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## **South of the South: political dissidence, exile and Latin American transnationalism around the “New Geography” meetings in the Southern Cone (1960s-1970s)**

**Abstract:** *Based on new archival documents and on original interviews, this paper extends recent works exploring radical and critical geographies from linguistic areas other than the Anglo-American ones. It addresses the extraordinary story of the two international meetings for the “New Geography” that took place in Salto (Uruguay) in 1973 and in Neuquén (Argentina) in 1974, still ill-known due to the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, which forced many of their protagonists to exile or to professional reconversion. Analysing surviving documents and reconstructing the trajectories of these gatherings’ protagonists allows developing an original point for today’s critical and radical geographies. That is, the frameworks of national academies are insufficient to develop critical approaches, that need first to be constructed through practices rather than mere theories, addressing societal problems in connection with activism. This business can be only accomplished through voluntarist, transnational and cosmopolitan scholars’ engagement.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Geography; Internationalism; Latin American Integration; New Geography; Transnationalism*

This paper argues for further rediscovering geography’s alternative traditions and practices. It makes so by addressing the little-known but very significant experience of the two “Latin American Meetings for New Geography” that took place in Salto (Uruguay) in 1973 and Neuquén

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(Argentina) in 1974, being currently considered as a founding myth for Latin American critical geographies and EGAL (*Encuentro de Geografías de América Latina*) meetings (Ferretti 2018; Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman 2021). EGAL gatherings started in Águas de São Pedro (Brazil) in 1987, with the decisive contribution of a figure who symbolically linked these two generations of Latin American critical scholars: Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (1926-2001). Since then, EGAL became the main international conference for Latin American geography, taking regularly place every two years in different locations.

According to Mónica Arroyo, New Geography meetings can be considered as “antecedents of EGAL” (Arroyo 2019, 97), which represents today geographers’ engagement with: “The political and theoretical challenges that we face as citizens of this continent” (Arroyo 2019, 96).<sup>1</sup> Yet, the 1973-74 meetings are virtually unknown to English-speaking readerships, having only been addressed by some papers in Spanish whose arguments I discuss below (Bietti 2019; Cicalese 2007; Quintero, Dufour and Iut 2009). Based on original interviews with survivors and on a documentary work to recover meeting minutes, draft presentations and authors’ correspondences, this paper wishes to fill these lacunas and to extend recent literature on internationalising critical/radical geographies.

My argument is twofold. First, the origins (and current developments) of Latin American critical and radical geographies are more pragmatic than ideological, which matches and extends current scholarship arguing that Latin American social movements are more the result of practices than of ideologies imported from Europe (Lopes de Souza 2016). This notion chimes with current critiques of modernity and of “pure” theory disconnected from concrete social movements (Mignolo and Escobar 2010). While, in the 1970s, radical Latin American circuits still accepted ideas that are broadly associated with modernity such as dependency theory, it is possible to argue that early

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from texts and recordings originally in Spanish, French and Portuguese have been translated by the author.

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Latin American critical geographies were already aware of the limitations of classical modernisation theories. The Southern Cone case confirms what has been argued elsewhere addressing Brazilian cases (Ferretti 2018 and 2021). That is, Latin American critical geographers reworked originally concepts of European origin, elaborating their own notions of dependency and “critical development”, which constituted a way for the South to “theorise back” in relation to Northern hegemony of critical thought (Slater 2004). As I discuss below, in these geographers’ denunciations of “underdevelopment”, there was no emphasis on modernisation per se, which allows for suggesting new dialogues between their ideas and current Latin American critical scholarship on geography, social movements and decoloniality (Haesbaert 2021).

Second, from the cosmopolitan, militant and non-academic praxes of *Nueva Geografía* one should find lessons for current critical scholarship. I especially stress the need of acting outside academic frameworks, fostering activism beyond campuses’ walls and practicing internationalism and multilingualism beyond national, provincial or parochial scholarly cenacles (even when they are styled as “international”). Importantly, the *Nueva Geografía* experience matches current definitions of transnationalism understood as cosmopolite networking which is not limited to mere cooperation between national “schools” or linguistic circuits. Instead, transnational networking and multilingualism should be considered as key characteristics of both scholarly (and activist) practices and of their analysis (Bantman and Altena 2015; Jöns, Meusberger and Heffernan 2017). These practices informed *Nueva Geografía*, anticipating current transnational approaches to social and territorial struggles in the subcontinent (Zibechi 2012): the trajectories of people whose stories are told here provide outstanding examples to inspire today’s debates.

This paper extends recent literature rediscovering histories of radical geographies beyond North America (Barnes and Sheppard 2019) by addressing a geographical area whose dwellers are proud to be the South of the South, given the peculiar colonial and migration history of Southern Cone countries. Indeed, precious works such as the book edited by Barnes and Sheppard include only

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limited cases outside the “core”. Some of its authors even argue that in countries such as France (Calbérac 2019) and Mexico (Crossa 2019) it is impossible to find an exact correspondent of “Radical Geography”. This proves true only if one seeks the exact match for imported models like North-American radical geography of the 1970s, broadly informed to Marxism. Conversely, recent scholarship has shown that one can identify plural critical/radical geography’s expressions in both France (Ferretti 2021) and Mexico (Mendoza Vargas 2017 and 2018; Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman 2021).

Today, Latin America shows great effervescence in terms of geographies informed by activism, decoloniality and in general critical and feminist scholarship (Finn and Hanson 2017; Halvorsen, Fernandes and Torres 2019; Zaragocin and Caretta 2021). In Argentina, recent grassroots mobilisations have been the object of sustained geographical scholarship on territorialisation and localisation of struggles (Wald and Hill 2016; Halvorsen 2020 and 2021). Works of some Brazilian critical and radical geographers working in the second half of the twentieth century have been recently rediscovered by a burgeoning international literature (Melgaço 2017; Davies 2019 and 2023; Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018). Yet, there is still work to do: on the one hand, there is the need of addressing more geographical areas, especially in Spanish-speaking countries. On the other, Latin America still has a lesser place than what it would deserve in histories of critical geographies. In the recent book *Placing Critical Geography* (Berg et al. 2021), the entire continent was worthy of just one chapter, that is the space that was otherwise conferred to single nations.

