

DAVID M. SMITH

David Marshall Smith

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by

TOM SLATER

ROGER LEE

The human geographer David M. Smith worked around the world from the UK to the USA, South Africa, Israel/Palestine, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The leitmotif guiding his work throughout was August Lösch's dictum: 'The real duty of the economist is not to explain our sorry reality, but to improve it.' From industrial archaeology via industrial location theory, to social inequalities, the formulation of welfare geography and the rigorous geographical extension of moral and ethical concepts, his underlying concern was always with marginalised people – including those in the academy – rather than any professional recognition.



Dear Mr. Sitt

Just two kilometres to the east of the main campus of the University of Nottingham lies the King's Meadow campus. Here, in a former TV studio which houses the university's Manuscripts and Special Collections, may be found the PhD thesis of David Marshall Smith. Entitled *The East Midland Industrial Area: A Regional Study of Industrial Location*, it was submitted in May 1961 within three years of the completion of his undergraduate degree. The title looks back to his earlier undergraduate studies within the Department of Geography, and simultaneously looks forward to one of his major academic interests: the spatial relations which shape industrial location.

This interest had been sparked by the inspirational undergraduate teaching of Eric M. Rawstron, whose influence was always fulsomely recognised by David. It contrasted with the exceptionalist tradition of regional geography which shaped the approach to geography within the Department, where the focus was with areal differentiation. Rawstron's approach – well before its later widespread adoption within geography – not only incorporated spatial economics but was interested primarily in the forces shaping the geographical patterning and spatial relations of industry: areal *integration* rather than differentiation. And yet, very wisely, David also understood the significance of regional geography in understanding the great significance of geographical space on human life – a theme which he pursued with profound political purpose in later stages of his academic trajectory. It was therefore highly prescient of Eric Rawstron to observe that David Smith: 'would have done well in economics but I think he was wise not to change'. Wise indeed.

Perhaps the most revealing document of all in the archive of David's postgraduate work is the meticulous collection of 200 photographs that he put together and presented to the University Library within a year of the submission of the thesis. He mounted them all in an immaculately organised and rigorously annotated booklet. His purpose was 'to illustrate the effect of the growth of industry on the landscape of part of the East Midlands ... and to provide a record of some of the more interesting features of the industrial landscape as it exists at the middle of the twentieth century'. All but one of the photographs are 5.0 by 3.5 inches, all are film-based (of course), and all are of superb quality: sharply focused, beautifully composed, and coping well with extremes of light and shade in order to show detailed content.

The photographs also illustrate amazing industry of another kind: that displayed by David in completing an immensely detailed thesis involving extensive fieldwork as well as a very wide range of documentary sources, and the application of a novel theoretical framework with which to organise his analysis. His thesis worked against the kind of geographical education of his undergraduate years, but it also showed a respect for the inherent value of the regional tradition, not least in recognising the tensions between similarity and difference across geographical space with which he became so concerned in later years. His thesis and photographic archive reveal a commitment to what he was studying and to the value of the way in which he studied it.

Despite his immense body of work – 21 books, 18 monographs, and 104 papers – David thought of himself as being on the ‘fringe’ of geography (Smith 2004a). He neither sought nor occupied any professional position of significance in the national or international institutions of geography, nor did he get involved in editing any of the journals in which he wrote so copiously. In that sense – but in that sense only – he was marginal to geography. But at the same time, he was a central figure in contributing to its development, and he used his understanding, reputation and influence to highlight inequality and social injustice and the increasing corporatisation of social life – including that of universities. He was sometimes very critical of geography, but his critique was concerned less with some innate inadequacies of the subject than with apparent trends of self-reflection and navel-gazing. Against those trends, he felt strongly that geography provided the tools to make life better for those marginalised by economic, social and political circumstance. Indeed, it could be argued that geography – unlike economics, for example – gave him the freedom to exercise his intellectual imagination and political commitment in ways that he felt were appropriate.

And how appropriate they were. The remarkable space from which David thought and wrote incorporated into geography numerous perspectives from economics and location theory, archaeology and architectural history, political science and sociology, and social justice and moral philosophy. His views were informed by years of intensive fieldwork in the East Midlands, the cities of the American South, apartheid South Africa, the Soviet Union and socialist Eastern Europe, and Israel/Palestine. Perhaps most important of all, David’s ‘fringe’ was a space of collaboration and mutually beneficial exchanges with scholars and practitioners in parts of the world with fewer resources (Owens 2023): a deep intellectual commitment to an ethics of ‘professional responsibility to distant others’, as he once put it (Smith 1994a).

The value of geography for David was *what it could do*, not what it might or might not be. More specifically: what could geography do in terms of advancing our understanding of the world and, moreover, how can it be used to address conditions of social injustice? This stance guided his work as he moved from geography department to geography department around the world, before finally settling at Queen Mary, University of London where he remained for over 30 years until his retirement – and beyond. This stance was expressed in, for example, his profound reformulation of industrial location theory; in the recognition that the material inequalities of people’s lives were hardly addressed or even recognised in the conventional economic geography of the 1960s; and in the need to explore the nature of geographical space in shaping geographies of social injustice and moralities.

