## Part VI Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies

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## Chapter 29

# **Imperial Geographies**

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## Introduction

Wherever we look in the current annals of geography – in geography books, journals, postgraduate projects, and teaching curricula – we find palpable evidence of a postcolonial critical spirit. This spirit is perhaps most evident in a recent range of work on geography's historical ties with empire. But we find it more broadly in geographers' critical embrace of the postcolonial world in which they work – a world, Edward Said (2001: 65) has remarked, in which the white-male-Eurocentric intellectual establishment has been beset by "the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies and currents of our times." These diverse 'postcolonial' energies and currents have made western scholars more sensitive to other voices and claims to difference, made work on the imperial/colonial past a highly marketable critical product, and made an academic home for themselves in the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies. This chapter sketches their impact on geography. It considers aspects of the recent 'postcolonial turn' in geographical inquiry. What happens when a discipline like geography starts to take its imperial heritage into account? And how have geographers wrestled with the postcolonial question of what it means to work 'after empire' and 'in the knowledge of' colonialism?

The following overview is inevitably partial and provisional. The geographical literature on questions of colonialism and postcolonialism is now enormous, and there is no consensus about the appropriate aims and methods of postcolonial analysis in geography or any other discipline. The chapter focuses on a body of geographical research that is ostensibly concerned with the imperial/colonial past, and on a limited set of postcolonial ideas (largely those that have had the most direct bearing on geographers' work).<sup>1</sup> I will start by situating geographers' work in an encompassing intellectual context and highlighting postcolonialism's trademark concern with the relations between culture and power, and then outline how work on the historical and cultural geographies of colonialism and empire has developed over the last 10 years.<sup>2</sup> I try to capture the eclecticism of research in this fast-growing area of geographical inquiry and guide the reader to a representative range of work. But I also tease out a number of distinctive themes, orientations, and debates in the

geographical literature, and offer a partial evaluation at the end of the ways in which geographers' work can be called 'postcolonial.'

## Postcolonialism and Culture

Postcolonialism can be characterized as an 'ameliorative' and 'therapeutic' project that is concerned with the impact of colonialism on colonizing and colonized peoples and places, and reexamines imperial/colonial history in the light of contemporary realities and especially the predicaments of decolonization (see Gandhi 1998: 1–15; Gregory 2000a). It is a hybrid and heterogeneous project – not least because it incorporates work from a wide range of disciplines and theoretical positions - giving us more differentiated and contested pictures of the making of modernity and the west. For some, the critical value of postcolonialism lies in its disclosure that colonization is a constitutive rather than tangential feature of western culture (see Hall 1996: 246). For others, its value lies in its attempt to question the postcolonial desire to forget the past and the west, to come to terms with the material legacies and psychological scars of colonialism, and to find new ways of talking about cultural difference (see Brennan 1997; Fanon 1963; Nandy 1983). Postcolonial thinkers and scholars have sought to debunk Eurocentric and historicist schemes of thought that configure the west as the self-contained fount of modernity and sovereign subject/center of world history. They point to the mutual (albeit asymmetrical and hierarchical) constitution of metropole and colony, and seek to critically revise understanding of the west (and historically Europe) in such a way that the Other can be treated as a subject rather than object of knowledge (see Blaut 1993; Hall 2000; Pratt 1992; Young 1991). But postcolonialism does not simply amount to an attack on western thought and the racism explicit in imperial/colonial projects and implicit in the current practices of western governments, corporations, and the media. It also extends a long history of anticolonial thought and activism, and is characterized by a new critical vigilance towards the successes and failures of anticolonialism before and after independence (see Young 2001). Postcolonial thinkers have been critical of the postindependence search for national and cultural origins and identities that are untainted by the experience of colonization. They insist that we will not find a critical position from outside of the historical configurations of colonialism and modernity from which a postcolonial society, discipline, or new global order will naturally arise (see Chatteriee 1999; Prakash 1999). As Gyan Prakash (1996: 189) insists, postcolonial projects can only work "in medias res" from inside a story about colonialism that has not ended.