In that chapter, Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman clarify that there is no one “critical geography” in Latin America, but rather “different critical geographies” informed to different political and theoretical stances, including “elements that are specific to each region” (Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman 2021, 66). According to these authors, New Geography meetings were the “seed [that] would eventually bloom into a constellation of critical geographies in Latin America” (Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman 2021, 79). They echo an argument developed by recent scholarship (Ferretti

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2018) on the paradoxical effects of the dictatorships that afflicted countries such as Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina between the 1960s and the 1980s. Indeed, oppression indirectly fostered international and transcultural exchanges through “the dispersion of intellectuals from the Southern Cone who were forced into exile” (Ramirez, Montanez and Zusman 2021, 79). Thus, the dictatorships could only delay processes that remained operational in underground and diasporic circuits, to become increasingly vibrant today also thanks to the formation of critical collectives of geography students and teachers all across the continent. Hence, the importance of studying the very transnational beginnings of Latin American critical geographies that were inaugurated in Salto and Neuquén.

Following the established qualitative methodology of “elite interviews” (Harvey 2011) giving to the interviewee the maximum of liberty and initiative in sorting conscience from memory based on dialogue and open questions, I interviewed a representative sample of surviving protagonists from the two sides of the Rio de la Plata. In the history of geography, this kind of autobiographical interviews proved effective to apply contextual and spatial-sensitive approaches to the study of the production of knowledge (Buttimer and Hägerstrand 1980). The geographers who kindly accepted to share their memories with me and generously helped in seeking further contacts and documents are Carlos Reboratti and Vicente Di Cione from Argentina; Miguel Ligüera, Graciela Rita, Mirian Pérez, Elbio Garrone and Danilo Antón from Uruguay. It is worth noting that most of these geographers had non-academic trajectories. For instance, Ligüera, Rita and Pérez mainly worked in secondary teaching, while Antón and Di Cione spent a relevant part of the respective careers in consultancy or in other jobs outside university. They provide examples of non-academic scholarship often associated with broader societal activism and with very inclusive ideas of what geography should be.

Unavailable for interview for health reasons, Germán Wettstein kindly accepted to share with me some documents of his personal archive. Although Wettstein is the most famous of Uruguayan

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geographers, he also lived non-academic experiences, as he was also often compelled to “survival tasks” (Wettstein 2019, 88) during periods of political repression and exile. Given that this research took place in pandemic and post-pandemic times with related challenges to research mobility, my witnesses were interviewed through video-calls, complemented in certain cases by a set of open questions responded by e-mail. My positionality also played a role: being fluent in Spanish and national of a country from which the grandparents of several interviewees migrated to Uruguay and Argentina (which was the occasion for jokes and family anecdotes during some interviews) was precious to establish empathy with them.

As both conferences were shortly followed by the instauration of authoritarian regimes which violently intervened in repressing dissent, in Uruguay in 1973 and in Argentina since 1974 (Reboratti 2022), there are no institutional records of these gatherings and the only available minutes, drafts and final statements survive in private collections, in addition to scattered correspondences currently held in Brazilian archives (Reboratti 1974a). As first stressed by my interviewees, this highlights the urgency of preserving these events’ memory, showing the precarity of the “international archive” recently discussed by historical geographies of internationalism (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg 2021) and the resulting need of counter-archiving. In the first part of this paper I expose the scholarly and political contexts leading to New Geography meetings, including the pioneering Uruguayan experience of the Geography Room (*Sala de Geografía*). In the second part, I address the theoretical and practical matters that were discussed in Salto. In the third part, I discuss the experience of Neuquén in relation to transnational aspects and outcomes of these meetings including female agency and the exile trajectories of their protagonists.

### **1. The context: a continent in turmoil**

As noted by several authors, Argentinian traditional geography inherited the conservative and colonialist mindset of European geography, including descriptive memories that were “obsolete

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from the very moment they are published” (Reboratti 1982, 398) and collaboration with the Army (Cicalese 2007). Yet, Argentinian historiography highlights how, already “from 1947 to 1955 ... a group of students and professors promoted a movement of disciplinary modernization” (Busch 2012, 282), challenging what they deemed a descriptive and uncritical teaching of geography. A key work in this movement was a sort of geographical encyclopaedia, *La Argentina, suma de geografía*, a collective endeavour in which a leading figure was Elena Chiozza (1920-2011). Although Chiozza did not style herself as a critical geographer, authors such as Guillermo Cicalese consider Chiozza’s contribution as paramount in implementing the concept of *Geografías populares* (People’s Geographies) (Cicalese 2018b).

Broadly defined as “those encyclopaedias, summaries, thematic atlases, journals or dictionaries that targeted a massive public” (Cicalese 2008, 2) to promote public betterment by making knowing the country, *Geografías populares* prefigured a key New Geography task. That is, practicing geography outside the walls of the academy through participatory fieldwork, critically informed teaching at all levels and extra-curricular popular education. Published by the *Centro Editorial de América Latina*, these works were initially “totally ignored” (Cicalese 2008 11) by the academy. Chiozza was one of the numerous Argentinian intellectuals whose job depended on the power in place at each time. She only held a university position after the fall of General Juan Domingo Peron in 1955, to give up her place again after the coup d’état of 1966 when, according to Vicente Di Cione, she was the only geography professor who resigned, as geography shamefully was: “The only discipline whose teachers endorsed the 1966 military coup” (Di Cione 2022).

Historiography defined “shadowy university ... all those intellectuals of liberal and cosmopolitan tendencies who kept an intransigent opposition to Peronism”, working “at the margins of official institutions’ (Cicalese 2018a). In 1974, Chiozza was one of the rare senior geographers who attended the Neuquén conference. As Di Cione recollects: “The editor of the exceptional work *El país de los argentinos* [Chiozza], in the Neuquén meeting, defended the regional paradigms that

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were commonplace among historians and geographers after Vidal de la Blache. Eventually, [Di Cione] had a quite heated exchange with her, as [he] proposed the theoretical and methodologic notion of socio-economic formation against traditional regional focuses” (Di Cione 2022). While I address these intergenerational disputes in the next section, it is worth noting the presence of a *Geografías populares* mature leader among the young contesters of the Neuquén meeting.

Chiozza claimed that *Suma* was: “An act of resistance, as all authors were outside university... In that period, the more or less innovating tendencies of geography occurred outside university”, challenging the positivist paradigms of a discipline that pretended to be “scientific and aseptic” (Cicalese 2008, 23). The political prickliness of *Geografías populares* was indirectly confirmed by the harsh critiques that *El país de los argentinos* received during the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 by conservative geographers deeming it “an attack to the territorial integrity” of the country, for including “dialectic couples ... such as: empire-colony, oppressors-oppressed, Buenos Aires-hinterland; city-countryside etc.” and releasing “trivial dependentist theories” (Cicalese 2018b). Dependency theory was exactly one of the attempts for “theorising back” (Slater 2004) from the South that these geographers mobilised to make sense of a Latin American geographical discourse that was not dependent from Northern models, including in theory.