Although David was a major international scholar, he was never interested in the status of professional recognition in whatever form that may take, but was always continuously engaged in the inclusion of marginalised people and colleagues into positions

of influence and agency. It was entirely in this spirit – working for others – that he was a very successful Head of Department and Dean of Faculty. More widely, not for him the closed environment of an academic conference; he was far more comfortable learning from people he visited and met in the parts of the world that fascinated and troubled him the most. Quietly and determinedly, sometimes without wider recognition, certainly without any expectation of praise, he drew on those learning experiences to carve his own intellectual path against the forces of inequality and injustice, and to enable others to participate more fully in their own intellectual development. In the process, he shaped theoretical and empirical discourse on numerous topics, and changed many lives through his brilliant teaching, gentle encouragement, quiet integrity, and immense warmth.

‘A poor prospect for industry’

David Marshall Smith was born in Solihull, Birmingham, on the 16 July 1936, the elder of the two children of James Marshall Smith and Elizabeth Smith. A sickly child with recurrent bronchitis, long periods of missed schooling led to a love of reading (especially William Wordsworth) and an unquenchable curiosity about the world. Sixth form geography at Solihull School was enlivened by ‘cycling through the Warwickshire countryside on autumn afternoons to survey a muddy field with the dubious accuracy of novices with chain and pole’ (Smith 1984: 118). A childhood about as far away from the sea as one can be in the UK sparked a yearning for coastlines, and he won a scholarship to the University of Nottingham in 1955 as a budding coastal geomorphologist. Perhaps his grandfather – the first of his family to go to university in the seaside town of Aberystwyth – sparked this interest in coasts.

Geography at Nottingham was initially a huge disappointment for David, ‘a dull succession of regional courses in what seemed little more than a continuation of school work’ (1984: 119). Even the coastal geomorphology failed to thrill. Salvation was found from an unlikely place: his subsidiary subject of economics, where cost, revenue and indifference curves lacked the aesthetic attraction of geomorphological features, but nonetheless provided some intellectual order, to the point where ‘the strength and shackles of conventional economic theory became an important part of my mental equipment’ (p. 120). His growing intellectual curiosity in the human world was nurtured further by a final year option in economic geography taught by Eric Rawstron, which was in effect an introduction to industrial location theory. Each student was randomly assigned a classic text on which to deliver a seminar, and David got *Economics of Location* by the persecuted German scholar August Lösch (1940). This assignment was a career-shaping stroke of good fortune.

Lösch was a member of *Bekennende Kirche* (*The Confessing Church*), a Protestant organisation that spoke out against the rise of fascism in Europe. Much of *Economics of Location* was written in hiding, for the famously stubborn Lösch refused to emigrate, convinced that independent and critical thinking on regional economic, political, and spatial issues was crucial in the fight against Nazi ideology. David was deeply impressed by the elegance of Lösch's prose, the rigour of his analysis and by the order and regularity of his economic models (which Lösch defended by arguing that if they do not conform to reality, then it is reality that is wrong and needs to be changed). For the first time, David saw that economics and geography could occupy common analytical ground, and it was Lösch's explicit normative stance – an outcome of his prolonged persecution – that proved most captivating of all. Lösch asserted in his Preface that 'The real duty of the economist is not to explain our sorry reality, but to improve it.' To an impressionable student hitherto asked to describe and explain everything, Lösch's mandate was an exciting shift in a different direction: something of a *post hoc* invitation to look around and consider how the regional geography that David found so sterile could become more in tune with the times. That a severely malnourished Lösch died alone, in hiding, in 1945, can only have provided David with further motivation to fulfil that real duty. In later years David frequently drew attention to the striking similarity between Lösch's notion of 'real duty' and Karl Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: 'Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it.'

Eric Rawstron's teachings planted an early seed for what would become one of several areas on which David became a scholar of international repute: the geography of industrial location. Rawstron (1958) had articulated a 'spatial margin to profitability', defining the area within which industrial plant viability was possible by virtue of total revenue exceeding total cost of production. As an undergraduate, David toyed with this concept for some time. He realised that if distance is substituted for quantity on the horizontal axis of graphs charting the relationships between profit on the vertical axis and other geographical variables on the horizontal, a simple geographically-founded model may be created. Cost and revenue appear as *spatial* variables, their intersections defining the spatial margin in just the same way as the 'break even' points define constraints on scale in previous models. David's ensuing insistence that location theory and production theory are interdependent was an insight that proved foundational to a whole field of inquiry. Very few scholars in any field can claim such an achievement emerging from their undergraduate studies.

Upon graduation from Nottingham in the summer of 1958, David consulted a university careers advisor who, with farcical irony, declared the budding industrial location theorist in front of him to be 'a poor prospect for industry'. So David embarked on postgraduate research at the same institution, initially intending to apply location theory to the industrial development of the East Midlands, but he was soon engrossed in the

region's economic history, and especially in the landscape of the Industrial Revolution. By this time he had fallen for Margaret Harrup, a sociology and social work student at Nottingham. They enjoyed numerous lengthy excursions together in the Derbyshire Dales in search of the first Arkwright and Strutts cotton mills, apprentice houses and, especially, the framework knitters' cottages with their distinctive elongated windows. These excursions were a meeting of minds and hearts that not only resulted in their marriage in 1961, but also in David's PhD thesis completed the same year.

