

## OBITUARY

### Geographers matter! Doreen Massey (1944–2016)

Doreen Barbara Massey was one of the few geographers whose work and reputation spanned the discipline globally and whose influence extended well beyond Geography's borders. In the 45 years following her first publication in 1971 she wrote and edited a number of highly influential books and wrote articles and book chapters that spanned economic, regional, urban, political, social and cultural geography; contributed to a number of key debates concerning uneven development, urbanization, globalization, localities, the conceptualization of place and space, and gender in social and economic processes and within the discipline; and introduced a number of key concepts, including 'spatial division of labour', 'progressive sense of place', 'power geometries' and 'space-time'. While her theoretical and empirical work was expansive it was centrally focused on the relationship between space, place, capital and power. The majority of her empirical work concentrated on the UK, but she also undertook research in Mexico, Nicaragua and South Africa. She firmly believed in applying her academic work in practice and was highly active in policy formulation, social movements and left wing politics. As all who met her will attest, Doreen was big hearted, generous, witty, enthusiastic, encouraging and principled. She also didn't mind a fight and could happily engage in a feisty debate. She was a passionate Liverpool fan and regularly attended games at Anfield and took delight in bird-watching.

Born in Manchester in 1944, Doreen grew up on the Wythenshawe council estate, one of the largest in Europe, located in the south west of the city. In 1963 she was awarded the Irene Shrigley Scholarship and attended St Hugh's College, Oxford University, graduating with a first-class degree in Geography and receiving the Special College Prize. From 1966 to 1968 she worked for AGB Research Ltd, a market research firm, in their computer department. In 1968 Doreen moved to the Centre for Environmental Studies (CES), an independent think-tank established by the second Harold Wilson government which focused on the planning and design of physical spaces. In 1971–1972 she used her sabbatical leave to undertake a Masters in Regional Science at the University of Pennsylvania. While working at CES during the 1970s Doreen lectured part-time in the Planning Department of the Polytechnic of Central London (1972–1976) and the Department of Geography at the London School of Economics (1976–1980). After the first Thatcher government terminated the funding of CES in 1979, she moved to LSE as a Social Science Research Council Industrial Location Research Fellow in 1980. In 1982 Doreen was appointed Professor of Human Geography at the Open University where she remained until she retired in 2009, serving as Head of Department from 1982 to 1993.

Doreen's initial research at CES concerned urban development models framed within a traditional regional science perspective. Early in her career, however, she embraced the Marxist ideas being developed within radical geography. She used these ideas throughout the 1970s to examine the regional restructuring of industry and employment in the UK, debunking aspatial, neo-classical accounts of industrial location, and to critique industrial location theory and its reliance on statistical techniques and naïve empiricism (Callard, 2004; Massey, 1973; Massey & Catalano, 1978; Massey & Meegan, 1978, 1979). In 1984 her book *The Spatial Division of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* was published. In this landmark text, Doreen argued that understanding patterns and processes of production and employment required an analysis of the spatial organization of the relations of production within a capitalist political

economy. However, rather than focusing exclusively on the general processes of capitalist accumulation she argued for the need to pay adequate attention to constitution of regionally differentiated places (Phelps, 2008).

Rather than rejecting an ideographic approach that concentrates on the supposed uniqueness of place in favour of a nomothetic approach that emphasizes structural processes, she sought to balance the two, recognizing that whilst there are general tendencies in the workings of capitalism how these play out locally is contingent, contextual and relational. She thus moved away from essentialist Marxist accounts of uneven development as advocated by David Harvey, Neil Smith and others (Phelps, 2008). It was this move that generated some criticism of her thesis. Importantly, however, the book opened up an alternative path for understanding the relational production of space and a key impact was the setting up of a major UK research programme, the Changing Urban and Regional System initiative, focused on locality studies and the relationship between global and local processes, generalization and specificity (Massey, 1991a). Doreen continued to work on the capitalist system, regional differences, urban systems and spatial inequalities throughout her career (e.g. Allen & Massey, 1988; Allen, Massey, & Cochrane, 1998; Amin, Massey, & Thrift, 2000, 2003; Massey, 2007; Massey & Allen, 1988; Massey, Quintas, & Wield, 1992), but after her move to the Open University her academic gaze started to widen.

As Callard (2004) notes, beyond her interest in economic, city and regional development, Doreen's research from the mid-1980s onwards can be broadly collected under three banners each of which had significant impacts on thinking and empirical research within social and cultural geography. First, she was a pioneer of feminist geography. On the one hand, she examined the role of gender in social and economic processes and how gender relations are central to the spatial organization of society (Massey, 1984, 1992a, 1995a; Massey & McDowell, 1984). On the other hand, she actively exposed the gender politics of Geography as a discipline and its empirical and theoretical work. This is most evident in her essay 'Flexible Sexism' (1991b), a critique of David Harvey's and Ed Soja's writings, in which she strongly argued against the subjugation of gender to class and the positioning of feminism as a local rather than general struggle. Her work both provided inspiration for the next generation of feminist geographers and essential theoretical referent points that guided subsequent research. In turn, feminist geographies have strongly influenced social and cultural geography more broadly inflecting conceptions of social relations, power and social/spatial justice. Some of her writings on gender were collected together in the book *Gender, Space and Place* (1994), presently her most cited work.