Most geographical debates started on the Uruguayan side of the Rio de la Plata in the 1960s. As I was proudly told by Danilo Antón, one of the protagonists of the “Geography Room” in Uruguay and later an exile in Mexico, Colombia and Canada during the 1973-1985 Uruguayan dictatorship: “The processes start in Montevideo, but the human mass is in Buenos Aires” (Antón 2022). Indeed, there is consensus on the fact that the first steps of New Geography took place in Uruguay, through the exceptional experience of the “Geography Room” at the IPA (*Instituto de Profesores Artigas*), a school for secondary teachers’ training. As Reboratti notes, in Uruguay there was not yet a geography curriculum at the university (Reboratti 2022), therefore it was at IPA that debates on

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geographical teaching and scholarship took place, which facilitated ideas of making geography in contact with working-class and non-academic publics.

A sort of self-managed space for geography teachers and students to organise workshops, fieldwork expeditions and curricular activities, the Room was founded in an highly politicised context. As Antón recollects, in 1965, a mobilisation to claim labour rights for geography professors ended with a long student strike following which: “We all lost our year” (Antón 2022). Thus, in 1966, two generations of students met and formally inaugurated the Room, counting on comfortable spaces “in the old city of Montevideo” (Antón 2022) including a library and a map collection. As referred by another protagonist of New Geography and likewise an exile in Mexico, close Antón’s friend Elbio Garrone, the main notion informing the Room was: “The spirit of horizontality, where the student had the responsibility to direct and coordinate fieldwork expeditions [that is] a form of breaking the framework of: ‘I am a teacher, you are a student’” (Garrone 2022). Room participants Rita and Ligüera stress likewise: “The value of teamwork and the need for permanent training” (Rita and Ligüera 2022). Indeed, organizing periodical field expeditions in the Uruguayan hinterland challenged models of teaching that were based on superficial factual knowledge.

According to Garrone, this had a political meaning as it entailed: “Taking contact with reality ... Many people acquired consciousness of what the country was through fieldwork expeditions” (Garrone 2022), in a country where Third World struggles increasingly inspired youth unrest and incipient guerrilla groups like the Tupamaros (Garrone 2022). While a leading geographical figure such as Wettstein mobilised the notion of “conscientisation” by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Wettstein 2014), Antón reveals a telling anecdote on how he contributed to the group’s research philosophy. Being at the same time one of the senior students and an activist in a Maoist group, he “started to apply some of the booklets by Mao Zedong that we were studying in my section” (Antón 2022). According to Antón, who claims that this Maoist inspiration has been neglected by

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commentators hitherto: “Acting fieldwork practices in contact with the people” was consistent with “Maoist revolutionary views” (Antón 2022), especially interested in contacting peasants. For Antón, this had a certain success as all the 40 students of his class “became activists” (Antón 2022). Thus, innovative techniques of geographical inquiry matched the most fashionable leftist tendencies of the day.

Some of the IPA professors were especially empathetic towards this new generation of politically engaged students and started working with them, especially César Campodonico and the future organisers of New Geography meetings, Alfredo Tróccoli and Germán Wettstein (Antón 2022). This even led the Room to participate in the creation of a National Association of Geography Teachers that celebrated well-attended congresses since 1967 (Garrone 2022). Accepting the active participation of students’ representatives, this association saw the amazing phenomenon of: “Elderly professors listening to some youngsters” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 33). These congresses were saluted as “the Revolution in Geography” by the sympathetic press arguing that, for geography’s teachers, it was no longer sufficient to transmit knowledge: “They create it through direct observation” (La Nueva didáctica, 1971), that is fieldwork practices and research-led teaching, quite revolutionary notions in that context. For Room participant and attender of New Geography meetings Mirian Pérez, fieldwork also implied a dimension of sociability that attracted students. With a group of female friends registered to the IPA first year, Pérez: “Immediately joined the Room because we loved fieldwork excursions” (Pérez 2022).

In this process, a central idea was the geographical study of “development and underdevelopment in the contemporary world” (La nueva didáctica 1971), a matter on which Wettstein was especially prominent in inspiring young scholars. Like his colleague Tróccoli, Wettstein held a French PhD obtained in Toulouse (Quintero, Dufour and Iut 2009), where he was supervised by Latin Americanist geographer Olivier Dollfus, and was responsible for bringing to Uruguay famous French leftist geographers such as Jean Tricart in 1971 (Garrone 2022). As his close collaborator

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Garrone notes, Wettstein was inspired by French geographers such as Pierre George and Yves Lacoste, but he had his own critiques to their approaches to underdevelopment from Northern perspectives. As Garrone recalls: “During a class, Germán argued that [French geographers] were confusing the causes and the consequences” (Garrone 2022), asserting that conditions such as poverty were not the origin of “underdevelopment”, but the consequence of dependent economies, that is Western-led capitalism.

A supporter of the leftist coalition called *Frente Amplio* (Wettstein 1980) that tried to oppose the rising of armed Far-Right in Uruguay, Wettstein spent five months in Cuba in 1968 as a guest of the local Academy of Science led by geographer Antonio Nuñez-Jiménez (Ferretti 2022a). In his recollections, Wettstein expressed his enthusiasm for the revolutionary experience ongoing and for its “Third World” dimension, favouring political and cultural consciousness of “the problems of Asia, Africa and Latin America” (Wettstein 1969, 8) after which geography should explicitly challenge colonialism and imperialism. While claiming that a geography teacher should be “implacable in denouncing social contradictions, as a first line fighter for liberation struggle” (Pesce 2014a, 401), Wettstein opposed ideological “sectarianism” (Wettstein 1967, 9), prefiguring the spirit of pluralism and absence of ideological dogmatism that characterized the New Geography meetings. As Wettstein ironically recollected, one of his books was denied publication by a Latin American leftist publisher because it was “not filo-communist enough” (Wettstein 2019, 103).

Although Argentina and Uruguay are considered as more “Westernised” countries than other Latin American realities, the idea of living in a “dependent and underdeveloped country” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 93) was key to Wettstein and to the Argentinians as well. Reboratti notes that, at that time: “There was dependency theory which came from CEPAL and looked like a very progressive theory. Now, it is demonized as pseudo-capitalism and you would rather talk about extractivism. But it made sense as a counter-theory” (Reboratti 2022). Garrone ironically adds

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that: “We consider ourselves to be underdeveloped until today” (Garrone 2022). Thus, the need of a Southern and Latin American insurrection against Northern and neo-colonial conceptual models clearly informed New Geography.