The subject was the neglected role of the domestic hosiery industry in the economic development of the East Midlands. Location theory was thus suspended (pun intended) in favour of industrial archaeology, the subject of David's first book, *Industrial Archaeology of the East Midlands* (Smith 1965). This was innovative in at least two distinctively geographical ways. First it explored the profound spatial interconnections and causal relationships between different industries in their tendency to cluster in distinctive ways. Secondly it recognised the great significance of economics and economic history (rather than physical geography) in shaping the geographical integration of the sub-regions of the East Midlands.

A first lectureship, surprisingly, proved elusive. In need of paid employment, David landed a position as a Planning Assistant in the Research and Industry Section of Staffordshire County Planning Department (1961–63). Two years in that mind-numbingly bureaucratic and hierarchical world proved truly miserable; what kept him sane was continued work with Margaret on industrial archaeology. Living in Stoke-on-Trent allowed them to spend every weekend exploring the industrial relics of the Potteries, Cheshire and Shropshire, which David systematically photographed to add to the extensive archive of his East Midlands research. In 1963, following dozens of applications, he finally obtained a Lectureship at the University of Manchester (1963), where he returned to location theory, supplemented by an interest in regional industrial development, on which he wrote his second book on the North West of England (Smith 1969).

David did not regard himself as much of a mathematician, especially at the time when human geography underwent its quantitative revolution in the mid-1960s. At Manchester he had to teach himself quantitative skills, assisted by his first PhD student, Peter Dicken. The university, however, proved a difficult base for data analysis due to a lack of computer access: there was incredulity on the part of guardians of the giant Atlas machine that geographers might have a use for it. In order to find computing support and immerse himself fully in the excitement of the quantitative revolution and its corresponding theoretical geography, David felt he had to get at least some experience in the USA.

In the summer of 1966, Southern Illinois University (SIU) at Carbondale offered him a one-year post. David and Margaret made plans, rented the house out, and packed up. Then, at the eleventh hour, Manchester refused the leave of absence that had been promised. Agonisingly for a young couple with an infant (Michael, born 1965), they made the

decision to go to the US anyway, and David resigned the permanent lectureship that had taken him so long to gain. That decision turned out to be one for which David remained grateful for the rest of his life, as it was the beginning of what would prove to be a remarkable intellectual journey, with his family (completed by Tracey, 'Tes', born 1968) always heavily involved in his academic endeavours and travels.

Towards a welfare approach

It didn't take long for SIU to offer David a tenured appointment in geography and Margaret an instructorship in sociology, so America became home. SIU provided a thriving intellectual environment and the necessary support – computer access and research assistance – for David to write what became the canonical geographical text on industrial location (Smith 1971a), which was later expanded and updated in a second edition (Smith 1981).

However, in the late 1960s, there was simply no way that David could ignore the fact there were more serious geographical issues to consider in the United States than the best location for an industrial plant. The very foundations upon which existing statistical geographies and models were built were being challenged in the immediate wake of the Civil Rights struggle and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The poorest, most racially segregated parts of numerous American cities were literally on fire as African-Americans, pulverised by state oppression and police brutality, torched public institutions in their own neighbourhoods. Student uprisings, countercultural movements and protests against the Vietnam War completed the turmoil.

Margaret's influence upon David's development as a scholar at this time was crucial. At SIU she taught a very popular course on social problems. Her work provided David with his first encounter with the literature on poverty, inequality, hunger, and discrimination. Disturbed yet energised by their observations of a profoundly unequal society during repeated family visits to parts of the urban Mid-West well off the tourist trail, again it was August Lösch's real duty that beckoned. In such an explosive wider societal context, SIU's geography department sadly 'degenerated into an arena of faction-fighting' (Smith 1988: 141), so it was time for the Smiths to relocate once more. In 1970, an opportunity emerged when David was offered a joint appointment in Geography and Urban Studies at the University of Florida, Gainesville. Margaret turned down a post in sociology there to become heavily involved in numerous voluntary organisations, particularly Gainesville Women for Equal Rights, a multi-racial pressure group which fought successfully for the unionisation of Black domestic labourers. She is remembered with enormous affection in that city. Margaret and David were always active in support of local Black communities, fighting for greater equality of race, class and gender, joining

sit-ins at City Hall, and even creating a group to transport local African-American children to schools. Together, they wrote a beautiful book on life in the United States for a popular audience (Smith & Smith 1973). It is a searingly honest portrait of a country that they came to love, but one reeling under a warped set of institutional arrangements that fashioned some disturbing social conditions, all of which troubled them both immensely.

It was those conditions that David set out to understand as he threw himself into the nascent 'social indicators movement' in the early 1970s. He began mapping the incidence of a wide range of social conditions such as housing, health care, educational attainment and crime, all of which were hitherto of little interest to human geographers focused obsessively on indicators of economic growth as proxies for human well-being. Always attuned to spatial differentiation, David argued strongly for the disaggregation of national-scale data in order to identify important contextual factors behind certain social problems that, if remaining hidden, would lead to flawed public policies and misallocation of federal resources.

As a consequence, he coined the phrase 'territorial social indicators', and wrote up his findings in another book, this time on the geography of social well-being in the United States (Smith 1973). The project was aided by a period spent as a planning consultant to the City of Tampa municipality, working with its data sets to identify 'target areas' in that city that would qualify for extra funding under a new federal scheme aimed at improving life chances and living standards. Although useful work in many respects, it proved challenging practically and politically, due to the deleterious influence of lobbying groups, business interests and powerful personalities. Indeed, he was told by a colleague that the main role of municipal government employees was to 'keep the Mayor's ass clean' (Smith 1988: 143).

