

Border thinking: Rossport, Shell and the Political Geographies of a Gas Pipeline
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Running title: Border thinking

Abstract: Rossport is a small, sparsely populated rural area in the West of Ireland. Over the past seven years, some of its residents have been engaged in a struggle against the building of a gas pipeline through their locality by multinational corporations, including Shell and Statoil. Their struggle has garnered opposition and support within Ireland and internationally. This paper takes the story of Rossport as the starting point for a broader discussion of epistemology within political geography. Drawing on the work of Walter Mignolo, in particular his ideas about 'border thinking' and the 'decoloniality of knowledge', it argues that Rossport offers the possibility for a redeployment of postcolonial thought within political geography.

Keywords: Pipelines, border thinking, decoloniality of knowledge, postcolonialism, resources, Shell, Ireland

INTRODUCTION

On June 29 2005, Philip McGrath, Brendan Philbin, Vincent McGrath, Micheál Ó Seighin and Willie Corduff were jailed by the High Court in Dublin for contempt of court. The five – all from the Erris peninsula in Mayo, in the west of Ireland – had refused, despite a court order, to stop obstructing the construction of a gas pipeline through some of their lands. The Rossport Five, as they became known, remained in jail until September 30, 2005, for 94 days (see Fig. 1). Despite their release, the campaign against the construction of the gas pipeline – known as Shell chun Sáile or Shell to Sea – continues. Despite these protests, the construction of the gas pipeline also continues.

Insert Fig 1. about here

This paper focuses on the lead up to and the aftermath of the imprisonment and release of the Rossport Five, and raises broader questions about why and how political geographers should engage with this story, unfolding in a remote part of Ireland. The question of *why* may be quite obvious. Rossport matters, because it is a dispute about ownership and use of natural resources; because it illustrates the threats posed to local communities by a powerful coalition of state and capital; and because, as a consequence, it raises questions of scalar politics and power. In this way, Rossport is part of a longer tradition in geography that focuses on place-based conflicts and struggles (for some recent examples, see Davies, 2005, 2006; Perreault, 2003; Watts, 2004a; Zaup, 2008). The question of *how* political geographers should engage with this story is, perhaps, more difficult to answer. In this paper, I suggest that the story of Rossport offers the possibility for a redeployment of postcolonial thought within political geography. While political geographers engage with the postcolonial, their analyses most often focus on the postcolonial as a bounded temporal and spatial state

(see, for example, Tan, 2007; Power, 2001, Ramutsindela, 2001, Christopher, 2009, Sidaway, 2003), or apply postcolonial analyses to the new imperialism of the US (see, for example, Slater, 2004; Sparke, 2005)¹. The potential for an expanded understanding of postcolonial theory in political geography and geopolitics has been articulated by Robinson (2003), but her powerful argument has yet to make a significant impact on the discipline. In this paper, I suggest that a broader engagement with postcolonial thought offers new insights into the epistemologies of political geography, and new directions for the practice of political geography. The work of Walter Mignolo, a professor of literature and a key writer on Latin America, provides one such set of possibilities. In particular, Mignolo's attention to the geo-politics of knowledge – the spaces where knowledge is created, and the means by which knowledge is legitimated – offers a provocative challenge to political geography. Mignolo's strategies for unveiling the geo-politics of knowledge are varied, but two are of particular relevance here. The first is 'decoloniality', which makes the place of knowledge production explicit. The second is 'border thinking', which explicitly works to link together those spaces and places that have been marginalised through the twin processes of colonialism and modernity. By applying these strategies to Rosspport, we can move beyond the restricted uses of postcolonial theory in political geography, and identify new 'horizons of expectation' for the discipline.

THE PLACE OF ROSSPORT

Rosspport is located in the Erris peninsula, a harsh and beautiful place (see Fig.2). It's exposed to the Atlantic Ocean, and endures strong winds, heavy rainfall, and long dark winter nights. It has suffered from depopulation, high levels of

emigration, and marginalisation throughout the decades, from famine times to the current day.

Insert Fig. 2 around here

Robert Lloyd Praeger, writing in 1937, described Erris as ‘the wildest, loneliness stretch of country to be found in all Ireland’ (1997: 195-6). Despite its position as a Gaeltacht region in the mythologised West of Ireland, Erris has not been part of the Irish national imaginary in the way of Connemara or the Aran Islands. Rather, it has appeared from time to time in public discourses as a signifier of poverty, a pattern that was well established in the colonial era: witness, for example, the words of journalist Thomas Campbell Foster who, in despair at what he had experienced in Erris, wrote that:

It is a singular fact that the further you travel westward in Ireland, the more bountiful does nature appear to have been in heaping upon the country natural resources, and the less has been done by the hand of man to use and improve them (Foster, 1846: 218).

