Ethnographies of Power


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In 2003, I was an undergraduate student in Gillian Hart’s large lecture course, DS100, at the time titled ‘History of Development and Underdevelopment’ (the course has since morphed into ‘Global Developments: Theory, History, Geography’). This was my first exposure to Hart’s concept of D/development, or the intertwined nature of the development of capitalism with ‘Development’ projects of intervention in the ‘Third World’. The US invasion of Iraq occurred while I was taking this class, the war in Afghanistan raged on, and the post-9/11 wars began expanding into today’s global geography of war and militarism. This chapter thinks with Hart through her concept of ‘big D’ and ‘little d’ D/development, which I have engaged with since 2003 to understand the weaponisation of D/development in the post-9/11 wars. Reflecting Hart’s writings on keeping ‘big D’ and ‘little d’ in tension with one another and understanding their situated practices, my ethnography of military training reveals how, far from their intention to strengthen military operations, privatised forms of militarised D/development introduce new tensions and contradictions into the terrain of global militarism. In contrast to what is often a popular and academic interpretation of military institutions as monolithic, this ethnographic approach reveals how changes in military policy come into conflict with aspects of military culture.
Concept and genealogy of D/development

Hart’s concepts are deeply entangled with the political-economic context in which she writes. The concept of ‘D/development’ grew out of the necessity to establish concepts adequate to the challenges of the moment in which she was working. In her 2009 *Antipode* article, ‘D/developments after the Meltdown’, Hart defines ‘big D’ Development as ‘the multiply scaled projects of intervention in the “Third World” that emerged in the context of decolonisation struggles and the Cold War. “Little d” development refers to the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven but spatially interconnected process of creation and destruction, dialectically interconnected with discourses and practices of Development’ (Hart 2009, 119). Yet the origins of the concept go back to Development debates in the 1990s, spawned by the demise of the Washington Consensus by the early 2000s. Hart (2001) notes the convergence of neo-liberal and post-Development critiques, both of which take aim at ‘big D’ Development, understood as a post-war project of international intervention in the ‘Third World’ (see Lal 1985; Sachs 1992). The notion of D/development as formed *both* through the development of capitalism *and* through post-war international interventions in the ‘Third World’ grew out of the need for a way out of what Hart calls ‘the intellectual and political cul de sac’ formed by responses to neo-liberal and post-Development critiques that invoke problematic conceptions of civil society. ‘Notably missing from these formulations – yet urgently needed – is attention to the multiply inflected capitalism that have gone into the making of globalization’ (Hart 2001, 651).

The concept shed light on the 2008 financial meltdown, offering a path beyond prevalent debates at the time as to ‘whether we now find ourselves in a post neoliberal era, and if so how to characterize it’ (Hart 2009, 118). Moving the debate beyond ‘an ideal-type (or, for that matter, yet another iteration of post-ist critique),’ Hart argues, ‘the imperative is for analyses that can illuminate the shifting relations of force in the present conjuncture – precisely because, as Gramsci points
out ... political dynamics can't be read off economic crises’ (118–119). With this Gramscian understanding of political economy in mind, the notion of D/development as always formed together through the interconnection of political-economic processes with policy interventions provides a framework to think through the ‘relations of force at various levels’ (Gramsci 1971, 184–185). The result is a conjunctural analysis of key turning points since the 1940s that sheds light on the post-2008 global financial crisis, in particular by making explicit the connections of shifts in Development policy to the development of capitalism.

Hart attributes Gramsci’s attention to the ‘relations of force’ as informing the concept of D/development. The concept brings together a Gramscian analysis with Karl Polanyi’s conception of capitalism’s double-movement (Polanyi [1944] 2001) ‘within an explicitly spatialized frame of understanding that owes a great deal to [Henri] Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) relational conceptions of the production of space’ (Hart 2009, 120). Polanyi’s influence is important here, as it distinguishes Hart’s D/development from Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton’s writings on development as an immanent process and as intentional practice. ‘Little d’ is not synonymous with Cowen and Shenton’s contention that development was an immanent process, distinct from intervention, ‘invented to deal with the problem of social disorder in nineteenth-century Europe through trusteeship’ (Cowen and Shenton 1996, 60). Rather, channelling Polanyi’s double-movement, intervention is a process internal to capitalism. Tensions contained within capitalism have shaped the need to constantly redefine official discourses and practices of ‘big D’ Development. In contrast to Cowen and Shenton’s emphasis on continuity of trusteeship over time, Hart emphasises instability and redefinition.