At the 1971 meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Boston, David participated in the now famous set of paper sessions organised by Dick Peet on poverty and well-being, at the time when the now esteemed journal of radical geography, *Antipode*, was in its infancy. David identified and wrote about the emergence of a radical geography at that time (Smith 1971b). Historians of the discipline have traced the birth of Marxist and even critical geography to those conference sessions, not least because it was where David Harvey's blistering assault on the neoclassical urban land use models of the Chicago School had its first public airing (Harvey's paper on social justice and spatial systems became a crucial chapter in his 1973 *Social Justice and the City*, one of the most influential books ever published in geography). These were very exciting times for human geography, as it moved away from positivist spatial science towards what Harvey called 'a genuinely humanizing urbanism' (p. 314). Gainesville proved increasingly uncomfortable for David Smith's growing radicalism. By 1972, it was time to move on.

When applications for professorial positions back in the UK proved unsuccessful, David's emerging interest in race as a source of oppression and the corresponding geographies of racial segregation (which developed in Florida) led him to South Africa and the extreme case of apartheid. He secured a four-month position at what was then called the University of Natal, Durban, and then moved to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, to complete the year – again with his family in tow.

Many extended stays in South Africa were to follow throughout his professional life. These visits not only reflect a lifelong love for the country, but generated an exceptional set of contributions to South African geography. What is more, whilst in South Africa, David spent a huge amount of time reading welfare economics: 'a strange form of escapism' (Smith 1988: 145) from the madness and viciousness of the apartheid system that he was there to study. A manuscript began to take shape at Wits, derived from the need for a conceptual foundation for his empirical work on territorial social indicators, and for a sturdier analytical framework through which to scrutinise spatial inequalities in social well-being. What became known as *welfare geography* was born via David's pen. In its earliest formulations, David's notion of welfare geography was simply a spatial extension of the formal framework of neoclassical welfare economics (reflecting David's undergraduate training), but – crucially – it was revitalised and animated by social concern.

After that first year in South Africa, David took a six-month position at the University of New England in Australia and then, in the autumn of 1973, he moved to the post where he stayed for the remainder of his career: a Chair in Geography at Queen Mary College, London (now Queen Mary, University of London). It took a few more years for the manuscript on welfare geography to be completed, not least because David also wrote a very well received textbook on numerical methods in geography (Smith 1975). It is a signal of David's astonishing range and capabilities as a scholar that someone who deemed himself almost innumerate could produce such a clear instructional text. However, he saw this differently, as more of an indictment of geography's 'quantitative revolution' with which he ended up having little patience: 'Who else but geographers would dignify their puerile pursuit of statistics, models and paradigms as a 'revolution', as though it really mattered to anyone but themselves?' (Smith 1988: 132).

The all-consuming project, however, was the welfare book. *Human Geography: A Welfare Approach* was published by Edward Arnold in 1977, and is without question one of the most important geographical texts of the 20th century. Lauded by numerous reviewers as an exemplary blend of theoretical and empirical inquiry, it quickly becoming one of the staple ingredients of an undergraduate education in geography. The book set out to redirect human geography from its traditional preoccupation with areal differentiation to a concern for spatial inequality: 'The position to be developed here is that welfare issues pervade the whole of human geography and that the welfare theme thus defines a new geography' (p. 6).

Anchoring every chapter was David's simple reworking of Harold Lasswell's dictum that politics is the study of 'who gets what, when and how', into human geography as the study of 'who gets what, *where* and how'. David would always begin his undergraduate courses with that phrase, delivered with an urgency that proved inspirational to generations of students. His objective with the welfare approach was to make human geography as relevant to society as possible, focusing on quality-of-life issues and contributing a normative framework – Lösch's real duty always lurking – within which policy decisions involving spatial outcomes might be made on the basis of reasoned analysis. This was a deliberate response to what David saw as the self-congratulatory, nepotistic rhetoric of those engaged in Geography's quantitative revolution, which he felt lacked a necessary concern for actual people living and working in particular geographies.

One of the more striking features of *Human Geography: A Welfare Approach* was how it carved, painstakingly and constructively, a path between neoclassical economics, liberal humanism and Marxist political economy, at a time when there was a tense battle between all three perspectives for theoretical and epistemological primacy in geography. David often acknowledged that conversations with his colleague Roger Lee, who was critically interrogating neoclassical economics, and with Doreen Massey, who was pulling apart industrial location theory to articulate its total neglect of class and class struggle, were indispensable in this regard. Paul Knox summarised the outcome well, reflecting on the impact of the book in 1995 for the journal *Progress in Human Geography's* 'Classics in Human Geography Revisited' series:

By exploring the literature on social values, social justice and equity, Smith showed just how narrow human geography had been. The way he marshalled material from welfare economics, political science and political economy helped to nudge human geography away from its adherence to traditional regional and cultural themes and simultaneously helped to release it from its systematic separation of the economic, social and political dimensions of real-world human geographies. (Knox 1995: 391–2)

The welfare geography that David advocated and led was, therefore, much more than an exercise in neoclassical spatial economics with a conscience, but rather a serious consideration and empirical testing of a wide range of theoretical perspectives on inequality across multiple geographical contexts. It was powered by his steadfast commitment to informing policies aimed at reducing the unacceptably wide inequalities in all those contexts, and thus a first and highly significant step towards the pursuit of the central normative issue of social justice that is arguably his greatest intellectual legacy.