Postcolonialism imbues 'culture' with special significance. The momentum of western power is now deemed to lie as much in the 'cultures of imperialism and colonialism' – in language and knowledge, texts and discourses, images and representations, and the iconography of power – as in the political economy of imperial expansion and colonial incursion. There is no consensus about the conception of culture that shapes or best suits postcolonialism, largely, perhaps, because it is recognized that colonization set in train both a complex intertwining of communities, histories, places and geographies, and a long global history of conflictual cultural interaction. But one thing is clear: that we should resist totalizing and superorganic views of culture that cocoon 'the cultural' from other dimensions of human dis-

course. Rather, culture is taken to be an intrinsic and relational dimension of identity and difference, and a concept that focuses our critical attention on the uneven and unequal production and circulation of meaning. As Arjun Appadurai (1996: 13) suggests, culture is "a pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity." Or as Derek Gregory (2001a: 130) notes, culture is seen "a series of representations, practices and performances that enter fully into the *constitution* of the world."

Postcolonialism's characteristic cultural emphases reflect its disciplinary origins in the fields of literary and cultural studies, and anthropology. More profoundly, however, this recourse to culture stems from the recognition that the break up of European colonial empires did not place decolonized nations on an equal cultural footing with the west. Western dominance and hegemony changed but continued. Political decolonization needed to be followed by a process of cultural and intellectual decolonization both inside and outside the west (see Pieterse & Parekh 1995). There needed to be a decolonization of thought and knowledge, and as Robert Young (2001: 65) notes, this necessarily involved western academic disciplines and "a decentring of the intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Europe, the critique of Eurocentrism." Postcolonialism seeks to undo what Ranajit Guha (1996: ix) has called the "government of colonialist knowledge" that has outlived empire and now infuses postcolonial politics. Postcolonialism is thus centrally concerned with the means by which the west arrogated to itself the authority to grant (and deny) cultural respect to others, and to decide on what counts as truth and knowledge (and what does not) (Seshadri-Crooks 1995). Or as one influential postcolonial thinker, Homi Bhabha (1994: 239) puts it, "the question of ethical and cultural judgement, central to the processes of subject formation and the objectification of social knowledge, is challenged at its 'cognitivist' core."

One crucial postcolonial tactic has been to recover and challenge the ways in which western dominance has revolved around binary (essentialist, dichotomous, and exclusionary) understandings of identity and difference. There has been a flood of postcolonial work on the binaries of center and periphery, civilization and savagery, colonizer and colonized, modernity and tradition, and so on, that drew material and imaginative lines of difference between colonizing and colonized cultures, and set peoples and places apart. Work in this direction received a decisive impetus from the writings of Frantz Fanon (1963: 37), who characterized colonialism as "a world divided into compartments," and latterly from Edward Said's Orientalism (1978), which examines how the Europe stereotyped the Orient as its 'inferior' and eternal Other, and emphasizes the west's propensity to demean and dominate the Other through language and knowledge. For many the power of Said's analysis lay in his representation of the Orient as a sort of 'distorting mirror' in which Europe defined and championed itself (Washbrook 1999: 597), and his account of the object- and reality-constituting power of discourse (a term he borrowed from Foucault). Orientalism inspired a new generation of scholars to examine how imperialism hinged on the production and codification of knowledge about different peoples and places, and on discursive strategies of cultural projection, incorporation, debasement and erasure (see Brennan 2000; Prakash 1994; Walia 2001). Indeed, the term postcolonialism is commonly associated with the critical analysis of colonial discourses - with the idea that imperialism works as a discourse of domination, and that colonialism works as a system of 'epistemic violence' (see Childs & Williams 1997). But Said's influence does not end here. Geographers have been particularly drawn to his acutely spatial sensibilities and the spatial turn he has nurtured in postcolonial inquiry – to his use of the term "imaginative geography" to capture the dichotomizing operations of colonial discourse, and his definition of imperialism as an incessant "struggle over geography" (Said 1993: 7; also see Gregory 1995; Jarosz 1992).