Geography – or, more accurately, attention to situated spatial practices – is also fundamental to the concept of D/development. Hart (2002) continues to establish this concept in relation to the interplay of political economy, culture and power. The concept of D/development turns on ‘conceptions of culture as practices of meaning-making
that are inextricably linked with situated material practices, the
collection of identities and relations of power in multiple, intercon-
ected arenas of everyday life’ (Hart 2002, 818; emphasis in original). If
culture, power and political economy are made through situated prac-
tices, then critical ethnography becomes the requisite methodology to
produce concepts that adequately contain the tensions and contradic-
tions of practice. Hart advances critical ethnography as a project of
“advancing from the abstract to the concrete” in the sense of building
crude concepts that are adequate to the historical and geographical
complexity with which they are seeking to grapple’ (Hart 2004, 97; see
also Hall 1974; Marx [1857] 1973). Building concrete concepts out of
critical ethnography is an explicitly spatial project in Hart’s formula-
tion, employing Doreen Massey’s (1994) sense of place as ‘nodal points
of connection in socially produced space’ (Hart 2004, 98).

In Hart’s undergraduate lecture course, ‘Global Developments:
Theory, History, Geography’, which must be considered part of her
intellectual contribution, she periodises D/development: the 1950s
and 1960s are defined by development economics, structuralism and
import substitution industrialisation (ISI); the 1970s by basic needs; the
1980s by the neo-liberal counter-revolution and structural adjustment;
and the 1990s by the rise and decline of the ‘Washington Consensus’.
Furthermore, D/development is highly geographical; different
moments in this periodisation are defined by different geographies –
for example, Latin America’s centrality to ISI. Individual but inter-
connected countries and regions reflect specific trajectories of ‘big D’
Development that depart from, yet also produce, the global geography
of Development. Recent iterations of Hart’s course include a section on
the ‘challenges of the present moment in a global conjunctural frame’,
which begins by locating the US in a global conjunctural frame and
examining militarism before and after 9/11. Hart identifies militarism
as central to the challenges of the current conjuncture, framed here as
Gramsci’s attention to ‘the relations of military forces, both technical
and “politico-military”’ that are linked with economic and political
relations (Hart 2009, 134). It is the current conjuncture of US militarism in relation to D/development to which I now turn.

The intertwined rise of militarised D/development and for-profit D/development contracting

On 26 October 2001, six weeks after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the US secretary of state and former chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Colin Powell, spoke at the National Foreign Policy Conference for Leaders of Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs). Praising NGOs’ work and committing to a supportive partnership with them, Powell remarked: ‘Just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there serving and sacrificing on the front lines of freedom … I am serious about making sure we have the best relationship with the NGOs who are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team’ (Powell 2001). Powell’s reference to NGOs as ‘force multipliers’ indicates the broader conscription of Development into the military’s arsenal, exemplified in military efforts to build schools, infrastructure and microenterprises in the so-called battle for hearts and minds in the Iraq and Afghanistan counter-insurgencies. A decade later, I spoke with a US army colonel who designed training programmes for soldiers specialising in civilian interaction in both counter-insurgency and humanitarian responses. Calling attention to the military’s increasing demand for troops specialising in civilian interaction, the officer commented: ‘In Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a period when we were more of an NGO with guns.’ These two remarks – one a civilian notion of NGOs as the military’s ‘force multiplier’, the other a military notion of itself as ‘an NGO with guns’ – capture the shifting relationship between militarism and D/development in relation to the ‘war on terror’.