This continued after independence. In Irish parliamentary debates since 1921, for example, the portrayal of Erris is generally as a place of struggle: where food is scarce, where subsistence activities such as fishing, turf-cutting and the sale of seaweed are under threat, and where state services are poorly supplied. The current picture of the Mayo Gaeltacht, from the 2006 Census is not very different: it shows a region with an older age profile, higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of education than the national average (CSO, 2006).

Yet Erris is also beautiful, with breathtaking scenery and a strong sense of community, underpinned by a deep attachment to place (Vincent McGrath, in Garavan *et al* 2006:157). Census statistics and official debates do not capture its

beauty and hold over many of the people who live there. From time to time, this sense of community and place becomes apparent, even to outsiders. A telling parliamentary exchange occurred in 1978, when the Minister of Agriculture, in response to a question about the division and allocation of 1,600 acres of commonage in Rossport, Mayo, said:

A preliminary investigation as to the feasibility of dividing this commonage was carried out a few years ago. The matter was not, however, proceeded with as it transpired that the majority of the co-owners were not in fact interested in division (Dáil Éireann, 1978).

And many of those directly involved in the current division in Erris, over the building of a gas pipeline, frame their involvement in terms of ‘the love of the land and the love of the place’ (Garavan et al, 2006: 27).

ANATOMY OF A DISPUTE

Beginning in the late 1990s, Erris began to appear more regularly in parliamentary debates and national media reports. This was linked to the discovery, in 1996, of gas in the offshore Corrib field by Enterprise Oil. The Corrib field is located in the Slyne Basin, one of the four sedimentary basins to the west of Ireland that are a focus of exploration activity (Shannon et al, 2001). In 1996, the Irish Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources had over 20 exploration licenses in place, to companies that included Marathon, Chevron, Mobil and Bula, as well as Enterprise Oil (DCENR, 2008)². In early 2001, the Corrib gas find was publicly declared as commercially viable by Enterprise Energy Ireland (EEI), the company set up to develop the find. However, EEI had already been working behind the scenes for a number of months (CPI, 2005). They had identified a site for an onshore gas

processing plant; and they had identified a route for the pipeline from landfall to the plant by late 2000 (CPI, 2005). By August 2001, EEI had been granted planning permission for the processing plant, and by November 2001, they received a petroleum lease for the gas field (Garavan et al, 2006: 7). Planning permission for the pipelines associated with the project was granted in February and April 2002 (Shell, 2008). In April 2002, Shell purchased Enterprise Oil, and took over its controlling stake in the project. There are now three core partners: Shell (45%), Statoil (36.5%) and Marathon (18.5%) – of these, only Statoil has been involved from the very beginning (Shell, 2008). Planning permission for the processing plant was appealed on a number of occasions, before finally being granted in October 2004. Following a number of reports and recommendations, a new onshore pipeline route has been proposed, and SEPIL have just applied for planning permission for the new route (see Fig. 2). Locals opposed to the development frame their opposition in terms of safety and health. They claim that the pressure of unprocessed gas in the pipeline will be too high, that the pipeline will be too close to people's homes, and that the environmental effects of gas transportation and processing will be devastating to the place, people and wildlife. They want the gas to be processed offshore.

On the surface, these dates and events seem relatively straightforward. Yet, they mask the structures and networks of exploitation and solidarity and the threads of memory that underpin the many Rossport stories. The first is the alliance between state and capital. In the case of oil and gas exploration and production, 'Ireland has had the best fiscal terms in the world for exploration and production' (Indecon, 2007: 76). In Ireland, the tax rate on profits from oil and gas is currently 25%, with no requirement for royalties or production bonuses, and with full write off of capital expenditure. In addition, corporations can sell oil and gas to the state at full market