Critical energies have been focused on the universal-stable-immutable and diverse-precarious-contingent character of colonial discourses, and how postcolonial thinkers and scholars position themselves in relation to these poles of interpretation. Thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (1999) have heightened critical awareness of the ambivalences and contradictions inherent in the colonial psyche and the subject positions authored by colonialism. Nicholas Thomas's Colonialism's Culture (1994) is another important reference, in part because of the complaints that the book airs about postcolonialism. Thomas complains that postcolonial theory and scholarship fixates on the west, the agency (and anxieties) of the colonizer, and the analysis of texts; that it tends to overgeneralize about colonial discourse and 'the' colonial condition; and that it is much too tightly focused on the colonial experience of particular parts of the world (India looms large in much postcolonial theory). This body of theory is ill-equipped to identify the specific sources of power in different colonial contexts because it is overcommitted to the configuration of colonialism as a transhistorical totality, and it tends to treat colonial discourse as "impervious to active marking and reformulation by the 'Other.'" Thomas sees colonialism as grounded, localized and partial yet encompassed by more widely held and enduring ideas and systems of representation (Thomas 1994: 2-4, 105-6). He captures a set of questions and concerns that have come to haunt the field of postcolonial studies (see e.g. Parry 1997; Bhabha 1994: 21-3; Spivak 1999). Postcolonialism runs a fine line between subverting and aggrandizing the grip of the colonial past on the present by placing colonialism too securely in the past or placing the colonial past too firmly in the present. As Prakash (1994: 1476) insists, we should acknowledge that postcolonialism's "critical apparatus does not enjoy a panoptic distance from colonial history but exists as an aftermath ... [and] inhabits the structures of western domination that it seeks to undo."

The geographical literature to which we will now turn has developed in critical dialogue with these postcolonial agendas and concerns. We can find in geographers' work a similar engagement with questions of western intellectual sovereignty and colonial discourse, and a similar concern with the issues that Thomas raises. Yet different disciplines were not implicated in empire in the same way and do not have identical postcolonial motives and concerns. Geographers have tailored postcolonialism to their own interests and ends.

## The Return of Empire to Geography

Geographers have a longstanding critical interest in questions of imperialism and colonialism (see e.g. Sauer 1938), but geographical research on such questions started to gain new intellectual momentum in the late 1980s through revisionist

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work on the history of geography and wider theoretical surveys of the discipline. On the one hand, there emerged a new historiographical literature that treated geography as a historically contingent, socially constructed, and power-laden set of concepts, knowledges, and practices rather than as an immutable, autonomous or impartial knowledge domain and field of study. On the other hand, postcolonial theory, and its complex articulation with Marxism, feminism, postructuralism, postmodernism, and cultural studies, was used to raise important questions about what constituted a 'critical' human geography.

Some geographers sought to show that geography has long been a plural and contested discipline and discourse, and started to reroute the history of the subject through the power-laden context of empire. In his monumental study, The Geographical Tradition (1992: 352–8), David Livingstone argued that geography has meant "different things to different people at different times and in different places," and that it "has frequently cast itself as the aide-de-camp to militarism and imperialism." What Felix Driver (1992) dubbed "geography's empire" can be traced back to the fifteenth-century origins of European overseas expansion, and reached its climax at the end of the nineteenth century, when geography came into professional existence in tandem with the promulgation of imperialism as a 'civilizing mission.' This recourse to geography's imperial past did not just amount to a process of historical retrieval that would keep the discipline's imbroglio with empire at a comfortable distance from the present. From the start, geographers aimed to politicize as well as pluralize their understandings of 'the' geographical tradition. Driver (1992: 26), for instance, surmised that "the writings of our predecessors were so saturated with colonial and imperial themes that to problematize their role is to challenge the status of the modern discipline," and suggested that this was precisely what geographers needed to do if they were "to exploit present intellectual and political opportunities." He was referring to the critical opportunities opened up by Said's work, and that of other postcolonial scholars who paid attention to issues of geography and spatiality (e.g. Carter 1987; Mitchell 1988).

Other geographers became mindful of the contemporary theoretical implications of postcolonialism. There were pleas for geographers to see themselves as "situated actors engaged in the political work of representation and the production of knowledge" (Katz 1992: 496), to attend to their discipline's protocols of inclusion and exclusion (Rose 1995), and to "learn from other regions" (Slater 1992). Such pleas to rework - or decenter - geography's conventional 'maps of meaning' were wrapped up with the wider formation of the 'new cultural geography' within British and North American geography, and its concern with identity politics and placebased imaginations and practices. And postcolonialism can be seen as part of what Livingstone (2000a: 7) has described as a more general - postfoundationalist -"retaliation of the situated" against western protocols of science and objective knowledge that beset the western academy. But it was postcolonial theory that encouraged geographers to highlight the issue of geography's Eurocentric moorings. Gregory (1994: 165-203), for example, pointed to the incredible arrogance built into the idea that geography finds its raison d'être in the study of the variable character of the earth's surface, and insisted that geographers are the "creatures and creators of situated knowledges." Geographers, he noted, knew remarkably little about large parts of the earth, studied the world according to the mensural standards of the west, and blithely assumed that their models could be freely exported overseas with little modification (also see Gregory 1998). Postcolonial theory also helped geographers to see that some of their discipline's founding and characteristic practices – exploration, mapping, surveying, landscape reconnaissance, and spatial classification and planning – had been placed at the service of empire and honed in colonial contexts.