I focus here on the role of for-profit Development companies that, since the return of counter-insurgency in military doctrine in the mid-2000s, have provided pre-deployment training in Development ‘best
practices’ to a variety of military audiences in the US. International development companies (IDCs) are a particular articulation of the development of capitalism that grew out of neo-liberalism. Militarised D/development has intensified a pre-existing trend towards for-profit IDCs, which now outpace the NGOs prominent in the remarks of Powell and the army officer in the contracts they win from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Security and development were closely tied to each other at the inception of USAID in 1961. A foreign service professional commented on the decade leading up to USAID’s establishment: ‘The State Department and Defense Department viewed economic assistance as an arm of military and political security’ (Essex 2013, 31). The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which established USAID, was framed as a weapon in ‘the battleground of freedom’ against Communist victory in the ‘Third World’ (36). The Act was also concerned with separating bundled economic and military assistance under the Marshall Plan. In light of the present merging of security and Development, it is possible to track from this originating moment how, administratively, military and Development assistance have been entwined, separated, then entwined again at various moments.

The neo-liberal counter-revolution of the 1970s and the associated privatisation of social services created an industry of for-profit contractors in the business of providing social services (Easterly 2001; Taylor 1997; Watts 1994). ‘Between 1977 and 1997 the number of for-profit providers of individual and family services, job training, vocational rehabilitation, child day-care, and residential care in the USA increased by 202 per cent’ (Frumkin 2002, 4). Some of the largest international development contractors in the US today got their start in this period providing contracted domestic social services, such as Creative Associates, or executing large public construction contracts, such as the Louis Berger Group (Frumkin 2002). Companies such as these honed their expertise at home, only to find expanded foreign markets in the years following the growth of USAID.
The end of the Cold War and neo-liberal austerity efforts to shrink state institutions at home saw the internal reform and restructuring of USAID in the 1990s. Even as USAID’s programmatic envelope expanded, its staff was reduced by 40 per cent between 1990 and 2008. This meant that fewer direct-hire staff had the responsibility of overseeing more and more money (Nagaraj 2015, 592). The agency cut its global staff between 1993 and 1997, from more than 11 000 to 7 600, with a growing number of positions being contract staff and foreign nationals hired abroad (Essex 2013, 93). Already entrenched in domestic and foreign-service provision, IDCs benefited greatly from these changes, as USAID shifted the responsibility of project implementation from direct employees to contractors. IDCs even absorbed former USAID employees during this period (Nagaraj 2015, 592). To give a sense of the scale of for-profit D/development contracting today, in 2010, USAID awarded contracts worth US$5.3 billion to private contractors, while it awarded a total of US$5.1 billion to non-profits, United Nations’ agencies and the World Bank (588). If Chemonics, one of the world’s largest IDCs, were a country, it would have been the third-largest recipient of USAID funding in the world in 2011, behind only Afghanistan and Haiti (Nagaraj 2015).

It is in this context of firmly entrenched IDCs that a series of post-9/11 institutional and financial shifts reformulated the relationship between militarism and D/development. In 2004, the State Department established the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilisation (now called the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilisation Operations). In 2005, USAID established a new Office of Military Affairs (now called the Office of Civilian–Military Cooperation) in order to coordinate the agency’s relationship to the Department of Defense. This new institution responded to the National Security Strategy’s demand that ‘development be a strong and equal partner with diplomacy and defense’ (USAID 2015). The new USAID office hosted military liaisons and embedded Development personnel at the Pentagon and six of the military’s geographical combatant commands. A large part of the office’s work involves the sort of training for
military audiences described below, as well as more recent iterations of ‘Development in Vulnerable Environments’ (USAID 2015). These new USAID and State Department institutions met policy demands for a ‘whole-of-government’ or ‘Three Ds’ approach to US foreign policy. During her tenure as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton gave a speech at the Center for Global Development, in which she spoke of the need to ‘elevate development and integrate it more closely with defense and diplomacy’, which she called a ‘Three Ds’ approach (Clinton 2010, 5). In a speech at Kansas State University in 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates employed similar rhetoric, reflecting that ‘one of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win’ and advocating for an increase in ‘civilian instruments of national security’ (Gates 2007).