In 1967, Geography Room members produced a collective document denouncing some “mistaken notions” of which geographers should get rid, including: “The concept of race”, “Eurocentrism” and “a touristic vision of geography” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 134). Conversely, geography should be: “A tool in the process of Third World national liberation” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 61) from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Importantly, this did not imply joining nationalistic rhetoric: what follows shows the internationalist inspiration of these Latin American pioneers of critical and radical geographies, who did not use such labels but are recognised as the producers of “elements of critical geography” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 17), or: “A critique before critical geography” (Bietti 2019, 108). The idea that they wanted to foster for changing society was: “An active geography, opposed to a passive and descriptive geography” (Pesce 2014, 18) echoing Brazilian interpretations of Pierre George’s notion of “active geography” understood as socially engaged scholarship to be applied to social contradictions in the Souths (Ferretti 2021). In 1972, it was after the journey of some Uruguayans to Argentina that New Geography started, as I discuss in the next section.

## **2. A meeting and a dictatorship**

From 30 September to 11 October 1972, the Argentinian Society of Geographical Studies (GAEA) celebrated its International Congress, for which “30 members of the Room” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 44) travelled from Uruguay. During that meeting, an alliance was established between Uruguayan teachers such as Wettstein and Tróccoli and Argentinian students such as Reboratti, all disappointed by the conservative geography that GAEA displayed. In that context, Wettstein’s speech looked quite revolutionary to local publics as it dealt with: “Human landscapes from the standpoint of underdeveloped and dependent countries”, defining geography as a science for

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“overtaking scientific and cultural neo-colonialism” (Wettstein 1972). Wettstein criticized the international congresses on the history of landscape that had been celebrated until that moment as their animators mobilised Eurocentric models that could not be applied to Third World countries. This inaugurated a leitmotiv of New Geography, as its exponents insisted a lot in arguing that theories circulating in the North such as spatial science were: “Not always applicable to underdeveloped countries” (Reboratti 1982, 401). Reboratti also blamed the attitude of “Non-Latin American Marxist geographers towards Latin America ... sometimes as paternalistic as that of other foreign geographers, as can be seen by going through the pages of *Antipode* or *Herodote*” (Reboratti 1982, 401), matching Wettstein’s positions.

At the end, that meeting was highly productive, as Reboratti and Wettstein agreed to organize an international conference some months later. Originally designed to be the fourth Congress of the National Association of Geography Teachers and taking place in Salto, on the western border of Uruguay, neighbouring the Argentinian town of Concordia: “This congress was redesigned as the First Latin-American Meeting for a New Geography with the aim of including geographers from Argentina and other countries” (Quintero, Iut and Dufour 2009, 7), being attended by rather one hundred geography students and teachers from 26 to 31 January 1973. While this first meeting seemed to be international only as a principle, as Reboratti recalls his feeling “that everybody was Uruguayan but me” (Reboratti 2022), a “Latin American reach” (Bietti 2019, 103) was one of the displayed targets of the conference, whose final declaration was signed by Wettstein for Uruguay and by Reboratti for Argentina.

Surviving in Wettstein’s private archive, the draft of this latter’s speech at Salto accounts for the centrality of themes such as the “responsibility of teachers and researchers before New Geography” and dependency, implying the “necessity of building a geography for underdeveloped countries” (Wettstein 1973). Wettstein defined this social responsibility as the imperative of choosing between two opposite options: “The first, justifying the existing order by hiding the

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contradictions that are inherent to the economic, political and social system in which most of Latin American countries evolve. The second, raising knowledge to the level of collective consciousness of these contradictions ... to overtake them” (Wettstein 1973). “Knowledge” was accompanied by the adjective *libertador*, applied to Latin America but also to other Third World struggles such as that of “Vietnamese people”. Wettstein was outstandingly aware that the first problem of underdevelopment was exactly development, as: “Underdevelopment and capitalist development are complementary forms” (Wettstein 1973). Together with Wettstein’s critique to the “false illusions of technical progress” (Wettstein 1973), this notion importantly prefigured later engagements of geographers with post-development and critiques to Northern-driven ideas of development and “growth” (Power 2003).

While endorsing a “Latin American socialist project for autonomous development”, Wettstein expressed again his aversion for ideological dogmatism and for the rigid application of just one theoretical/political framework, wishing: “The most possible theoretical amplitude” (Wettstein 1973). The second meeting in Neuquén confirmed that New Geography did not want to “be a party, but to take part” (Noticia 1974) in social struggles. Salto was also the occasion for Room members to display publicly the findings of a collective fieldwork research on an *ingenio azucarero* (sugar mill) in the town of Mercedes, which was directed by Wettstein as for human geography and by Antón as for physical geography (Sala de Geografía 1973). This was the accomplishment of a key point for the Room, that is collective fieldwork, as the excursions in Mercedes involved dozens of students and teachers. Another point was the collaboration between “physical” and “human” geography, as field techniques involved both geomorphological surveys and engagement with the opinions of local dwellers.

Indeed, leading figures of New Geography such as Antón and Garrone are fully-fledged physical geographers. Antón even defines himself as “a mix of a geologist and a geographer” noting that, once in Canada, he studied “quaternary geology”, which he considers to be an essential part of

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physical geography (Antón 2022). Asked on what are the connections between physical geography and critical/radical approaches to geography, Antón and Garrone unanimously argue that these research agendas should be strictly connected. Antón makes the example of his works on behalf of the Canadian government on several projects in Third World countries, stressing how “everything had a social justification” in these endeavours. He ironically notes that, once back to Uruguay in the 1980s, he ended: “As a human geographer ... teaching human and social geography” (Antón 2022). Garrone likewise argues for the importance of physically-informed social fieldwork, evoking his exile experiences in the Sierra de Guerrero, Mexico, where he worked in projects involving indigenous communities. On the one hand, his team was able to trace connections between diseases and seasonal conditions helping the communities in taking health measures. On the other, Garrone states that he “only understood what a peasant is in Mexico” (Garrone 2022), which highlights the close links that these scholars identify between morphological fieldworks and political engagement with the problems of local societies.

The Salto final declaration stressed the need for a deep renovation of geography in “both theory and practice”, first highlighting that: “As both science and teaching, Geography has to put itself at the service of popular classes of all Latin American countries, rather than remaining on a descriptive and falsely objective level” (Declaración final 1973). This explicit challenge to ideas of “neutrality” or “objectivity” would be one of the reasons for the clashes between “new geographers” and conservatives in the following years, paralleling concurrent critiques of geographical positivism that radical and humanistic geographies were carrying out in Northern countries (Ferretti 2019). Given the very nature of the Room, training geographers who were aware of their social and political responsibilities was identified as a key objective, to build autonomously theoretical and methodological models that diverged: “From imported models, difficult to adapt to the peculiar conditions of our continent” (Declaración final 1973). That is, the claim of non-dependency in theory and methodology.