In these theoretical attempts to come to terms with the discipline's history, the imperial/colonial past was not simply construed as a revamped site of substantive investigation. A critical focus on geography's imperial habits of mind and colonizing gestures was also deemed to be a theoretical necessity. The recognition that colonialism casts a long shadow over geography's intellectual heritage - with some of the leading lights in the discipline's cognitive and institutional development (for example, Humboldt and Mackinder) holding the imperial torch - raised acutely epistemological questions about the nature and critical purpose of geographical inquiry. And as Jonathan Crush (1994) diagnosed, it was by no means clear what an alternative postcolonial geography might look like. If geography is a quintessentially Eurocentric and colonizing science, then would not the creation of a 'postcolonial' geography be an ironic - and perhaps even self-defeating - gesture? Would it needlessly refocus attention on the bumptious and aggressive aspects of geography's past - on geographical projects and practices that geographers no longer found acceptable, or on what many had simply forgotten about (see Barnett 1995)? Was work on geography's past that found its critical feet by dredging up onerous representations of foreign peoples and places meant to constitute some sort of enlightenment for the discipline? Were geographers documenting an injurious disciplinary past in order to demonstrate that 'we' now do things that are less harmful to others? Such questions have made 'the return of empire' of geography a complex and vexed affair.

Geographical research on the imperial/colonial past has proceeded apace from these kinds of critical coordinates, and we now have an expansive field of study. To list just 9 of the most prominent streams of research (though not in any order of importance), there have been surges of work on: (i) the 'imaginative geographies' and 'spaces of knowledge' that shaped colonialism and empire (e.g. Driver & Yeoh 2000; Livingstone 2002); (ii) the spatial construction of imperial/colonial subjectivities (e.g. Blunt 1994; Kearns 1997); (iii) imperial and colonial cities (Driver & Gilbert 1999; Yeoh 1996); (iv) how metropolitan and colonial spaces and landscapes were gendered, sexualized and racialized (e.g. Blunt & Rose 1994; Phillips 1997); (v) the links between cartography and empire (e.g. Edney 1997; Clayton 2000b); (vi) processes of environmental change in colonial settings, and the colonial production of nature (e.g. Head 2000; Gregory 2002); (vii) the articulation of global imperial networks and local colonial geographies (e.g. Lester 2001); (viii) questions of travel and transculturation (e.g. Duncan & Gregory 1999; McEwan 1998, 2000); and (ix) the making of regional colonial geographies and their relations with the present (e.g. Harris 1997; Morin & Berg 2001). This prodigious literature is not easily reviewed, and in some ways resists synthesis. Its substantive eclecticism mirrors the historical-geographical diversity of colonialism and empire, and its conceptual pluralism bears witness to postcolonialism's conceptual heterogeneity. However, it is possible to identify some distinct cleavages, and stock themes and problems, in the literature. In what follows, I will draw a distinction between a body of work that has a metropolitan and/or disciplinary focus and a more diffuse literature that deals with the colonial margins of empire – ultimately (though at the risk of great oversimplification) a distinction between work on imperialism and work on colonialism (see note 2). I will also remark on geographers' fraught attempts to decenter and decolonize their discipline, and attend to 'other' voices.

## 'Geography's Empire'

Over the last 10 years historical-cultural work on the links between geography and empire has grown and become one the chief manifestations of postcolonialism in the discipline. Landmark collections such as *Geography and Empire* (Godlewska & Smith 1994) and *Geography and Imperialism* (Bell, Butlin, & Heffernan 1995), and a gamut of articles and monographs, explore the imperial/colonial roles played by diverse producers and arbiters of geographical knowledge. The work of explorers, cartographers, surveyors, field scientists, geographical societies and professional geographers, which has long played a prominent role in narratives of the history of the discipline, have all been brought under the critical spotlight (see e.g. Bowd & Clayton 2003; Ryan 1995; Staum 2000; Withers 1995). So too have the geographical images, knowledges, and practices generated by a much wider range of agents, texts, and institutions of empire – artists, photographers, colonial administrators, merchant adventurers, geography school projects, adventure fiction, museums and exhibitions (see e.g. Braun 2002; Maddrell 1998; Myers 1998; Ogborn 2002; Ploszajska 1996; Phillips 1997; Ryan 1997).