value (Allen, 2006; CPI, 2005; Indecon, 2007)³. Beyond these general fiscal conditions, the current government has brought its weight to bear to ensure that this specific development continues: it facilitated the compulsory acquisition of land for the pipeline by introducing new legislation; it enabled meetings between the developers, the Taoiseach⁴, and the planning authority (CPI, 2005: 14; Garavan et al, 2006: 8); and it regularly took the side of the developers, branding the protestors as trouble-makers. Less directly, a government minister – Michael McDowell, the Minister for Justice – spearheaded a smear campaign against the Centre for Public Inquiry and its chief executive, Frank Connolly, who had published a highly critical report in November 2005, entitled *The Great Corrib Gas Controversy*⁵. The Centre for Public Inquiry was set up in 2005 and received significant funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. Its aim was to investigate corruption in Irish public life, but its funding was withdrawn after Michael McDowell alleged in the Irish parliament that Frank Connolly was an active member of the IRA. Connolly suggested that the allegations were ‘patently a considered and timed response to the publication of the Report on the Corrib Gas controversy from those seeking to protect vested interests’ (Connolly, 2005). More recently, the Garda Síochána – the police force of the Irish state – have been highly active in protecting the construction site and in preventing protests. The alliance between state and capital has not always been seamless. A senior planning official refused permission for the processing plant in 2003 (McCaughan, 2008: 29-31, 36-40); Irish TDs (MPs) have been highly critical of the treatment of the Rosport Five and the local community⁶; and the Ministers involved in the provision of generous incentives to the oil and gas exploration industries have been forced to resign and are under investigation for corruption in relation to other events. However, it is clear that the Irish state has significantly facilitated the

development of the Corrib Gas field, and it continues to do so despite some local opposition.

The second is the types of networks of solidarity, support and resistance that have coalesced around the issue of the pipeline. The main opposition group, Shell to Sea, runs a very active website and campaign, and they have support groups in Germany and Norway, as well as throughout Ireland. The campaigners regularly draw comparisons between their situation and that of the Ogoni in Nigeria: so much so that a nickname for the protestors in Mayo is the Bogoni. A documentary on the Corrib Gas pipeline, called *Those Who Dance*, makes this connection explicit, intercutting footage from Ireland and Nigeria. Ogoni campaigners, such as Owens SaroWiwa, have been regular visitors to Ireland and to Mayo. In this way, Shell to Sea has become part of an international coalition of groups opposed to the activities of resource exploitation companies, particularly Shell. However, Shell to Sea has also targeted Statoil, and activists have travelled to Norway, met with politicians and trade union activists, and attempted to influence public opinion in that country. The story of the Corrib Gas pipeline has also attracted interest and attention from international environmental groups, such as Global Community Monitor and the Goldman Environmental Prize, which was awarded to Willie Corduff in 2007. ‘I didn’t realise’, Corduff said in his acceptance speech, ‘that somewhere in the world people were watching what I was doing and actually appreciated it’ (Goldman Environmental Prize, 2007a). The extent of the international links of the Shell to Sea campaign is in contrast to earlier assessments of environmental campaigns in Ireland as generally ‘limited both in time and space [and] not networked into professionalised or national campaigning frameworks’ (Davies, 2006: 721). Within Ireland, a coalition of environmental and left-wing campaigners have been central to the campaign against

the pipeline. Indymedia Ireland, a radical media collective, continue to provide comprehensive coverage of the struggle. The Rosspport Solidarity Camp, established in Rosspport in 2005, provided practical support to the local community, and became involved in direct action campaigns. In addition, Rosspport is often discursively connected to other environmental campaigns in Ireland, such as the attempt to prevent the building of the M3 motorway through Tara, the ancient capital of Ireland and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Micheál Ó Seighin commented that the aim of the Shell to Sea campaign 'was not to get it into the national media. It was to get it into the unofficial network that is there, where real people live, but not the sheltered establishment' (in Garavan et al, 2006: 78). However, the extent of the support has created its own difficulties, with Shell to Sea pejoratively linked, in various media and other reports, to Sinn Féin and to violent protesting tactics. Similarly, local residents who support the pipeline are often marginalised, and their voices are often obscured, particularly in the creation of transnational alliances.