New policy discourses and institutions emphasising the merging of Development and defence were accompanied by new financial relationships. In 2005, Congress provided the Department of Defense with the authority to transfer to the State Department up to US$100 million per fiscal year to fund small security and stabilisation activities implemented by the State Department and USAID (Serafino 2011). This blended Development/defence funding came to be known as the ‘1207 Fund’, since it was authorised under Section 1207 of the National Defense Authorization Act from 2006 to 2010. The funding was never intended to be permanent (it expired in 2010), but rather to temporarily fund the activities of the State Department’s new Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and activities coordinated with USAID. The authority fell under the Department of Defense because it was easier to obtain the funding from Congress (Perito 2008, 3). Yet the blending of Development and defence funding incited a great deal of concern at the time within Development institutions, especially among NGOs operating in the competitive contracting market. The 1207 programme meant that defence funding could essentially find its way into NGO programme budgets through opaque contracting vehicles.
A worker at one large humanitarian NGO I interviewed in 2009 described how it declined defence funding to support rural development work it was already doing in the Horn of Africa. An individual at another NGO interviewed the same year described how a long-standing rural economic development programme in West Africa had come to be funded by USAID’s Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which, together with the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT), constitute major integrated Development and defence initiatives in Africa. The ‘military-development corporations’ at the heart of Vijay Kumar Nagaraj’s ‘market-led development-security assemblage’ benefited from the 1207 programme. In Haiti, USAID contracted DynCorp using 1207 funds for a community policing programme (Becker 2011). Although the 1207 programme is no longer active, it does represent an important moment of militarised USAID contracting to both NGOs and IDCs.

Many of the new institutions of this era designed to integrate Development and defence fed into the mode of contracting that dominated USAID’s operations by the early 2000s. The established terrain of private contracting was also particularly amenable to a language of ‘stabilisation’ that in recent years has come to pervade Development discourse. The ways in which contract culture has already rendered aid ‘a techno-administrative matter’ predisposed private contractors to successfully obtain project funding for ‘stabilisation’ projects that became available in this period (Gulrajani 2011). A number of private contractors have thus emerged over the past decade to fill a niche market of ‘stabilisation’ work – Development projects that carry a security or military imperative and often directly involve military personnel. Large, established firms that have long dominated the government contracting landscape, such as Booz Allen Hamilton, have now begun to speak the language of ‘stability operations’ and a ‘whole-of-government approach’ (Sulek, Cowell and Delurey 2009). Newly established private companies have also appeared – for instance, the McKellar Corporation,
established in 2006 by a retired military officer to provide translation, civilian role-players and staff for military trainings and simulations.

The firm I refer to below as ‘Stability Inc.’ is part of this subset of IDCs that have come to specialise in merged military/Development ‘stability’ operations.\(^1\) During the period of my research, Stability Inc. was contracted by USAID to provide military audiences with training in the District Stability Framework (DSF), an instructional framework that repurposed Development ‘best practices’ for military operations. At that time, the DSF had become integrated into many pre-deployment trainings, particularly among the Marines, and was mandated for all US government field positions in Afghanistan. Contractors held up the Development framework as more ‘sophisticated’, ‘academic’ and ‘scientific’ than the initial first wave of militarised Development articulated as ‘winning hearts and minds’.

‘Critical ethnographies’ of military D/development contractors

I shadowed Stability Inc. contractors between 2010 and 2012 as they travelled to five different military bases across the US. During one of these observations, I had accompanied the contractors to a large military base in a rural part of the Midwest, where they were to provide training in the DSF to the military component of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) as part of their larger pre-deployment training. The Navy captain in charge of the training introduced Dave, one of the contractors, as providing the trainees with a tactical toolkit that ‘operationalised’ the counter-insurgency theory they had learned in the class so far. Dave took over the podium from the captain and commented to the class that he had heard them that morning talking about targeting: ‘Targeting isn’t just about who you are seeing through the sight of your rifle. It can be a 14-year-old Afghan girl. Or a tribal shura [council],’ invoking what the counter-insurgency manual refers to as a ‘population-centric approach’. Dave then explained how he had
worked as a civilian on a PRT in Iraq, where his team had spent large sums of money without being able to point to concrete results of their expenditure. ‘How do you figure out what you should be targeting and how you are going to have an effect on that target?’ he rhetorically asked the class, framing his training as a response to the failures of ‘winning hearts and minds’.