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Making an evaluation of his own career forty years later, Wettstein claimed that the Geography Room had successfully challenged the mnemonic teaching of geography based on nomenclatures and Eurocentric concepts, pushing students to gain consciousness: “Of the inhuman levels of life in which a great part of the population of dependent and underdeveloped countries live” (Wettstein 2014, 4). In assuming the task of denouncing “all forms of colonial, imperialist and neo-colonial exploitation in Third World countries”, the members of the National Association of Geography Teachers were adamant to “share the expectations of all the peoples who take the way of decolonization first and liberation later” (Wettstein 2014, 6). For New Geography, decolonization was not complete if limited to national liberation, as it needed radical social changes within Southern societies, towards a “freed society” (Wettstein 2014, 9) for which a geography of and for “underdeveloped” countries was considered as a key instrument.

The Salto meeting decided to nominate an Argentinian-Uruguayan Secretariat to maintain organic relations and to coordinate new initiatives to foster international exchanges between the two countries, and especially to call a new meeting, likewise “of Latin-American reach”, the following year in Argentina. Yet, this project soon encountered the “Doctrine of National Security” (DSN), justifying the direct intervention of armed forces to counter the “internal enemy” (that is communism) which had been already responsible for the 1964 and 1966 military coups in Brazil and Argentina and inspired what Gonzalo Bietti defines “democratic authoritarianism” (Bietti 2019, 96) in Uruguay since 1968. The political situation in the small Latin American republic was especially tense in the years in which the Room worked. This included storming of university buildings by the police and by far-right groups (Gaceta de la Universidad 1971) and wide-spreading of political violence across the region (Narcesian 2013). According to Bruschi and Cutinella, there were several cases of “arrestations and persecutions of Room members” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 103).

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Although such arrestations were rather related with activism in political groups than with the Room, similar episodes occurred during fieldwork expeditions due to: “The suspects raised by the presence of groups of external people walking in rural zones, asking questions and handling strategic devices such as aerial photos” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 103). In Uruguayan Far-Right press, Wettstein and some of the Room leaders were then portrayed as promoters of “Bolshevism” and “anti-national activities” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 104) under pretext of teaching. Thus, geography was implied in the anti-communist witch-hunt that preceded the coup of June 1973, inaugurating a 12-year dictatorship that closed all spaces of free debate, including the outlawing of the National Association of Geography Teachers, whose “archives and goods were requisitioned” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 106). While the Room was not formally outlawed, it had to stop its activities as “many teachers were removed and persecuted” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 106). Thus, the Neuquén conference took place when New Geography was already forbidden on the Uruguayan side of the Rio de la Plata and some Uruguayan geographers had already found sanctuary in Argentina.

As Di Cione recalls: “In Uruguay, repression started at the beginning of 1973, which pushed some Uruguayan geographers to seek exile in Argentina, including Germán Wettstein, Alfredo Tróccoli Moreno, Danilo Antón and others. Then, frustrated in their aspirations by restoration [in Argentina], Uruguayan geographers started exile alongside the Argentinians. Wettstein was exiled in Venezuela since 1975” (Di Cione 2022). Thus, in February 1974, the Uruguayan delegation to Neuquén had to lament that, in Montevideo: “The College of Arts and Science is still closed ... the courses of 1973 were not concluded ... The Geography Room is not working ... Students’ enrolment for History and Geography was suppressed” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 105). According to Rita and Ligüera, the Government even: “Corrected the contents of primary and secondary geography curricula, suppressing all ... unwanted themes” (Rita and Ligüera 2022). The second conference took place in Neuquén, at the University of Comahue (Northern Patagonia)

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from 18 to 23 February 1974, because Tróccoli had just been appointed as the Director of that new Geography Department.

As Reboratti recollects, Comahue was a region “invented following regional theories”, that “never ceased to remain a mere word” (Reboratti 2022). Nevertheless, these new university departments were initially a good opportunity for transnational scholars like Tróccoli. This latter: “Had worked in Africa and had good relations with the Brazilians” (Reboratti 2022). For Reboratti, the difference between Salto and Neuquén was quite apparent, as the second meeting looked more like “a formal academic conference with the support of the University”, gathering more than 200 people. Despite the difficult situation, the organizers had higher international ambitions than in the previous year. Among the international guests, the “star” had to be French Marxist geographer Pierre George, whose works constituted a reference for critical geographers all over Latin America, where French geographical scholarship traditionally had more influence than the Anglo-American one (Ferretti 2022b). Yet, George could not attend and the effective “guest star” of the meeting was not a European academic, but a Black geographer from the Brazilian state of Bahia, who was then wandering across three continents as a political exile: Milton Santos.

### 3. Repression, transnationalism and the “Milton effect”

#### *Cross-border scholarship and female agency*

The typewritten folder in which some of the Neuquén documents survive is opened by the paper that George sent to be read, “Pourquoi la géographie”, previously published in the French journal *GeoScope*. George’s text was substantially a discussion on the strategic importance of geography for states and warfare, hence the need to transform it in a useful science for civil and social purposes—not a big novelty for those already familiar with New Geography. Thus, it does not

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come as a surprise that, from all available recollections, it was not George's text that left a durable trace in the memory of the attendees, but the enormous charisma and charge of radicality that the Brazilian guest offered to the meeting, which Reboratti named: "The Milton effect". For Reboratti, this effect was very beneficial to Argentinian geography, being initially favoured by Santos's exceptional empathy. His intervention was a "shock" (Reboratti 2022) or, as Reboratti recollected in a former interview, "a revolution" (Pasti 2016, 427).

Banished from Brazil after the 1964 coup (Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018) and invited in Neuquén by Tróccoli, Santos was then moving from Venezuela, where he worked in the National University, to Tanzania, where he would spend the following two years at the University of Dar es Salaam supporting Julius Nyerere's projects of academic decolonization (Ferretti 2020). Thus, he fully embodied the Third Worldist general spirit, and additionally he was a person of Afro-Brazilian origin. As Di Cione explains, in a country of mostly European white settlers like Argentina: "Seeing a black geographer surprised everybody. His empathy seduced everybody, including myself" (Di Cione 2022). This capacity of communication was stressed by Reboratti through anecdotes on Milton's capacity of debating hours on radical concepts and then, at the end of a conference: "Inviting to dance an elderly [conservative] lady geographer" (Reboratti 2022). Completely unknown in Argentina until that moment, Santos acted as a "brains' opener" (Reboratti 1996, 211), showing new possibilities to young scholars who were substantially unaware of international critical theories.