The third is 'the sound of the past' (Robinson, 2006: 1). The events in Erris, particularly since the jailing of the Rosspport Five, have raised the spectre of Michael Davitt and the Land League. In 1879 Davitt, a Mayo native, was one of the founders of the Land League, a peasant rights organisation, and his legacy is still strong in Mayo. The act of jailing also made audible the sound of other, more recent injustices. The five men who were jailed became, on imprisonment, the Rosspport Five, evoking memories of the Birmingham Six or the Guilford Four. Yet, the 'sound of the past' is not only linked to conflict and injustice, but it is also part of the emotional attachment to place. As Willie Corduff said, 'it's memories that are making us do what we're doing' (in Garavan et al, 2006: 15). Those memories are materialised in a range of local initiatives concerned with preserving and keeping alive the stories of Erris⁷, and

in the stories that people tell about the pipeline that draw on the past. As Caitlín Ó Seighin recounts, ‘there is a local prophesy in a story that says a wave will rise at Glengad and sweep up the estuary. Now we believe that refers to gas’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 96). This is taken up by Micheál Ó Seighin, who says:

people will still tell you locally that the last battle from some prophesy or other will be the battle of Ballinaboy. To me this is an echo of the awareness of people back to the Bronze Age time. An awareness that having a grip on a place is tenuous and can be destroyed. You can have an evil god like Balor who can destroy the thing and a Lugh Airgeadlámh isn’t always at hand (in Garavan et al, 2006, 96).⁸

However, the past does not only become audible through the memories of the community. The other actors in this dispute – the state and the oil and gas exploration and development companies, in particular – also have memories; of past conflicts; past resolutions; past successes (see, for example, Bradshaw, 2007b; Davies, 2008; Wheeler et al, 2001). These memories also shape the events in Erris, though they are, perhaps, less audible than the sounds of the past for the protestors.

BORDER THINKING AND DECOLONIALITY: PUTTING MIGNOLO TO WORK IN ROSSPORT

Why Rosspport should matter to political geography and political geographers is quite clear. The question of *how* Rosspport should matter is more troublesome, but of more strategic importance. In approaching this question, the work of Walter Mignolo raises some interesting possibilities and directions. Mignolo is a professor of literature and a key writer on Latin America, yet his insights into the geo-politics of knowledge raise highly relevant questions: for Rosspport and for political geography

and geographers. By introducing the concepts of border thinking and decoloniality, therefore, I'd like to put Mignolo to work in Rosspport.

For Mignolo, and for a growing number of Latin American theorists, the idea of modernity should never be delinked from coloniality. The modern world system is also and always the colonial world system, Mignolo argues, and coloniality is the 'darker' side of modernity. There is, he says, 'no modernity without coloniality' (Mignolo, 2007: 466). For Mignolo, this raises significant questions about epistemologies, in particular the ways in which the tenets of modernity – variously described in terms of progress, development, emancipation and, especially, rationality – assume the rhetoric of universality. Mignolo challenges such universality through the introduction of his conceptualisation of *body-politics* and *geo-politics*. By body-politics, he refers to the embodied construction of specific forms of allegedly universal knowledge; while by geo-politics he refers to the importance of locating the construction of knowledge. All histories, and indeed all geographies are local; but only some have global designs. Modernity has global designs, but in doing so occludes the geo-political location of its formulation (Mignolo, 2007: 463). Anibal Quijano describes this as the 'provincial pretense to universality' (in Mignolo, 2007: 493).

Decoloniality makes the place of knowledge production explicit. In arguing for the decolonization of knowledge, Mignolo envisions a constant double movement, of 'unveiling the geo-political location of theology, secular philosophy and scientific reason and simultaneously affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of Christianization, civilization, progress, development, market democracy' (Mignolo, 2007: 463). The stories that the Rosspport Five tell of their struggle and their imprisonment capture this double movement. They tell of a

local community forced to educate itself about gas pipelines and pipeline pressure, water pollution and the practices of multinational corporations. They describe a clash of views – about the importance of place and community, about definitions of progress and development. And they also demonstrate the rhetoric of modernity: how their opposition was narrated as the stance of people opposed to progress and development. Underpinning these stories is the sense of a dominant world view that is itself highly localised. ‘They all went to the same school of training’, Philip McGrath observed of the Shell personnel who visited his house, trying to get him to sign over his land for the building of the pipeline (in Garavan et al, 2006: 103).

The Rosspport Five and their families and supporters reiterate that this is not a struggle about money and individual gain, a perspective that is difficult for multinational companies, and indeed many in contemporary Ireland, to understand. These very different approaches to the value of resources came into regular conflict. For Mary Corduff, the Shell world view is that:

money is the answer. Profit is all. People or environment doesn’t come into the equation. Money for them is all and they’d nearly think how could it not be money (in Garavan et al, 2006; 36).