Dave repeated the targeting metaphor, urging the class to think of the DSF toolkit as ‘non-kinetic rounds you’re sending downrange’. He began to flash a series of PowerPoint slides corresponding to each section of the DSF on two large canvas screens hovering above the podium. The first section, ‘situational awareness’, adopted military language, techniques and acronyms to guide the gathering of physical and cultural information in a local area. This section included a matrix organised by the acronyms PMESII (political, military, economic, social, information and infrastructure) and ASCOPE (areas, structures, capabilities, organisations, people and events). The acronyms and matrix were adopted from other military trainings, presenting trainees with familiar language.

Continuing through the four steps of the DSF, Dave used more weapons metaphors to explain how measuring the attitudes of the local population with the Tactical Conflict Survey would allow them to ‘adjust fire’. The second step of the DSF, ‘analysis’, used a series of matrices allowing the user to prioritise the local population’s grievances. This section emphasised the difference between ‘needs’ and ‘priority grievances’. Dave warned the soldiers, ‘Don’t get dragged into a discussion about wants and needs. Afghans have so many needs. You’ll never be able to meet all of them.’ Instead, he emphasised identifying a ‘priority grievance’ (a need much of the population agrees on) that is also a key ‘source of instability’ (SOI). The second step of the DSF was supposed to help trainees make the distinction between a ‘source of instability’ versus ‘wants and needs’.

After a short break, another trainer – Nancy – continued to instruct the class on the third and fourth steps of the DSF. She explained how the
third step, ‘project design’, involved evaluating potential activities that address the ‘systemic causes of the SOI’ identified in the previous step. The potential projects are evaluated in a matrix that asks whether they meet the framework’s ‘stability criteria’, which are defined according to a series of questions about whether the proposed activity increases support for a legitimate government, decreases support for ‘malign actors’ and increases ‘societal capacity and capability’. Another matrix evaluates potential activities according to USAID’s Development ‘best practices’ design principles. The final step, ‘monitoring and evaluation’, combines donor-centric language with counter-insurgency principles in order to evaluate how the chosen activity has improved ‘stability’.

Initially, in the classroom portion of the course, many students appeared bored, their eyes glazing over or scrolling down smartphone screens while countless PowerPoint slides clicked by. Others expressed confusion at the difference between their previous training to, in the words of one security officer, ‘do x, y, and z. Then it’s done’, whereas in this training, ‘they’re saying sometimes do x, but other times do y’. In addition to the PRT training discussed here, I also observed Marine and army civil affairs qualification courses on two different US military bases. Here, too, the shift in emphasis was troubling for some of the participants. In the course operated by the Marine Corps, an officer explained that his prior training in bomb disposal was ‘there’s an IED [improvised explosive device]. We have to dispose of it.’ But now he was being asked to think: ‘There’s an IED. I wonder what caused him to stop farming and dig that hole.’ In the Marine Corps, which had its own distinct training structure, apart from both the PRTs and the larger army, a number of personnel had been involuntarily reassigned from ‘kinetic’ (violent) specialisations, such as infantry and artillery, to ‘non-kinetic’ specialisations, such as civil affairs – a specialisation focusing on military interaction with the civilian populace.

The Stability Operations Field Manual emphasises the importance of civil affairs personnel, particularly in their capacity to ‘provide unique area and linguistic orientation, cultural astuteness, advisory
capabilities, and civilian professional skills’ (United States Army 2009, 78). The trainees cited above, who commented on the multiple and conflicting roles they were now expected to play, also reflected the broader reclassification of personnel from infantry and artillery to civil affairs. The rise of this civilian-centric specialisation took place in relation to the release of military doctrine on counter-insurgency and stabilisation. Until civil affairs became part of special operations in 1987, the specialisation was considered, in the words of one defence analyst, a ‘dead end career field’, ‘backwater’ or ‘dumping ground’ (Sisk 2009, 48). The specialisation gained favour through its association with special operations, yet had no active duty branch until 2006, the same year the Counterinsurgency Field Manual was publicly released (United States Army and Marine Corps 2007).