Second, there was a wide-ranging engagement with the theorization of place. Extending her relational thinking, in part as a response to the critique of *Spatial Divisions of Labour* but also as a response to Harvey's (1989) account of time-space compression in which he posited that the significance of place was being eroded by globalization, led to the notion of a 'progressive sense of place'. Places, she contended, are not simply bounded locales where people gather, nor are they being unproblematically eroded and rendered placeless by processes of globalization (1991c, 1993, 1995b). Instead, places are made up of flows and movements and the myriad interlinkages and interdependencies among places. They are simultaneously local and global, their social, cultural and economic relations stretched out across the globe, shaped by structural processes but retaining local particularities. She illustrated this with respect to Kilburn, a district in London in which she lived most of her life. Here, the sense of place is shaped by its culture, politics and history and in-migration from different nations, the mix of indigenous and international employers, and its diversity of shops and restaurants with their produce from around the world. The notion of a progressive sense of place gained much traction in social and cultural geography as it provided a multiscalar, relational means to understand the cultural complexity and emergent nature of places, situating locales and communities within globalizing processes while not being subjugated to them.

To this idea, she added the notion of 'power geometries' noting that places are made through power relations – not simply capital relations – which construct the rules and define boundaries (Massey, 1993). These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded. As such, the socio-spatial processes that help shape and define places do not operate evenly, with different social groups and individuals relatively positioned as a consequence. Within social geography in particular, the notion of power geometries has become an important way to frame the differential geographies of groups stratified by gender, race, disability, sexuality, religion and so on.

Third, there was an engagement with the concept of space and the promotion of a relational understanding of space. Initially, this was articulated through the notion of 'space-time' in which space and time are conceived as being inseparable (Massey, 1992b, 1999). Here, she argued that 'space and time are inextricably interwoven. It is not that we cannot make any distinction at all between them but that the distinction we do make needs to hold the two in tension' (1992b, p. 77). Her thinking was significantly extended in her landmark book *For Space* (2005), an impassioned plea for geographical thinking to be front-and-centre in the social sciences. In this text she championed three counter-propositions to the notion that space is the container in which everyday life takes place. First, space must be recognized 'as the product of interrelations, as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (p. 9). Second, space must be understood as a sphere of multiplicity in which distinct trajectories and heterogeneity co-exist. Third, space must be acknowledged to be always under construction; always in the process of being made. Recognized as active and heterogeneous, Doreen asserted that far from being inert and static, space becomes open to progressive politics that can change the ways in which it is imagined and produced (Anderson, 2008). Such thinking dovetailed with the performative and ontogenetic conceptions of space, underpinned by poststructural thinking, that were becoming common within social and cultural geography. At the same time it did not lose sight of the structural forces of capitalism, political economy, and power manifested in different ways shaping the conditions under which space is endlessly produced.

Doreen was committed to not just thinking about a progressive politics but also to trying to create and enact such politics. Across her entire career she was active in political work inside and outside the academy. From 1973 to 1979 she was a member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee, subcommittee on Town and Country Planning. From 1982 to 1987 she was director of the Greater London Enterprise Board. She was a long-time friend of Ken Livingstone and was an active advisor in his terms of office. She acted as an advisor to Hugo Chavez's government in Venezuela, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Syriza in Greece. She was a friend and contributor to countless activist groups in Britain and elsewhere. In 1995 she co-founded, along with Stuart Hall and Michael Rustin, 'Soundings', a journal of politics and culture, and regularly wrote political editorials, as well as pieces for other Left-wing magazines and journals such as *Marxism Today* and *New Left Review*. She was also a frequent media commentator seeking to enlighten the wider public about various topical issues. Her political commitment is enshrined in *Kilburn Manifesto*, a book that not only calls into question the neoliberal order but argues for radical alternatives (Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013). It is a rallying call for geographers to translate their empirical and theoretical work into politics and action.

The importance of Doreen's work is reflected in the many awards she received, including the Prix Vautrin Lud ('Nobel de Géographie', 1998), the Presidential Achievement Award of the Association of American Geographers (2014), the Anders Retzius Medal in Gold of the Swedish Society of Anthropologists and Geographers (2003), the Centenary Medal of Royal Scottish Geographical Society (2003), and the Victoria Medal of the Royal Geographical Society (1994). She was elected a fellow of The Academy of Social Sciences (1999), a fellow of The British Academy (2002), and a fellow of The Royal Society of Arts (2000), and received honorary doctorates from the University of Zurich (2013), Harokopio University (2012), Queen Mary University of London

(2010), University of Glasgow (2009), University of Edinburgh (2006) and the National University of Ireland (2006). A profile of her and her work was included in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004), and two of her books (*Spatial Divisions of Labour* and *For Space*) were included in the 26 books discussed in *Key Texts in Human Geography* (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2008). She turned down the award on an OBE.

Doreen's legacy is a rich set of empirical work, theoretical tools and powerful insights into the production of space and place. She will remain a role-model for geographers who not only want to study the world but to actively change it through enacting a progressive politics. Her work deeply influenced the thinking and praxes of social and cultural geography, particularly her feminist scholarship and her notions of a progressive sense of place and power geometries. More broadly, she was highly influential in getting geographers to more actively engage with social theory, but as importantly she encouraged the social sciences to recognize the role of space and place (Callard, 2004). Indeed, Doreen was a passionate advocate for taking space seriously and throughout her career she insisted that *Geography matters!* (Allen & Massey, 1984). And what Doreen Massey had to say about space and place will continue to matter. She will be sorely missed.

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