In a statement to the court, Micheál Ó Seighin said ‘the farms form the basis of the identity of the people. Monetary compensation cannot compensate for undermining the social identity of the people’ (in McCaughan, 2008: 77). And when Willie Corduff accepted the Goldman prize in 2007, he stated that Shell ‘have never understood what our place and our community means to us’ (Goldman Environmental Prize, 2007). The short description of Rosspport residents as not wishing to divide commonage may well be anaethema to the property owing obsession of contemporary Ireland (Dáil Éireann, 1978). However, the exchange in the Irish parliament gave an insight into a

way of life based on co-operation and mutual aid, rather than individualisation and private profit.

Yet, to argue that Rossport needs to be seen as a struggle to protect a traditional way of life falls into precisely the trap that Mignolo outlines. ‘‘Tradition’, he argues, ‘is not a way of life that pre-dated ‘modernity’ but an invention of the rhetoric of modernity’ (Mignolo, 2007: 472). The practice of difference, of fundamental importance to the rhetoric of modernity, was spatialised, first placing modernity in opposition to located ‘barbarians’, and next placing modernity in opposition to located ‘tradition’. The ‘barbarians’ of Rossport, the people ‘holding up the gas, holding up progress’ (Philip McGrath, in Garavan et al, 2006: 106), even when redefined as the keepers of tradition, are always articulated in terms of the rhetoric of modernity. In this way, modernity – in the form of modern rationality – is ‘engulfing and at the same time defensive and exclusionary’ (Mignolo, 2007: 451). Thus, the High Court judge – according to Philip McGrath – told the Rossport Five that ‘he could take everything off them’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 114). The maps that SEPIL produced for planning applications, environmental impact statements and information campaigns made few attempt to show homes. The environmental impact statement section dealing with community and socio-economics states that ‘it is a fact that the Study Area is very peripheral even within County Mayo and this presents significant development problems (SEPIL, 2008: 6-17), while pointing out that opposition to this kind of initiative often occurs despite the goal of modernisation through the spread of an industrial wealth base through the country (SEPIL, 2008: 6-1). Writing of oil companies in the Niger Delta, Michael Watts commented that they ‘had little understanding of community politics and simply interacted with local elites (or families within elite groups), lacked transparency in their determination of oil spill

severity and compensation rates ... and used cash payments as a way of attempting to purchase consent' (Watts, 2004b: 22). Modernity at work, in Nigeria and in Ireland, is exclusionary, defensive, and engulfing, and it can only exist and be maintained because of the domination of others (Escobar, 2007: 184).

Where decoloniality refers to making explicit the body- and the geo-politics of knowledge, border thinking offers a way to move beyond mere identification. Mignolo comments that one of the key problems with the rhetoric of modernity is its effect on those 'who are not lucky enough to be in the *space* where *time* and *history* move forward' (Mignolo, 2007: 467). Border thinking links together those marginalised spaces. In doing so, it is both epistemological and ethical (Mignolo, 2000: 68-69). It is epistemological because it highlights the limits to modernity and the obscured body- and geo-politics of global designs. It also allows the connections between different experiences of exploitation to be explored (Mignolo, 2007: 498). As Mignolo comments:

what each diverse local history has in common with others is the fact that they all have to deal with the unavoidable presence of the modern/colonial world and its power differentials (Mignolo, 2007: 497).

It is ethical because it is not concerned with imposing – by implicit or explicit force – one vision of society over others that differ. Rather, border thinking connects these common experiences and uses them to create a new, pluri-versal basis for knowing (Mignolo, 2007: 497).

How might the story of Rossport illustrate decoloniality and border thinking? The first relates to the ways in which the protestors used knowledge as a weapon, seeking out the rhetoric of modernity in the gas development project⁹. Micheál Ó Seighin was sceptical of the original plans, yet uncertain of his own position. 'I did

see as a geographer that what they were doing was wrong, utterly stupid’, he said, ‘but maybe they knew more than I did’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 66). Following from this, members and supporters of Shell to Sea made it their business to learn – about pipelines and about gas processing, but also about the ways in which they could create ruptures in the alliance between state and capital. Through their exposure of the ways in which state and EU policies and legislation had been breached, most recently in an appeal to the European Parliament’s Committee on Petitions, Shell to Sea continues to call both state and capital to account. Yet this is not without significant costs. ‘That bloody company has forced me to learn more about pipeline safety than I ever wanted to know’, Micheál Ó Seighin said (in Allen, 2007: xv), while his wife Caitlín said that for six years ‘he worked from morning until night on all sorts of documents and research work [while] I’d get very angry about things’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 77). For others of the Rossport Five, their time in jail placed huge burdens on their families: the demands of farm work in the summer months, the stress of dealing with media and public appearances, and the strain of weekly trips to prison that meant leaving home at five in the morning, and not getting back until late. The second relates to the ways in which protestors against the pipeline understand place. Vincent McGrath expressed it in this way:

My ancestors have lived here in Rossport for many generations, at least six generations, in the same spot along the shore on the northern side of Sruth Fada Conn ... The homeplace down by the shore is called Rinn na Rón¹⁰, where the seals used to congregate and sometimes come ashore. That’s where I was born and reared. So we’ve been here a long time and as you’d expect we have a strong sense of attachment to the land and a deep sense of belonging to the place (in Garavan et al, 2006: 157).

Place, in this way, is tied to memory, to belonging, and to emotion. The logic of capital and profit does not necessarily dominate here, despite the sense of the area as economically marginal. This understanding of place is present in the work of other writers on Ireland: in that of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, for example, and her articulation of *dinnsheanchas* – the knowledge of place that is also a lived dimension of life (Ní Dhomhnaill, 2005: 25-42); or in that of Tim Robinson, who poetically excavates the landscape of his home in Connemara (see, for example, Robinson, 2006). These are not romanticised portrayals of place, but they are emotional, and that recognition of the emotion of place is of particular importance. The third relates to the ways in which the protestors actively drew parallels and created alliances with others, often using connections to place as a point of common reference. From members of the Rosspoint Solidarity Camp to Ogoni activists, Shell to Sea sought connections that would help them make sense of the situation and give them insights into successful struggle. So, they welcomed the ‘eco warriors’ at the camp, despite being told ‘they’ll rob every one of your houses’ (Willie Corduff, in McCaughan, 2008: 78). They developed relationships with activists in Nigeria, helped in many instances by Irish missionary nuns and priests who had worked in that country. Kevin O’Hara, an Irish priest who set up the Centre for Social and Corporate Responsibility in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, said of his visit to Erris that ‘I was very saddened to see all the mistakes, a repeat of what I saw in Nigeria and it was happening in County Mayo, Ireland’ (in McCaughan, 2008: 107). Describing themselves as ‘an international non-violent campaign’, Shell to Sea cite Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Michael Davitt as inspirations for their actions, and link their actions to national and international protest groups, while remaining locally based (Shell to Sea 2008), displaying a form of open localism (Castree, 2004) or the ‘convergence spaces’ of global justice movements that are

place-based though not place-bound (Cumbers et al, 2008: 192). In these various ways, the protestors work to unveil the rhetoric of modernity. In the process, they create the conditions for the kind of border thinking suggested by Mignolo – a way of recognising the distinct ‘spaces of experience’ of places around the world, marked by their distinct experiences of modernity and coloniality, and linked by their desire to build a different world.

PUTTING ROSSPORT TO WORK IN POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

In their recent editorial, the editors of *Political Geography* wrote of the need to ‘kick political geography further toward a ‘global perspective’ (O’Loughlin et al, 2008: 2). My concern is with their idea of a global perspective. While I appreciate its underlying sentiment, following Mignolo and Khatibi I wish to suggest that the global perspective may not be the most appropriate aspiration. Instead, I propose that political geography aims for ‘an other perspective’ (Mignolo, 2000), and I argue that the story of RosSPORT offers one such perspective.

I want to start with the epistemologies of RosSPORT within the context of political geography. How might we place RosSPORT? Is it a resource conflict? Is it an environmental movement? Is it an uplifting account of transnational advocacy? In many ways, RosSPORT could be used to illustrate all of these approaches. As a resource conflict, it provides an interesting illustration of critical resource geographies that centres such an analysis in the European Union, albeit at the western periphery of the EU (Hayter et al, 2003). It has been analysed as an environmental movement by a variety of sociologists, interested in understanding RosSPORT as yet another iteration of protests fuelled primarily by environmental concerns (Leonard, 2006). Within the discipline of geography, it was used for building networks of transnational advocacy