Applied geographies and ‘contextual thickening’

In 1990, with Nelson Mandela released from prison and the apartheid system starting to unravel, David was invited to give a plenary lecture at the University of Cape Town, with a direct brief: to consider what the emerging ‘post-apartheid city’ might look like (summarised in Smith 2002). He clarified that apartheid wasn’t just some historical aberration, but rather the brutal culmination of centuries of imperial arrogance visited upon South Africa. He presented territorial social indicators of the grotesque degree of inequality between all racial categories in the country, disaggregated to the urban and neighbourhood scale. Then, to a murmur of surprise from his large audience, he told them to look around, as ‘the post-apartheid city is already here’ (Smith 1992a: 315). He concluded by pointing out that it will take a monumental effort over a long period of time for inequalities to reduce, and geographers have a vital role to play in that effort. This was vintage David: an ability to step back, reflect, analyse, explain, and ultimately remind colleagues of their real duty.

South Africa captivated David, and not just because of its intoxicating mix of awesome natural beauty and glorious cultural riches. As he wrote in numerous publications, it was a land undergoing terrible human tragedy in the form of a sickening state exercise in applied geography: apartheid. During all his extended stays in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, which involved close collaboration and dialogue with South African geographers working under a repressive regime that trampled over and censored critical inquiry, he began to understand how apartheid’s social engineers had *spatial manipulation* at the heart of their grand design. Apartheid was something intensely and disturbingly geographical which David could get his teeth into with all the skills he had: a thorough grasp of historical and archival methods, a grounding in political economy, and rigorous spatial analysis. As a consequence, he wrote prodigiously about the apartheid system that troubled him and his family so deeply, and he used his reputation and elegant writing to make important contributions to the intellectual struggle against that system.

The architect of apartheid, Hendrik F. Verwoerd, and his successors, saw racial separation as the answer to the conflicting material interests and cultures arising from a very diverse population, and as the means for preserving white privilege and, ultimately, arresting the steady decline of the percentage of the white population of South Africa. Apartheid means ‘separation’ in Afrikaans, and arguably David’s most important contribution to South African geography was to elucidate three specific geographies of racial separation - national, personal, and residential – and provide compelling case studies of all three in action.

The legislation for the *national* geography, the ‘Homelands’ policy targeted at black Africans, predated the apartheid era. The Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 allocated 13 per cent of the total surface area of South Africa for roughly 75 per cent of the total

population of the country. Apartheid closed the door, via the complete expulsion of black Africans from the Republic, into self-governing independent states, 'Homelands' (or 'Bantustans', as they were officially called). These areas subsequently functioned as peripheral dependencies, from which millions of people were drawn into cities as migrant workers in order to exploit their cheap labour, whilst ensuring their voting and ultimately human rights remained externalised, tied to their respective Homelands. Apartheid rulers justified such massive disenfranchisement by dismissing the importance of geography in people's lives: 'If I were to wake up one morning and find myself to be a Black man, the only major difference would be geographical,' bleated Prime Minister John Vorster in 1973: a quote that David used often to show that, if people trivialise geography, it is usually from a position of power and privilege.

The *personal* level of apartheid, 'petty apartheid' as it became known, was enforced by the *Reservation of Separate Amenities Act* of 1953, which meant that trains and buses, public beaches, swimming pools and libraries were racially segregated, with the best facilities reserved (of course) for whites. Cinemas, restaurants and hotels in white areas were out of bounds to non-whites. Ambulances, bridges, parking spaces, benches, graveyards, maternity wards, parks, pedestrian crossings, public toilets, and taxis were also racially segregated. David and his family made repeated visits to Durban during the 1970s and 1980s, a city they grew to love, and he wrote with poignant eloquence about the absurdity of the interpersonal separation occurring there. The moral outrage undergirding his writing at that time stems from the fact that David and Margaret befriended Black street traders and domestic workers, and listened carefully to their stories of indignity and injustice.

The *residential* level of racial separation was arguably the most devastating in terms of what it did to communities. This was the *Group Areas Act* (1950), which segregated South African urban space according to racial classification. It was facilitated by another piece of legislation that same year, the *Population Registration Act*, which organised all South Africans into four rigid racial categories: Whites, Asians, Coloureds (people of mixed race), and Black Africans, in that strict hierarchy. Cities were carved up into Group Areas: residential neighbourhoods for the sole occupation of one specific racial category. If an individual was classified as Coloured, Asian, or Black African, and lived in an area that became designated as a 'White Group Area', they became a 'disqualified' person and were forced to leave, as they had become an illegal occupant of their home. Those homes, and often entire neighbourhoods, were then either redeveloped or razed to the ground in order to prepare the Group Area for White occupation. This happened on a huge scale across South Africa; like several scholars whom he mentored (for example, Brij Maharaj, who wrote many important papers about these processes occurring in Durban, and John Western, who wrote the seminal *Outcast Cape Town*, a qualitative study of the Group Areas Act removals), David documented, explained and challenged the enormous and inhumane dislocations of people of colour in multiple cities.