Geographical discourses and practices that were once viewed as enlightened and disinterested are now seen as tools of material and intellectual dispossession, and stories of the west's triumphal and uncontested passage around the world are now told as halting and sometimes haunting tales of human struggle. Many geographers have used geographers' involvement in empire to remind us that 'geography' literally means 'earth-writing.' Special attention has been drawn to the images of 'backward' and 'pristine' space awaiting the arrival of modernity and the transformative hand of the west that pervade the intertwined 'earth-writing' projects of geography and imperialism. Great interest has also been shown in the 'spaces of knowledge' (e.g. the field and the study) in which imperial/colonial meanings were molded and disseminated. Geographers stress the practical and embodied nature of geography's empire. Their critical narratives point up the effort it took to draw geographical order out of chaos - to travel, collect, map, represent, govern, survive, and draw material and imaginative lines on the ground that both separated 'us' from 'them' and brought different peoples into anxious proximity (see Gregory 2000b). To resort to postcolonial lingo, this range of work seeks to expose and challenge the ways in which geography arrogated to itself the power to create and sustain some geographical knowledges and truths, and denigrate and block the emergence of other stories (see Withers 1999; Heffernan 2001).

Livingstone (1991, 1999, 2002), for example, discusses the formation of "moral geographies" of racial superiority that revolved around scientific observations and truth claims about the links between climate, virtue, and social development. Climate, particularly, he argues "became an exploitable hermeneutic resource to

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make sense of cultural difference and to project moral categories onto global space," with the temperate world being exalted over the tropical world (Livingstone 2000b: 93). In an allied vein, Matthew Edney (1997: 14–35) explores how 'The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India' (started in 1817) was central to the creation of "a conceptual image [of India and the British Empire] that consciously set the Europeans apart from the Indians they ruled." India was rendered as a bounded and unified cartographic entity that was cast in the image of western science, and that stood above 'fragmentary' and 'irrational' Indian knowledges of the land. And in an avowedly postcolonial reading of the "Africanist discourse" of the London-based Royal Geographical Society (RGS) during the mid-nineteenth century, Clive Barnett (1998: 244–5) argues that

The actual conditions of cross-cultural contact upon which the production of nineteenthcentury geographical knowledge depended are retrospectively rewritten [for metropolitan audiences] to present ['racially unmarked'] European subjects as the singular sources of meaning . . . Without the use of local guides and interpreters, the exploits of men represented as untiringly perservering, independent and self-denying seekers of the truth [and nothing but] would have been impossible. But this routine *practical* dependence on local knowledges and information is not accorded any *epistemological* value. Local knowledge is refashioned as a hindrance, as a barrier to the arrival of the truth . . . Indigenous geographical meanings and knowledges are admitted into this discourse on the condition of being stripped of any validity independent of European definitions of scientific knowledge.

These and other studies read geography as a discourse in the sense that Said uses the term – as object- and reality-constituting – and trade on the 'epistemic violence' of geography's empire. Barnett and many others have underscored the importance of science as a duplicitous vector of geographical knowledge production, with non-European knowledge represented as "the confusion and noise against which European science takes shape and secures its authority" (Barnett 1998: 145; also see Anderson 1998).

As some of these snippets suggest, work on geography and empire takes on board postcolonialism's cultural concerns and bends them in more explicitly geographical directions. Driver (2000), for example, has argued that geographical exploration should be understood as "a set of cultural practices" that involved the mobilization of a wide variety of material and imaginative resources (equipment, guides, patronage, publicity, authority, texts, scholarship, myths, and so on). He charts the formation of a Victorian "culture of exploration" that centered on Africa, and revolved around a gentlemanly network of scholars, politicians and philanthropists who made the RGS an authoritative site for the promotion and dissemination of geographical knowledge. But he also shows that this culture was shaped by popular accounts of African exploration (such as those of Henry Morton Stanley) that were deemed sensational by the geographical authorities, and in public spaces of knowledge such as the museum and exhibition hall (Driver 2000: 7, 202, 216). Moreover, the motifs of manly adventure and exoticism that infuse the nineteenth-century configuration of Africa as 'the dark continent' are still at large in the advertising and tourism industries. In other words, students of geography's empire have to contend with contemporary forms of colonial nostalgia (see Gregory 2001b).