when a number of IBG speciality groups signed a letter of protest against Shell's involvement in the development. In this way, Rossport became yet another site of protest against Shell sponsorship of the RGS. In all of these instances, Rossport has the potential to be an intriguing case study, particularly if such a case study highlights the layers and levels of connections and complexities – what Gearóid Ó Tuathail has described as 'thick geographical knowledge' (Ó Tuathail, 2003: 654). However, the case study as currently constituted in human geography serves a different purpose. While in a small number of instances, particular cases 'have become the focus of so much research they've become iconic' (Castree, 2005: 541), those cases are most often 'global' cities, home to global geographers. Most often, cases are used to illustrate theory at work, by providing the 'case study from another place' (Simonsen, 2004: 526). In this way, there is an obvious conflict between the complex ways in which human geographers theorize place, and the ways in which they put those places to work. If Rossport is to be a case-study, then it needs to be understood not as an exemplar of a particular theoretical position, but rather as a complicated and entangled place with its own 'spaces of experience' and 'horizons of expectations'. Rather than forcing the Shell to Sea campaign into universalist theoretical frameworks that fail to take account either their body- or geo-politics, this approach highlights the local geographies of theory-production. In this way, Rossport becomes a study of the scalar geographies of politics and political action – this inversion, for political geography, represents a form of border-thinking.

In Rossport, everyday life has been drawn into practical politics (Smith 2005: 37). Yet, the catalyst for activist politics is a potent combination of fear and anger, underpinned by a desire for justice. The stories of the Rossport Five are suffused with fear: fear of a loss of livelihood, and fear of a destruction of a community and a way

of life, particularly through some kind of potential environmental catastrophe. They also narrate the ways in which fear becomes transformed into anger, and how anger itself is transformed into action. This anger is palpable. Caitlín Ó Seighin comments on the ‘contemptuous manner’ that the judge used (in Garavan et al, 2006: 84), while Philip McGrath spoke of how locals, following the compulsory acquisition orders, ‘probably had more temper against them then. A bit of anger was getting up then’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 105). Brendan Philbin, meanwhile, said of Shell that: ‘they have instilled an anger in families that won’t be forgotten for long a many day’ (Goldman Environmental Prize, 2007b) – that sense of anger was intensified following the imprisonment of the Rosspport Five. Geographers are again beginning to flirt with emotion – with fear and angst, with awe and love, with worry and loss (Davidson et al, 2005: 2-3). Many of these emotions, particularly love and fear, are present in the narrations of place that form the basis of the Rosspport struggle, and make sense within a longer geographic tradition that attempts to understand the relationship between people and the places they inhabit. Yet, in the nascent recognition of the place of emotions within geography, anger still struggles for recognition. Anger ‘is still, more often than not, evaluated negatively in Western thought’ (West-Newman, 2004: 191). This is clear within geography, and within political geography, where anger is suspiciously missing from the narratives and the analyses that make it into print¹¹. While Keith’s call for angry writing is often cited (Keith, 1992), a broader engagement with the geographies and politics of anger is still absent. Yet, anger is central to the protests at Rosspport; and requires ethical and epistemological attention. In another context, West-Newman comments that anger ‘enunciates and justifies demands for justice and restitution; it confronts threats to survival and well-being’ (West-Newman, 2004: 204). ‘An other’ thinking, within political geography,

recognises the validity and importance of anger, and sees anger as a collective experience and expression, rather than as an individual failure. It also sees anger as crucial to social transformation, rather than only about individual self-awareness. Taking the anger of Rossport seriously requires political geographers to engage, more directly, with emotional geographies, particularly those related to conflicts and disagreements over place and over resources.

Anger has been identified as important to ‘dialogues of indigenous rights’ (West-Newman, 2004: 190), and this also suggests another direction that Rossport offers for political geography. In other work, Lawrence Berg and I have argued that geography needs to engage with anti-colonial as well as post-colonial thought (Gilmartin and Berg, 2007), while others have argued for the need for a dialogue about ‘indigenous geographies’ (Shaw et al, 2006, Johnson et al, 2007). Anti-colonial and indigenous geographies come together in Rossport, where Micheál Ó Seighin weaves together Balor and Lugh Airgeadlámh with an analysis of the pipeline protest that says ‘our establishment may be post-colonial but we are not’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 62). Yet, the concept of indigeneity may well be stretched by Rossport. For example, Shaw et al describe indigenous peoples as:

groups with ancestral and often spiritual ties to particular land, and whose ancestors held that land prior to colonization by outside powers, and whose nations remain submerged within the states created by those powers (Shaw et al, 2006: 268).