The three scales of racial separation, for David, amounted to a hideous manipulation and application of geography to serve the interests of capitalist accumulation under white supremacy, and he wrote at length to explain it in such terms (e.g. Smith 1987; 1989). He appeared fearless in his work and travels, even when he received multiple death threats as a result of his observations and arguments clashing with those infected by ideological indoctrination. In September 1989 he appeared in a photograph on the front page of *The Star*, a major national newspaper in South Africa, in the middle of a riot around equal access for students to a university site. He was once pelted with eggs by Afrikaner students when he participated in a demonstration at Wits against yet another government clampdown on academic freedom. His solidarity with the fight for freedom did not go unnoticed: he was the first white geographer to be recognised formally by the African National Congress. Although it is an uncomfortable fact that an influential volume he edited, *Living Under Apartheid* (1982), featured only white contributors, David took this repeated criticism very seriously, and made amends in an important 1992 text, *The Apartheid City and Beyond*, which featured a multiracial cast of authors.

When apartheid ended and the wondrous moment of the first democratic elections occurred in April 1994, David wasn't finished. He returned to the country on a few lengthy occasions, even after his official retirement, to take on the challenge of assessing who gets what, where, and how in Desmond Tutu's 'Rainbow Nation'. The optimism of that phrase seemed understandable yet also something of a fantasy to David, who always took the trouble to 'look around', just like he instructed his Cape Town audience. He wrote several incisive commentaries explaining the stubbornness of inequality in a democratic South Africa (Smith 1999; Smith 2004b; Smith 2005), all of which emphatically stand the test of time when read today, and have arguably become even more relevant as the country has further descended into even wider inequalities: the outcome of a toxic political mess of skulduggery, corruption, and incompetence.

His contribution to South African geography was simply outstanding, and he is remembered fondly by colleagues in several institutions there, as someone who went against the grain of extractive research activities to forge deep and meaningful connections with scholars who shared his conviction that South Africa should not always lead the world in Gini coefficients (his preferred measure of inequality).

During the apartheid era, any opponents of the government – individuals and/or organisations – were silenced or 'banned' under the Suppression of Communism Act (1953), never mind whether communist or socialist discourse was part of their resistance. Observing the horrors of such state oppression and its capitalist motivations might have led David to embrace fully the Marxist geography that gathered steam in the 1970s. But whilst deeply sympathetic to Marxism's analytical contributions, he was troubled by its lack of evidential basis, and by the fact that few of those involved in Marxist geography had ever spent any time at all in socialist contexts. He knew there had to be

something better than capitalism, but ‘an unspecified form of socialism as a panacea without reference to actual experience’ (Smith 1988: 149) was, for David, deeply unsatisfactory.

To rectify this empirical deficit, he spent time in the Soviet Union, first in 1976 and then in repeated visits, even with his family in tow in 1978, when he announced in a *fait accompli* that they would ‘drive to Russia’ from London that summer and go camping! Off they went. The KGB tracked their trip, but David’s rudimentary grasp of Russian was sufficient to convince its agents that they weren’t spies and were, in fact, on a camping holiday. Many people they met on that trip remained contacts and friends: the Smiths were not a typical vacationing family.

David also made frequent trips to Poland, in order to gain a broader picture of urban inequality under socialism, which became a major research theme in his work. The first airing of his findings, in comparative perspective with capitalist systems, was in a delightfully pithy book published by Penguin for a wide audience: *Where the Grass is Greener: Living in an Unequal World* (Smith 1979). The intention was to show how different economic, social and political systems generate different patterns of inequality, and he tracked the interdependence of political economy, structural inequality and its spatial expression in multiple contexts.

The Eastern European and Soviet research was crucial, for it shattered some of the illusions about socialism as actually practised. In this and numerous subsequent publications, he marshalled data from various sources (obtained, as always, in collaboration with local scholars in all the contexts he visited) into a compelling set of observations of various degrees of inequalities in societies supposedly built on egalitarian ideals. In particular, he argued that the inegalitarian allocation of housing across different occupational groups was the driving force behind patterns of urban residential segregation by class and ethnicity – another warped form of applied geography – and this situation was amplified by inequities in service provision and environmental quality. His arguments were substantiated via evidence from Moscow, Novosibirsk, Alma Ata (Almaty), Leningrad (St Petersburg) and Tbilisi, as well as Warsaw, Cracow and Lodz in Poland.

When the Cold War ended and socialist regimes fell like dominoes, David wasn’t finished: he continued to write about the challenges faced by post-socialist cities (e.g. Smith 1992b; 1994b; 1996), again in the spirit of collaboration with colleagues researching their societies in transition. A particular highlight were three British-Georgian Geographical Seminars he co-organised with Revaz Gachechiladze in the mid 1990s. In 1997, he was given honorary membership of the Georgian Geographical Society, an award he treasured as much as his British Academy Fellowship.

From the mid-1980s, David furthered his commitment to comparative analysis by making several visits to Israel/Palestine, another fascinating yet disturbing illustration of applied geography. Once more, these visits were always done in dialogue and

collaboration with scholars based in the region, in this case with those who were analysing the tensions emerging from two peoples claiming sovereignty over the same territory, with one (Palestinian Arabs) having been involuntarily incorporated into the new state of the other (Israeli Jews). The existence of Israel is itself a potent territorial expression of the nationalism which united a people who had for centuries been scattered across the globe, and whose identity and need for security was heightened by the Holocaust. The Palestinians themselves belong to the broader external grouping of the Arab peoples, who have developed their own form of nationalism to underpin an increasingly strident and violent colonising reality from within.