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## 'Colonizing Geographies'

This plethora of work shows that geography's empire was far grander and more imposing than a narrow (if critical) disciplinary history could make it appear. Indeed, in recent years geographers have become increasingly interested in the broad implication of spatiality in the production of imperial/colonial power and identity. Gregory (2002) has coined the term "colonizing geographies" to convey the idea that geography and colonialism/empire work into one another in myriad ways, and can be approached from multiple positions. Let me briefly touch on two of these positions.

Geographical research on imperial travel, and feminist-geographical scholarship on empire, has been particularly effective at revealing the variegated and often paradoxical ways in which class, race, gender and sexuality were articulated in metropolitan and colonial locations, spaces and landscapes. Often based on the examination of sources that, until recently, were regarded as less than credible forms of geographical knowledge (e.g. guidebooks and women's diaries), this work gives us some important insights into the complex positionality of western men and women within the framework of empire (see McEwan 1998; Morin & Berg 1999). Jane Jacobs (2003: 349), for instance, observes that women were seen as

accessories to the masculinist project of empire building, often drawing on vectors of racial difference in order to assume a position of superiority denied to them within their own patriarchal social settings ... [Yet their] very positioning ... as peripheral to the privileged spheres of knowledge and action associated with empire building often placed them in relations with the colonized that unsettled those lines of difference and distinction.

Sara Mills (1999) and Judith Kenny (1995) explore how the complex gendering of imperial and colonial subject positions was tied to the creation of spaces of confinement and self-exclusion such as the urban cantonments and rural hill stations of British India. Alison Blunt (1994, 2000) and Cheryl McEwan (2000) have explored how the subject and viewing positions of women travelers and colonists changed as they moved between 'home' and 'away' and were presented in different ways before 'polite' and 'savage' audiences, and responded to alien environments (also see Gregory 2000b). Karen Morin and Lawrence Berg (2001) have started to open up important questions about how and why women became involved in indigenous practices of anticolonial resistance. And James Duncan (2000) has started to explore the fraught textual, physical, and psychical construction of colonial masculinity in natural environments – in his case, the tropical highlands of Ceylon – that were radically different than the ones from which the colonizers hailed.

The geographical literature on colonialism and empire arguably retains a much stronger concern with the materiality of discourse, the physicality of movement and interaction, and the geographical embodiment of power and identity than much postcolonial work that emanates, especially, from the fields of literary and cultural studies. It thus avoids one of the pitfalls of postcolonialism – its textualism – and augments the idea that geographical discourses are not free-floating constructions. Geographers routinely identify themselves as 'postcolonial' scholars and critics in this way. At the same time, it is important to point to the metropolitan and

disciplinary biases in this work. Much of it takes the European-imperial arena as its prime historical context and Eurocentric knowledge as its chief critical referent. Mary Louise Pratt (2001: 280) has criticized recent geographical work on travel writing on this ground, observing that the experience of travel is "examined from within the self-privileging imaginary that framed the travels and travel books in the first place." European sensibilities remain of intrinsic interest, and while ideas of cultural negotiation and exchange are explored in methodological terms, they are rarely pursued in great substantive depth. Geographers working in metropolitan and disciplinary modes are teaching us a tremendous amount about what 'empire' meant to Europeans and how it was construed in geographical terms. But they often display a much shakier sense of the non-European and indigenous landscapes over which geography's empire ranged. Barnett's essay on the RGS illustrates these tendencies well. He is less interested in how and why Native people worked as guides and informants than in the denigration of Native knowledges and ways of knowing in European geographical science. Brenda Yeoh (2000) points out that work on the historical geography of colonialism overshadows the difficult but crucial task of uncovering "the historical geographies of the colonized world." In fact, we have a literature that is ultimately more concerned with the projection of empire and the west - with imperialism - than with the messy pragmatics of colonial contact (also see Lester 2000).