Although there are no formal transcriptions of Santos's speech, he reportedly claimed for founding theoretically geography as a science for social change, proclaiming with his contagious optimism that: "The solution of the problems of wealth distribution ... will come through space ... Thus, geographers will play a key role in the incipient readjustment of this world" (Bietti 2019, 104). Basically, it was the principle that Ana Maria Goicoechea defines: "Engaged scholarship" (Goicoechea 1996, 451), destined to impress a long-lasting mark on Latin American scholarly

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exchanges (Martínez 2002). Yet, this raises the matter of what political or theoretical definition should be given to New Geography. On this point, Bietti convincingly claims that New Geography: “Was rather a denunciation than an epistemological project ... it did not construct a geographical or Marxist theory” (Bietti 2019, 107). Asked on whether they had the impression that this movement was more pragmatic than ideological, all my interviewees substantially agreed adding different nuances to the concept.

Reboratti notes that this was due to the fact that, at least from the Argentinian side, “nobody had a really deep academic formation” (Reboratti 2022) and foreign books hardly came to local libraries. From the Uruguayan side, Garrone argues that this was also due to the choice of privileging empirical fieldwork, where there was “more practice than ideology or theory” (Garrone 2022) being also complicated to bring theory to the countryside. Di Cione highlights the same lack of a unifying ideology but identifies it as a limitation of that movement. He especially claims that, also based on his previous studies in philosophy, he was: “From 1970 until 1984, the first and the only one [in Argentina] who proposed critical alternatives which explicitly articulated geographical themes with Marxist critical theory” (Di Cione 2022). Among the inspirations of his theoretical reflections, Di Cione quotes Marx, Gramsci, Lefebvre, Touraine, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, Sereni, Luporini and the theory of uneven development. In those years, Di Cione perceived that: “Global and local geographical formations were not extraneous to the basic principles of dialectics [and] uneven interdependence ... In this perspective, development and underdevelopment were considered indissolubly linked moments: the former determines the latter, at all scales. The revolutionary dream of the Sixties was impossible to carry out in underdeveloped countries without changing the conditions of domination and uneven exchange” (Di Cione 2022). It is worth noting that matters on social formation were famously addressed by Santos in the 1977 *Antipode* special issue that he co-edited with Richard Peet (Santos 1977), while Di Cione contributed to these debates through the notion of geographic formation, still recently updated (Di Cione 2021).

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Interestingly, also the most senior “brains’ openers” such as Wettstein and Santos did not act as “ideologues” in a proper sense. For Di Cione, who fully recognizes Wettstein as the inventor of the “New Geography” label: “The importance of Germán was rather in his effectiveness in politically mobilising geography than for big conceptual innovations” (Di Cione 2022). With Santos, Di Cione had a quite “contradictory” relation also because Santos’s Marxism was far from being orthodox (Di Cione 2022). Reboratti shares the same view, arguing that, despite common vulgates, Santos “could not be considered at all a Marxist, if not outside orthodox Marxism” (Reboratti 2022). It is important to understand all that in the context of the aforementioned ideological amplitude and refuse of dogmatism exposed by Wettstein. Even about Santos, who was committed to provide solid theoretical foundations for geography during all his career (Davies 2019), Reboratti stresses that: “He was not dogmatic” (Reboratti 2022).

On the one hand, the young protagonists of New Geography were not deeply trained in formal theoretical approaches such as Marxism or even anarchism, despite they were aware of the important anarcho-syndicalist Argentinian tradition (Di Cione 2022) and “someone had read Bookchin” (Reboratti 2022). On the other, they explicitly refused to conform to just one ideology, predefining in their own way some features of current approaches to the ‘pluriverse’, where different and heterogeneous strategies can concur to the common cause of global justice (Kothari et al. 2019). Importantly, as Di Cione had noted in a former interview to Cicalese, Santos also made known to Argentinians a book by David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, which became a sort of mandatory reference. Yet, the idea of importing critical theory from the North was always suspect to Latin Americans, as also Reboratti, in a former interview, sardonically notes that, when his books started to be translated in Castilian, Harvey: “Started to come to Argentina for the absolute casualty that his wife was Argentinian. Well, he did never learn a word of Castilian, but he became a sort of international luminary of Marxism” (Pasti 2016, 427). This confirms the need for critical scholarship to be really transnational and multilingual, as people like Santos and

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Wettstein were, to effectively internationalize and decolonize the field by including different people and different traditions (Ferretti 2022b).

In Neuquén, the Uruguayan delegation (estimated in 30 to 40 people) belonged to the Geography Room, while the vast majority of attendees were Argentinian students, early-career scholars or activists, generally with loose connections with the academy. As Reboratti notes, the “popes” of academic geography “identified the Neuquén meeting as a communists’ gathering, [thus] we did not have any relation with them” (Reboratti 2022). Di Cione confirms that, also in Argentina: “The innovating impulse did not come from university programmes, with the exception of students from the University of Buenos Aires, but from the political agitation broadly inspired by antiimperialist struggles” (Di Cione 2022). Indeed, even before the authoritarian turn that materially impeded the continuation of those discourses in Argentina, the tenors of conservative geography had already harshly condemned that meeting.

Patricio Randle publicly claimed that New Geography was: “Distorting notions that are basic to our discipline, compelling us to intervene to re-establish some basic concepts” and dismissed this movement as: “Marxist infiltration in our universities”. Likewise, Raúl Rey Balmaceda argued that the promoters only managed to gather a bunch of “incautious and naïve people” (Bruschi and Cutinella 2016, 98). Yet, this bunch of youngsters had managed to puzzle an institutional establishment, as it results clear from the following political repression of this, and of all innovating movements in Argentina.

What is notable is that the Neuquén meeting was not dominated by “great men”. Beyond the paper of the absent George and the interventions of Santos (out of the record) and Wettstein, the great majority of plenary interventions were the responsibility of collective panels in which women’s presence and agency was outstandingly prominent. While in the Geography Room there was already a strong female presence due to the fact that women were increasingly filling teaching

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places, in Neuquén most of the papers were authored by women, some of whom would have a future as academics, such as Rosa Colantuono, Elba Kloster and Beatriz Saint-Lary.<sup>2</sup> Yet, all my interviewees argue that, although women's participation was very strong, there was no explicit awareness of gender matters.