David analysed the protracted tragedy of competing claims to land, space and place with immense sensitivity and care, and wrote with poignant eloquence about why a geographical perspective is so important in finding a way forward (a strong summary can be found in Smith 2000: 114–135). He demonstrated the impossibility of the coincidence of nation and territory without massive further population movements, and then argued that a political choice has to be made, between full rights for all in a truly multi-national state, including an appropriate place (an intensely geographical solution), and national ‘self-determination’ which will involve some internal exclusion or expulsion. After reading David, such a compelling case for the former emerges that the latter seems frankly absurd.

Closer to home, in the 1980s a final aspect of David’s work on the importance of geographical context was taking shape in the form of his development of the Health Research Group (later Centre) in the Department of Geography at Queen Mary. The university sits in what has long been one of the unhealthiest parts of London or indeed any British city (on all available indicators), and David and colleagues set out to apply the welfare geographical approach to scrutinise local variations in the need for the health care and the service delivery response.

Again, collaboration proved crucial: he set up close working relationships with local health authorities and with medical sociologists within and beyond the university. Recruiting talented PhD students to the Centre, such as Jocelyn Cornwell (1984), triggered an interest in qualitative methods in geography, resulting in an influential edited collection (Eyles & Smith 1988). The collaborative links were maintained and further extended by Sarah Curtis for many years, and today Queen Mary geography still counts health geographies among its principal areas of research specialisation.

The foregoing account hopefully illustrates something truly fundamental to David’s scholarship: a steadfast commitment to what he called ‘contextual thickening’ in geographical research. His discomfort with introspection in his own discipline was never far away from how he chose to operate:

What I firmly believe now is that what passes for theory in geography has consistently been advanced without adequate empirical reference – and those pursuing a Marxist

approach may be even more guilty than the model builders and quantifiers in this respect. Furthermore, I am increasingly of the view that the academic standing which geographers so fervently seek ... is most likely to be earned by convincing place-specific studies. (1988: 151)

It would be erroneous, however, to read these words as those of a stubborn empiricist; rather, they are those of someone who was a passionate advocate of the interaction between, and inseparability of, theoretical construction and empirical discovery.

Justice, ethics and moral geographies

At the beginning of the 1990s, David realised that his frequent excursions and empirical discoveries were such that they ran the risk of supplanting serious immersion in theory, particularly with respect to the central normative issue underlying his life's work: the question of social justice. Therefore, he started engaging the gargantuan literature in moral and political philosophy in order to see how it might inform geographical perspectives, and vice versa. This resulted in what is arguably his finest and certainly his most underrated book, *Geography and Social Justice* (1994c), which accompanied an undergraduate course with the same title that he taught at Queen Mary for many years.

But this was no mere textbook: it was an extraordinarily wide-ranging, breathtaking comparative review of alternative theories of justice, and the importance of thinking geographically when considering all of them (Part 1 of the book), all brought to life (of course) by fascinating case studies (Part 2). He moved from egalitarianism to utilitarianism, from libertarianism to contractarianism, from Marxism and communitarianism to feminism, and all of these then 'touched down' to illuminate the basic problem of distributive justice in the contexts with which he was most familiar: the United States, South Africa, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Israel/Palestine. The more complex writings of, *inter alia*, John Rawls, Joan Tronto, Carol Gilligan, Iris Marion Young, Robert Nozick, Michael Walzer, Will Kymlicka and Ronald Peffer were clarified, dissected, and sometimes even synthesised with uncommon verve and intellectual creativity.

David was at his most compelling in a chapter entitled 'Territory, Community and Home', a powerful treatment of the necessity and importance of place for human existence, and, correspondingly, on the injustice of displacement, or what it means to lose your territory, community, or home. Although displacement is shown to have many causes, it was displacement via the neoclassical economic logic of supply and demand – recall, a logic that as a young man he believed to be unassailable – that led to his closing arguments in the book, that 'social justice should not be left to market forces' (p. 279).

Instead, David argued that, given the chance of birth (that is, the chance of *to whom* you are born and particularly *where* you are born), and given ever-widening inequalities

between people and places, social justice should be a process of *equalisation*. He argued that this should be a process that places constraints on the inheritance of advantages such as wealth, land and political power, and in terms of other spheres like education, health care and the law, a principle of strict equality according to human need should apply, so as to give all people the same capabilities in society. Informed by decades of mixed-methods research in very different places under very different political and economic systems, David argued that *the more equal a society, the better for everyone in that society* (unless there is a morally compelling argument to the contrary).

Crucially, David's was also a *geographical* argument, for social justice as *spatial* equalisation. It was a critique of uneven geographical development that recognised and respected that places are shaped by radically different histories and political structures, but a critique anchored in a universal commitment to the equal realisation of what is minimally required to be, and to feel, human. As all human beings have no choice but to occupy a place in the world, and as place is so central to human existence in so many ways, David argued that not being involuntarily banished from a place is a very solid principle and a building block for social justice anywhere.