This is not a problem in itself. It only becomes a bone of critical contention when geographers who are working in this way claim that they are also bringing the world of the colonized more clearly into view. For in approaching the colonial world in this way, the colonized are only partially rendered as subjects rather than objects of knowledge. Jacobs (2001: 730) observes that it is a "vexed truth" that much postcolonial scholarship within and beyond geography tends to reinscribe the authority of the western events, agents and texts that it ostensibly seeks to expose and subvert. It often does so by focusing too exclusively on the white/Western historical record and exaggerating the power of Western representations of foreign lands and peoples. A postcolonial politics of location that is premised on the courtesy of listening to the Other and working through the intersubjective nature of colonial encounters is frequently overridden by a metropolitan-intellectual politics of not speaking for the Other and using the colonial world to decenter/deconstruct the west (see Livingstone 1998). There has been a flurry of work by geographers on processes of othering, but much of it works at a great remove from its others - its objects of discourse. It is surely difficult to get at 'the native' side of the story from thoroughly lopsided archives that do not render knowledge about 'them' on 'their' terms. But geographers often exacerbate such problems by dealing with questions of native agency and otherness through the determining imprint of western discourses. Metropolitan-based geographical studies that conceptualize empire as situated, negotiated, contested, or anxiety-ridden often work much better in theory than in practice. Some geographers address this problem by recoiling from the analysis of native agency (by not attempting to speak for the Other), and sticking to the task of showing how dominant and demeaning knowledges were put together. This, to be sure, remains an important enough task in its own right, but this style of enquiry can come at a price. It can romanticize the Other, and make empire look too austere (and thus exaggerate the power of the west) or too precarious (and thus

overinflate the agency of the critic who looks for this trait in the imperial/colonial archive).

### **Colonialism's Geographies**

Such concerns are usually expressed most strongly by geographers who work on the contextually located nature of colonialism and what Jane Jacobs (1996: 1-3) has called "the politics of the 'edge'" (the subversive influence of the marginalized periphery on centrist practices of spatial demarcation). So let me now turn to another distinctive orientation in the geographical literature – a range of research on colonialism's geographies. Many geographical studies of the imperial/colonial past are regionally focused, treat colonialism as a situated (if unequal) process of cultural negotiation, and highlight the differences within and between specific colonial projects, regions, and formations. Geographers working at the colonial edges of empire stress the need to distinguish between Eurocentric and nation-centered imperial projects, and the different logics of power enshrined in settler- and dependent-colonial formations. They pursue the type of postcolonial project described by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who suggests (2000: 16) that if western thought is to be "renewed from and for the margins," we must acknowledge that both the margins and the centers are plural and diverse. Europe "appears different when seen from within the experiences of colonization or inferiorization in specific parts of the world." Scholarship on colonialism's geographies speaks of different - of specific and diverse – Europes (cf. Livingstone & Withers 1999; Scott 2002).

In fact, a good deal of postcolonial geographical work "from and for the margins" focuses on different parts of Britain's former settler empire - on Australia and New Zealand, North America, and southern Africa, which are not postcolonial in the same way as large parts of Africa and Asia. For geographers working on these parts of the world, disciplinary debates about "geography's empire" seem far off, and the type of globally ambitious (imperial?) postcolonial theory that emanates from India and other hot spots of postcolonial inspiration needs to be recontextualized. Postcolonial theory is used selectively, and regional historical literatures and conversations take on more importance (see Clayton 2002). Historicalgeographical research on Australia and Canada is also set against the contemporary backdrop of aboriginal resistance to, and litigation over, the ongoing extension of colonial power, and is thus politicized in different ways than work on 'geography's empire' (see Sparke 1998; Stokes 1999; Howitt 2001). Geographers have to negotiate the discordant voices of natives and newcomers who have different and competing ties to the land, and some geographers have been actively engaged in indigenous struggles. Geographers working in such regions bring their geographical sensitivities to bear on a wide range of colonial spaces and geographies - colonial settlement systems, native reserves, Christian missions, the spaces created and exploited by capital, and the geographies of colonial governance (e.g. Christophers 1998: Hannah 1993).