As part of my research on how the army learned the DSF, I arranged to meet with an officer who administered the army’s civil affairs qualification course. To get to a group of modular buildings housing his office, I drove through an on-base residential development of brick houses, many decorated for Halloween or sporting the flag of a favourite football team, each with a modest suburban yard. At his office on another section of the base, we sat at a table with a glass top covering at least 100 ‘challenge coins’ bearing the insignia of different military organisations, services and branches. The colonel shared his insight that, more broadly than the particular training he was involved in, ‘COIN [counter-insurgency] brought a human dimension back into the conduct of military operations’. In contrast to the Marine Corps training I had observed earlier that year, which lasted five weeks and contained a number of alienated, angry Marines who had been involuntarily assigned to the classification course, the army training ran for 17 weeks, included an intensive screening process and drew from higher-ranking enlisted soldiers, albeit with infantry (the largest branch of the army) still heavily represented. Having recently interacted with a number of Marines who emphasised the contradictions of performing civil affairs, I was struck not so much by army officers’ emphasis on
screening out students whose ‘kinetic’ tendencies might interfere with their ability to interact with civilians (although this was also a concern), but rather their emphasis on eliminating soldiers who think ‘this is the great American giveaway’. In other words, this particular branch of the army sought to find soldiers who understood, in the words of one officer, ‘the national security imperative’ for Development activities. In this most intensive, professionalised iteration of civil affairs training, the notion of weaponising Development as precisely as possible, in order to fulfil a specific military objective, came across most clearly. The army officer’s comment quoted at the beginning of this section – ‘in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a period when we were more of an NGO with guns’ – was made in the context of explaining how his training programme had evolved into a more precise targeting of ‘stabilisation’ objectives, as distinct from the work of an NGO.

Soldiers and Marines reclassified to civil affairs commented on their ambiguous impressions of training exercises that were intended to identify a village’s ‘source of instability’ very precisely. Some of this ambiguity arose from questions the DSF required soldiers to ask villagers, which could elicit responses that the military could do nothing about. For instance, the security officer for a PRT who talked about ‘doing x and y’ compared the survey to asking someone if they were thirsty, then saying, ‘That’s nice, but I’m not going to do anything about it myself. Who do you think could solve your thirst?’ He feared alienating local populations by raising their grievances without being able to resolve them.

Other trainees were concerned that the DSF was similar enough to ‘human intelligence’ tools that they could be mistaken for intelligence collectors. At the PRT training, a team discussed how the teams in Afghanistan they were about to replace were using a different framework to collect information about the local area. In between filling out parts of the SOI analysis matrix during one of the vignette activities, one team described how they had just been briefed on a number of projects
they would inherit as soon as they arrived in Afghanistan, including building an orphanage, a courthouse and a bridge. They would not have time to fill in all the charts from this training.

One of the most striking responses to the DSF material was that it conflicted with other aspects of how soldiers understood their mission. Trainees often expressed this conflict through anger and alienation. Such expressions were most extreme in the Marine training I observed, but also erupted from time to time in army and PRT training. For instance, in a PRT training, when Nancy handed out the SOI analysis matrix and told the class they would have 40 minutes to fill it in, several soldiers sighed and muttered under their breath, while another held up the case study and exclaimed: ‘This paper. I would be pissed [angry] to walk into a situation with this information.’ In a different Marine training focused on humanitarian response, in the middle of filling out a matrix for a simulated flood response, one trainee burst out, ‘I hate this fucking shit. I’d rather get shot at any fucking day.’ To which his neighbour replied: ‘I’d much rather be kicking in doors, blowin’ up something’, evoking laughter from another member of the team, who remarked that ‘the good days are gone’.