He continued to write about social justice through the 1990s, especially in light of the fact that conceptualisations and judgements of what is socially just tend to rely on even broader considerations of the good: the difficult notion of what a 'quality of life' actually means in geographical terms occupied David's attention for some time (Smith 1997; 1998a; 2000b). His thinking then moved towards the interface between geography and ethics (or moral philosophy), where he navigated between defensible universal principles for human well-being and particular, geographically-specific means towards basic needs satisfaction. For David, close attention to ethics illuminated geographical issues, and thinking geographically could help us make ethical judgements about what is right or wrong, just or unjust.

It was with ethics in mind that he also expended energy on a sustained and blistering critique of performance assessment in British universities, particularly the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), now the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Reflecting on his own hugely positive experiences with international collaborative inquiry, he argued that the framework of institutional audit 'breeds parochialism manifest in an exaggerated ethic of care for our own, at the expense of activity in support of more distant others' (Smith 2004a: 294). He worried deeply about the neoliberalisation of higher education and those 'seeking to turn academic life into some gross parody of the competitive world of profit-seeking business'. He asserted that universities are 'significantly different from factories: the creative process of scholarship is demeaned by the notion that it can be captured by a simple model or metric relating to quality of research' (ibid.). Even today, few scholars of his stature ever speak out against these costly, time-consuming, stressful and divisive research assessments, for fear of being punished by

them or their defenders. David saw them as huge threats to research ethics and to collegiality and collaboration, and he never backed down (e.g. Smith 2001).

Informed by further fieldwork and collaborations in multiple contexts, his final solo book, *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference* (2000a), was the outcome of all his reading and research on ethical considerations. It is a deeply personal book, not least because his moral reading of the industrial landscape of the Polish city of Lodz emerged from fieldwork he completed alongside Margaret: a delightful completion of their journey they began over forty years earlier in the similar landscape of the Derbyshire Dales. Perhaps the most telling quote about their partnership came from David's close colleague from Poland, Iwona Sagan, sent to his children upon his passing: 'Your parents were among those who appear in the world so that people do not lose faith in the beauty and nobility of human nature.' *Geographies and Moralities* (2004) was his final book, co-edited with Roger Lee and featuring essays penned in his honour, and dedicated to the memory of Margaret.

Real duties

David was a superb teacher: his lectures were a magical blend of incredible breadth and depth of knowledge, massive integrity, and gripping passion. Not only was there a sense of urgency to what he was articulating, but there was an immense warmth to his delivery. After guiding students through some really difficult theoretical and philosophical material – and why it matters for geographers to understand it – he would sometimes see confused expressions in the room. He would stop and say, 'Ok, you all look lost. I get lost, too. That's part of the process of finding. So perhaps an example will help us.' With often poignant accounts of events and moments he had experienced or witnessed during his fieldwork, he would bring all the theory to life and make everything clearer. His contextual thickening worked just as well in the classroom as it did on paper.

His students were energised by his teachings: they wanted to find out more about the things he cared about, because his pedagogy made them care. In 1997, one exam question for his *Geography and Social Justice* course was, simply, 'How far should we care?' He even answered that brutally difficult and intensely geographical question the following year, and published it in a journal (Smith 1998b). This was likely because he felt another real duty, to his students, and it serves as a lovely illustration of a teacher leading by example: answer the questions you ask your students, and show them how to be geographers. He took great delight in their engagement, and possessed a tremendous capacity for joy at the successes of those under his tutelage, together with a very rare ability to make people around him feel special, valued, and important. The pursuit of social justice anywhere, Lösch's real duty, was what drove David, and he truly believed that intense

intellectual engagement was the starting point for doing something about our sorry realities. He therefore saw his job as two-fold: not only must he engage, but he must encourage and support others to engage too.

Margaret passed away from illness in 2002, an unbearable loss to David, who had just retired. For a while he lacked a sense of purpose and even confidence. A genuine gesture of love and respect was offered by his former colleagues at Queen Mary, who in 2004 began an annual lecture series in his name. Those events gave him the opportunity to keep in touch with valued colleagues and previous students, and to hear and observe how his work had engaged and prompted that of others. The astonishing list of academic luminaries who have delivered a David M. Smith lecture over the past twenty years is itself a fitting tribute to how highly he was regarded. True to the family presence and spirit with which he conducted his life's work, his daughter Tes and her wife Eleanor would always accompany him to the lectures and sit in the front row. He treasured those occasions and they helped restore that purpose and confidence. Shy and unassuming, he was always humble about his many achievements, whilst able to encourage others so softly and gently that at times people's lives changed through a simple conversation.

He also made many trips to see his son Michael and his family in California, and loved every one of these, no doubt because he was in yet another fascinating geographical context. He fully understood that place is necessary for human existence, and he reminded others that we all have more real duties: to look after place and, especially, find it for those who have lost it:

To deprive people of their territory, their community or their home, would seem at first sight to be a heinous act of injustice. It would be like taking away any other source of basic need-satisfaction, on which people depend absolutely. ... But this experience is not simply deprivation: there is a literal necessity to be re-placed. People who have lost their place, for one reason and another, must be provided with or find another. There is no question about it. People need it. They just do. (Smith 1994c: 152)

It is such a precious gift to us all that he wrote so compellingly about why it matters to possess a geographical imagination.

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Note on the authors: Tom Slater is Professor of Urban Studies at Columbia University. Roger Lee is Emeritus Professor of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London.

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