According to Graciela Rita: "The Room, and New Geography, always counted on women's participation. Even more, we were the majority. Yet, there was no feminist consciousness as one can see it today" (Rita and Ligüera 2022). According to Mirian Pérez: "In the Room I never felt gender discrimination ... Neither I addressed this theme nor we had a feminist consciousness. My female friends and I always felt to be full part of a collective of women and men. Nobody was more prominent than others, we worked collectively and most working groups were led by women" (Pérez 2022). Predominantly or exclusively female panels were responsible for most of the Neuquén speeches, as confirmed in similar terms by their male fellows such as Antón: "There was no feminist consciousness... Yet, there were no prejudices, there were more women than men" (Antón 2022). While this theme will deserve further reflection, one can hypothesize that issues with patriarchy and discrimination were not immediately perceived at the time of New Geography conferences due to both the generalized enthusiasm for experimenting for the first time horizontality and participation and the short time in which this experience lived. However, female agency remains a noteworthy feature of that experience.

In one of the first Neuquén speeches, Angela Bisogni, Julieta Guevara, Beatriz Saint-Lary and Rosa C[olantuono] Gutiérrez drafted guidelines for "a geography committed to reality" (Bisogni

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<sup>2</sup> The women who signed formal plenary speeches recorded in the surviving conference documents (where they are much more numerous than male names) were: Rosa Colantuono; Norma Montiel de Allende; Luisa Arroyo González; Norma Sinigoj de Echeberria; Gladys Ramidán; Alicia Capelli; Ana María Petagna; María del Carmen Vaquero; Julieta Guevara; Ana María Goicoechea; Angela Beatriz Bisogni; Diana Sigal; Mabel Ciminari; Beatriz Saint-Lary; Angela Pollina; Elba Kloster; Elsa Ottonello; Marta Rodríguez Prenna; Zlata Jelka de Dosen; Vilma Vercesi; Cecilia Oker de Azcoitia. Other documents and witnesses also account for the active presence of Graciela Taddey, Claudia Natenzon, Elena Chiozza, María Isabel Andrade, Graciela Pezzuti and Cristina Klimza Sabalain, in addition to the interviewees.

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et al., 1974, 18) taking explicitly side with the recent rising of left-wing governments in Latin America. They mentioned explicitly the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the 1970 election of President Allende in Chile (who had already been assassinated during Pinochet's coup) and the recent democratic openings in Argentina (alas short-lived). Fuming once more at "objective science", the authors criticised technocracy, understood as the intervention of Northern experts in "development", arguing for the need of anticolonial notions of "Latin American integration" (Bisogni et al. 1974, 27). Together with Norma de Allende, Luisa Arroyo, Norma Sinigoj and Gladys Ramidán, Colantuono and Saint-Lary also presented a communication on the "Geographer's insertion in the professional field", a theme that was arguably of special interest for the young people in attendance. There, they stressed the need for training future geographers both theoretically and practically, with a special focus on "the liberation of peoples" (Saint-Lary et al. 1974, 30), significantly criticising the growing specialization of European scientists, whom they considered to have lost a holistic view of "totality" (Saint-Lary et al. 1974, 37).

In his presentation, Antón insisted on the applied nature of geographical knowledge and its subsequent applicability to "dependent countries" (Antón 1974, 45). The collective work presented by a group of more than 40 Uruguayans based on geomorphologic surveys was doubtlessly the contribution that showed most awareness of scholarly methodologies and international literature (Integrantes 1974, 123). In the "human geography" section, Danil Santamaria importantly stressed the role of geography in interdisciplinary investigations towards a "unification of social sciences" (Santamaria 1974, 127). Reboratti explains that Argentinian geography became "critical" only when it embodied methods and findings from other disciplines such as "sociology, economy and social anthropology" (Reboratti 2022).

Another all-female panel, composed by Elsa Ottonello, Marta Rodriguez and Elba Kloster, addressed the problem of geography as both "secondary and university teaching", lamenting that the place that curricular programmes allocated to Europe, even in Argentina, was still

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paradoxically disproportioned in relation to other continents. The authors showed full awareness of the colonial nature of such paradox, noting that it could have been understandable: “Only when Argentina was a mere appendix of British economy” (Ottonello et al. 1974, 135). Since the level of primary teaching, geography should then have a “demystifying function” (Ottonello et al. 1974, 136) in exposing the oddities of uneven exchange, overtaking essentializations and gross generalizations. As the Uruguayan delegation noted: “Social change is done by the peoples, whether or not they know geography” (Delegación de Uruguay 1974, 153), which importantly confirms the lack of ideological dogmatism and the centrality of conscientization: these intellectuals were not at all interested in becoming a vanguard party in the Leninist sense.

In another speech on geography’s contribution to Latin American integration, Benito Rodríguez, María Vaquero, Diana Sigal, Mabel Ciminari and Ana María Goicoechea stressed the historical continuity between Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and the creole elites who: “Kept the control of internal production ... directing it towards the hegemonic centre operating then in the capitalist system: England” (Rodríguez et al. 1974, 166). Quoting Latin American denouncers of neo-colonialism such as Eduardo Galeano, they provided examples of the disgraceful recipes that the IMF and the World Bank were imposing to Southern Cone countries, like in Argentina where, in 1967, they “imposed to fire 70,000 railway workers as the condition for their help” (Rodríguez et al. 1974, 168). Finally, Latin American unification had to overtake the “false nationalisms” (Rodríguez et al. 1974, 170) that impeded a common fight against neo-colonialism. Addressing the same theme, Latin American integration, Wettstein’s Neuquén speech contained similar claims to abandon nationalisms and take different perspectives.

The Uruguayan geographer argued for a “second independence” of the continent, which had to shatter the “naked-force antipopular governments” (Wettstein 1974a, 187) then ruling countries such as Chile, Uruguay and Brazil. For Wettstein, geography should be understood as “one more form of activism” (Wettstein 1974a, 189), challenging chauvinisms and parochialisms, as: “There

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are no intruders or strangers among those who fight for a geography of liberation” (Wettstein 1974a, 190). Most of these points, such as claims for a “second” or “total” independence were released in the final declaration of Neuquén, challenging “dependence” at all levels and concluding that engaged geography should be an instrument more to led “the people’s cause” (Noticia, 1974) to victory. Scholars in love with Big Theory might find these conclusions quite generic. Yet, as Reboratti finally states, the difference between “old” geography and “new” geography was that: “New geography included people” (Reboratti 2022), in the sense of both considering societal needs and including new persons in the profession.

Reboratti was in charge of spreading international invitations for the third New Geography conference, which was already raising interest across Latin America (García 1975). In a couple of unpublished letters that he sent to Manuel Correia de Andrade, he made a short report of the Neuquén meeting and expressed the intention to render Latin American geographical gatherings permanent, establishing local centres in: “Neuquén, Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Montevideo, Interior of Uruguay, Tucumán and Bahía Blanca” (Reboratti 1974a). He also suggested that the third meeting could be in Brazil (Reboratti 1974b). Finally, it was designed to take place in Mendoza, but it was already too late.

