed the (in)adequacies of the modern geopolitical imagination, the continued appropriateness of the Millennium Development Goal framework with respect to overseas aid and the rationales for the continued pre-domination of this system for development. The discussions surrounding these questions offered within this thesis, and the opportunities they present for further debate – such as the necessary revision of the way in which the world is geopolitically imagined, by whom and for who – not only validate their inclusion but work to fill voids in contemporary academic literature. This is particularly the case with regards to critical analysis of the use of the MDG framework for development and overseas aid. It is important to state that at no point does the thesis propose the rejection of the goals. Rather, it exemplifies post-Soviet Russia, and the work of two contrasting organizations for development, to illustrate that the MDG system must not be uncritically adopted as the most appropriate structure. Further, it proposes that, as has been presented in this piece, in cases where the viability of the MDG system is questioned through critical analysis the geopolitical motivations of those overseeing its use be critically explored.

In evaluating this thesis, there are inevitably areas of study to which I would have liked to have dedicated greater attention, or developed further. Although this particular study successfully stands alone, concerned with the ways in which Russia is represented and imagined within the international development community, the logical progression is to incorporate Russian voices into the discussion. Similarly, greater primary engagement with staff working in the context of development in Russia within the two organizations I have exemplified would further develop the discussion. Nevertheless, the thesis has raised a series of challenging questions concerning the role played by geopolitical imaginations in development. It has also clearly illustrated that the fields of geopolitics, development and imaginary geography demonstrate significant and important linkages. The thesis makes, therefore, two principal calls: firstly, for a reconceptualization of the modern geopolitical imagination and a greater level of critical analysis with respect to the geopolitics of aid and those structures through which aid operates; and, secondly, it calls for a greater volume of study that is both sympathetic to, and specifically concerned with the interconnectivities of geopolitics, geopolitical imaginations and development.

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