While it is clear that many people in Erris have a strong tie to the land and the place, it is more difficult to prove an ancestral link, and almost impossible to assert the people of Erris as a submerged nation within the Irish state. In other words, many people in Erris and many of the protestors against the pipeline understand themselves as Irish,

rather than as Irish-, and their understanding of what it means to be Irish was central to their protest. As Vincent McGrath said, ‘going to jail was an act of faith in the Irish people and I was proven right because once the people had the facts about what was going on they supported us’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 177). If indigeneity is further understood as racialised, then this creates additional difficulties in Erris, where the population is racially homogenous: in the Mayo Gaeltacht, for example, 98.8% of respondents identified as White in the 2006 Census (CSO, 2006). More broadly, Erris is located within the European Union, governed by EU legislation, in one of the world’s wealthiest countries. Yet, the search for collective rights and sovereignty, and the insistence on the importance and meaning of place highlights the ways in which the struggles of Rossport may well resonate with the struggles of many indigenous groups. The events in and around Erris demonstrate a common experience – the ways in which people who ‘have other ideas of how economy and society should be organized ... become subject to all kinds of direct and indirect violence’ (Mignolo, 2007: 450). For the Rossport Five, the land they fought for could not have a monetary value – its value was measured in memories and attachments, and fear and anger was the motivation for its preservation. ‘[I]t wasn’t about money... we weren’t used to money. We managed without money’, Willie Corduff insisted (in Garavan et al, 2006: 44). ‘I might as well die here with Shell as to go. Because I would die anyway if I had to leave with the memories I have of here’ (in Garavan et al, 2006: 18). Border thinking – an other thinking – seeks these links between places that are fundamentally, albeit differently, marked and scarred by their experiences of coloniality through modernity. Rossport, as a location for anti-colonial activity, as a site of common ground with Indigenous geographers, as an entangled case-study, and

as a place of emotions, creates the possibility for new 'horizons of expectation' within political geography (see Fig. 3).

Insert Fig. 3 around here

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CAPTIONS FOR FIGURES

Figure 1: The Rossport Five on their release from prison, from left Philip McGrath, Brendan Philbin, Vincent McGrath, Micheál Ó Seighin and Willie Corduff. Image courtesy of the Goldman Environmental Prize.

Figure 2: Rossport, the Erris peninsula and the proposed new route of the pipeline.

Figure 3: The pipeline route as originally proposed. Image courtesy of the Goldman Environmental Prize.

LINKS TO WEBSITES

Shell Ireland: <http://www.shell.com/home/content/ie-en>

Shell to Sea: <http://www.corribsos.com/>

Indymedia Ireland: <http://www.indymedia.ie/>

Goldman Environmental Prize: <http://www.goldmanprize.org/>

Global Community Monitor:
<http://www.gcmonitor.org/article.php?list=type&type=61>

Centre for Public Inquiry: <http://www.publicinquiry.ie/>

Those Who Dance: <http://www.youtube.com/>

ENDNOTES

¹ Though rarely explicitly framed as political geography, there is a growing body of work on the relationship between postcolonial theory and development (see, for example, Power et al, 2006; Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Raghuram et al, 2009)

² At the end of 2007, the Department also had over 20 exploration licenses in place, to companies that included Statoil, Providence Resources, Island Oil and Gas, Enterprise Oil and Marathon (DCENR, 2008).

³ The current Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan of the Green Party, has changed these terms for licenses issued from 1 January 2007. Changes include a profit resource rent tax of up to an additional 15%.

⁴ The Irish Prime Minister, at the time Bertie Ahern of Fianna Fáil.

⁵ McDowell alleged that Connolly had traveled to Colombia using a false Irish passport, in the company of his brother Niall. Niall Connolly is one of the ‘Colombia Three’, found guilty of training FARC members in bomb-making by a Colombian appeal court.

⁶ Two of the most publicly critical TDs, Mayo-based Jerry Cowley (Independent) and Dublin-based Joe Higgins (Socialist Party), lost their parliamentary seats in the 2007 General Election.

⁷ See, for example, the interactive CD produced by Comhar Dún Chaocháin Teoranta in 2000, with images, songs, stories and placenames of the local area.

⁸ In Irish mythology, Balor (of the Evil Eye) was a king of the Fomorians, a race of giants. He had just one eye, and could kill people by looking at them. Lugh Airgeadlámh, a hero of the Tuatha de Danann, was Balor’s grandson, and was responsible for killing him.

⁹ This provides an interesting counterpoint to the ways in which capital employs knowledge geographically (see Bridge and Wood, 2005 for a discussion of geographies of knowledge in the oil industry).

¹⁰ Rinn na Rón translates as ‘the place of the seals’.

¹¹ There is a body of work on hate within political geography (see Flint, 2004), but not on anger.