#### *Diasporic geographies under repression*

As Reboratti explains, after few months: “A fascist came to direct the University of Comahue ... his first act was to expel Tróccoli ... who will end his career in Mexico” (Reboratti 2022). This corresponded to the end of so-called “Camporist spring” (Pasti 2018, 415), during which “left-wing Peronist” Héctor José Cámpora, President of the Republic from March to July 1973, introduced some progressive reforms especially in the education sector (Di Cione 2022) to overtake the so-called “Argentinian Revolution” (Cicalese 2007) managed by the military between 1966 and 1973. Yet, the coming back to power of General Peron (and of his wife Isabel after Peron’s death in 1974) opened the way to an increasingly repressive “right-wing Peronism” which

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implied, in Reboratti's words, that: "We were all thrown out" (Reboratti 2022). In the sector of education, they nominated "one Ivanevich .. a Far-Right guy" (Reboratti 2022), who was responsible for the "intervention" in the universities targeting "conservative restoration" (Di Cione 2022), revoking professors and presidents. Even worse, the military coup of 1976 inaugurated a very hard dictatorship that lasted until 1983, closing all spaces for free discussion and especially targeting universities, considered as places exposed to "Marxist ideological penetration" (Cicalese 2007). Di Cione sarcastically adds that, in those years, geography saw a flourishing of funding, but for generals and conservative people (Di Cione 2022).

Thus, it was time for geography's innovators to follow Santos and put in practice their transnational principles in exile, or to change occupation. Stressing how New Geography, although "crushed between the military dictatorships of Uruguay and Argentina ... was an ephemeral star which only lived one year but left seeds", Reboratti recounts that he lived some years in London where he had a fellowship at the LSE (Reboratti 2022). Di Cione "isolated [himself] in San Carlos de Bariloche where [he] founded a building enterprise" (Di Cione 2022) before coming back to research thanks to the CLACSO and to a Professorship at the UBA from 1985. As for the Uruguayans, Antón, Garrone and Tróccoli went to Mexico as noted above.

For Antón, who recollects his peregrinations between Mexico, Colombia, Canada and Saudi Arabia between 1973 and 1985 highlighting the political and scholarly importance of multilingualism, this was not a novelty. Indeed, already from 1970 to 1973, he took advantage of an international doctorate in Strasbourg remaining "three years in France, being difficult for me to stay in Uruguay for political reasons" (Antón 1973) even before the dictatorship. This compelled him to organise adventurous journeys to join his Southern Cone comrades in 1973-74. Outside Uruguay since 1976 after being sacked and prevented to find new jobs under the dictatorship, Garrone notes how, in Mexico, they managed to "found a centre for geographical research" in Guerrero organising an "interesting group of Mexicans and Uruguayans" (Garrone 2022) to which

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their brought their experience from the Geography Room. Those who remained in Uruguay relate some lasting international networking with: “Geographers from Bolivia, Argentina, Chile and colleagues from the exile—undertrack, due to the strict internal control” (Rita and Ligüera 2022). Pérez confirms that those who did not migrate kept cautious contacts with their exiled friends. Some of their comrades “were tortured” and, even beyond these dramatic cases: “We all suffered some consequences of repression ... and had to be careful to what we said in class” (Pérez 2022), although Pérez recalls that she lived far from the capital, where repression was less displayed.

“Precursor of critical geography” (Pesce 2014a, 399) Wettstein found sanctuary in Venezuela (Wettstein 2019), another hub for Latin American exiles where also Santos, who corresponded with Wettstein in those years (Santos 1978), had been welcomed several times (Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018). Wettstein continued to mobilise his transnational networks, publishing in French journals to confirm the diagnosis of “dependence” for Uruguayan economy, as: “Over 100 dollars that the country earns for its export, 97 come from agricultural products” (Wettstein 1974b, 86), which meant only exporting rough materials to the “developed” core of world economy. He likewise contributed to the 1977 *Antipode* special issue co-edited by Santos and Peet to give voice to “underdeveloped” countries. In his paper, Wettstein restated several of the arguments that he developed in Salto and Neuquén on the need of building specific concepts to understand geographies and landscapes of “dependent” countries rather than importing “Northern” theory, quoting among his references Galeano, Freire and Josué de Castro (Wettstein 1977).

Back to Brazil in 1977, Santos remained ostensibly tied to the definition of New Geography, as he titled *Por uma geografia nova* the book with which he launched the idea of critical geography in Brazil, only recently translated into English (Santos 2022). In the tribute book that Maria Adélia de Souza dedicated to Santos “Citizen of the World” in 1996, a special place was given to an interview to Santos that Wettstein realised when he was invited to USP in the early 1990s. The two veterans shared a critique of academic institutions as places, often dominated by market logics,

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where critical scholars encounter: “An irresolvable contradiction ... We should work outside university, because we cannot dilapidate the scarce time we have to defend ourselves from the attacks of mediocre people and from those who control academic powers” (Wettstein 1996, 477). Thus, they came back, at least ideally, to the original extra-academic inspiration of the earliest New Geography meetings that academic institutions repressed alongside the political ones.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that the early inspiration for Latin American ante-litteram critical and radical geographies was rather linked to the sector of secondary and popular education and to grassroots activism than to the very academic world. While there is consensus in considering these meetings as the earliest “embryo” of current EGAL conferences, the lesson that can be drawn from this story is about the need of consistently radicalising practices in addition to knowledge. That is, it is not only a matter of “theorising back”, but of understanding extra academic contexts such as grassroots movements and social struggles as key places for radical intellectual work, a task to which current critical and transnational tendencies in Latin American geographies are still committed.

From the standpoint of the history of geography, this work has confirmed the need for contextual and spatial-sensitive readings of the production of knowledge that consider networks and concrete circumstances with the aid of archives and direct witnesses. After all, we should take example from these geographers’ cosmopolite trajectories to foster multilingualism and real internationalisation in current critical and radical geographies.

Finally, it would be a mistake to cage “critical” and “radical” geography under strict ideological labels or political obedience (such as Marxism or any other close party belonging), as experiences such as New Geography were admittedly rather pragmatic than ideological. While being proudly politically committed and generally active outside the academy, these scholars proclaimed values

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of pluralism similar to those of current geographical scholarship committed to dialogue with grassroots and “socio-territorial” movements (Halvorsen, Fernandes and Torres 2019).

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