Such frustrated, alienated responses to training came from many places. Friction also arose through the different training and mission of the security force of a PRT versus the staff component, which brought diplomatic, agricultural, medical and engineering expertise to the ‘stabilisation’ aspect of their mission. Each specific branch and military team had its own distinct set of reasons as to why trainees reacted in the way they did to the material, pointing to the necessity of deconstructing ‘the military’ into its varied parts. Although this variation cannot be collapsed into a singular reasoning, the lived experience of training does point to the disjuncture between the policy and practice of militarised Development. It also points to the contradictions of ‘stabilisation’, both as a concept that is sold by private contractors and as a lived practice of military learning.
Concluding analysis

The ethnography of D/development contractors shows how the incorporation of Development ‘best practices’ into military training introduced tensions and contradictions into military settings. The short ethnographic vignette in this chapter shows how soldiers found that the material conflicted with other dimensions of their training. I have shown elsewhere the multidimensionality of this soldier resistance to becoming ‘armed social workers’ (Greenburg 2017a, 2017b, 2018, forthcoming). For our purposes, critical ethnography sheds light on how D/development is produced through situated practices that are both material and meaningful (Hart 2002, 818). Military training is a site at which military meanings of culture and power are being produced. In particular, the sorts of training explored here have sparked conflicts within military learning environments: between military personnel over whether Development would help or hinder their efforts in the field; and between contractors who believed in the material despite its shortcomings and military personnel who were often quietly dubious of training material and sometimes angry and alienated by it. In other contexts, militarised D/development has changed gendered meanings of military labour, highlighting what I have called a ‘military femininity’ that upholds gender essentialisms such as domesticity and motherhood at the same time as promoting women’s role in combat (Greenburg 2017a).

The concept of D/development insists on the mutual production of Development policies and practices through the development of capitalism. I have focused in this chapter on for-profit IDCs as a particular articulation of the development of capitalism within the Development industry. Hart’s concept of D/development provides a framework for understanding how for-profit IDCs came to dominate the terrain of Development contracting in the years leading up to a pervasive language of ‘stabilisation’ in military and Development discourses and practices.
The ‘techno-administrative’ character of aid under contract is reflected in the technical language of the DSF (Gulrajani 2011). Articulations of ‘stabilisation’ such as the DSF flowed easily into the steady stream of USAID contracts to IDCs, intensifying further the political-economic dominance of private Development contracting.

Following Trump-era budget cuts to US foreign aid and diplomacy alongside the Heritage Foundation-backed increase to the Pentagon’s budget, the terrain of militarised D/development is today changing again. A common critique of the proposed increase in US military spending has been to uphold the value of Development for security objectives. A 2017 Politico article penned by retired Navy Admiral Mike Mullen and retired Marine General James Jones laments cuts to USAID and State Department budgets, proclaiming, ‘Our experience has also taught us that not all foreign crises are solved on the battlefield; in the 21st century, weapons and war fighters alone are insufficient to keep America secure. That’s why we support a robust development budget to advance our national security objectives’ (Mullen and Jones 2017).

Inserting militarism into a periodisation of D/development provides a sobering antidote to promotions of securitised Development that are likely to become even more amplified under President Joe Biden. The framework of D/development serves as a useful reminder to keep the development of capitalism tied to analyses of Development projects as we grapple with the challenges of the present conjuncture. Likewise, the concept reminds us, calling on Gramsci, that ‘political dynamics can’t be read off economic crises’, offering critical ethnography as a way to create concepts adequate to concrete political circumstances (Hart 2009, 119).

NOTES

This article contains a substantially revised section of my article ‘Selling Stabilization: Anxious Practices of Militarized Development Contracting’ (Greenburg 2017b).
‘Stability Inc.’ and the names of individual contractors in this chapter are pseudonyms.

A ‘challenge coin’ is a small coin or medallion bearing the insignia of a military organisation. They are often given to service members by high-ranking officers to commemorate an accomplishment. Historically, they acted as evidence of one’s allegiance; however, they are today more frequently exchanged among members of the military and collected as memorabilia.

For a fuller analysis of where this expletive-laden humour, alienation and masculinised violence comes from, and what it produces, see Greenburg (forthcoming).

REFERENCES