This literature eschews any essentialized vision of either western power or native agency, and much of it extends Nicholas Thomas's arguments about the localized yet broadly transformative cast of colonialism. Cole Harris (2002: xvii), for example, has argued in relation to British Columbia that while "colonialism spoke with many voices and was often deeply troubled about its own contradictions," it tended to "override them with its own sheer power and momentum. Nor [he continues] is it clear that a culture is attenuated, or that the distinctions between it and another culture are destroyed, because the two have overlapped and exchanged some elements." Alan Lester (2001) has shown how British metropolitan discourses on southern Africa were heavily inflected by the competing visions of metropolitan politicians, colonial officials, humanitarians, and settlers, and the (often incongruous) colonial spaces they created. And one of the main themes in my work on the beginnings of native–western contact on Vancouver Island on Canada's west coast is that western agendas were not imposed on native territory in a uniform or mechanical fashion. The encounters, knowledges, and representations generated by western explorers, traders, cartographers, and politicians were influenced by native agendas, and local contacts and global imperial strategies became connected in complex ways (Clayton 2000a).

Work on these and many other colonial localities shows that imperial incursion kick-started diverse and often unpredictable interactions between 'Europe,' indigenous peoples, the environments in which they met, and the geographies of accommodation and resistance that they created (see Kenny 1999). So much so, Andrew Sluyter (2001) has suggested, that we urgently need to discuss whether it is possible (and indeed desirable) to generalize about colonialism in geographical terms, and how we might build geographical models of colonial landscape transformation that are robust enough to accommodate diversity, specificity, and contingency.

This literature also raises difficult questions about how native voices should be handled, especially if we hold the poststructuralist/postcolonial view that narratives and histories are social and cultural constructions. Do we apply one set of interpretative – or deconstructionist – techniques to the white historical record, and some other set to the native record? Is native testimony and evidence to be used to question the certainty of western knowledge (and reveal its hybridity), or to reconstruct an alternative narrative that points to incommensurable western and nonwestern worldviews? Either way, geographers realize how difficult it is to bring western and native evidence together in ways that bridge the intersubjective space of contact. They run the risk of subordinating 'other' voices to the secular codes of western academic discourse (to codes about the rational derivation and logical presentation of factual/archival evidence). Furthermore, in this age of globalized postcolonial study, in which ideas travel far and fast, scholarship has an interdisciplinary and international momentum, and we cannot know much about many of the places we read about, scholarly appreciation of local and regional studies of colonialism often assumes a methodological tone. We tend to focus on the approach taken by the scholar/critic rather than the locality/region in question. We think about the wider implications of a particular study and sometimes rather less about the facts and details that are being marshaled and how they are placed in local/regional debates. We often think in terms of how the part (the vignette, case study, locality) relates to the whole (to colonialism as such, or to the field of postcolonial studies).

Barnett (1997: 145) adds that attempts to restore hitherto excluded or suppressed voices to our accounts often conform to a western model of representation that "inscribe[s] colonial textuality within a quite conventional economy of sense which ascribes to voice and speech the values of expressivity, self-presence, and con-

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sciousness, and understands the absence of such signs as 'silence,' as an intolerable absence of voice, and therefore as a mark of disempowerment." This 'economy' belittles the idea that in some colonial situations and postcolonial projects, silence can be construed as a strategy of resistance and mark of subversion. The historical recovery of "the geographies of the colonized" raises questions of what Gayatri Spivak (1999) has termed "strategic essentialism" – of how we might contest some assertions of difference and not others, and articulate some archival findings but not others, for political (strategic) reasons. I have tried to show that the native groups of Vancouver Island felt anything but possessed or inferior to westerners during the early years of contact. Yet the story I tell of native tribal competition, warfare, and territorial change hardly squares with images of the 'ecological Indian' living in natural and social harmony that have played an important role in whiteliberal sympathy for native causes, and the defense of native land claims in the courts.

## **Postcolonial Geographies?**

This, in outline, is how geographical research on the imperial/colonial past has developed since the late 1980s. There is no simple way of summarizing or evaluating how this range of work is 'postcolonial,' but I will end with three general points.

First, Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory (1997: 14) note that postcolonialism is centrally implicated in "the worlding of human geography"; it has made it "unacceptable to write geography in such a way that the West is always at the center of its imperial Geography." In part because of the advent of postcolonialism within geography, work in the expanding and increasingly fluid subfields of cultural and historical geography is now routinely framed around the notion that geography is a situated knowledge. Geographers have returned to, and in a way plundered, the imperial/colonial past to find out new things about themselves, and have found a new program of study in the postcolonial equation of power, knowledge and geography. Empire is now seen as a distorting mirror within which geography came to define and champion itself, and geographers are trying to come to terms with their discipline's imperial binds and conventions. They recognize that they are implicated in the power relations they study, and that they must therefore be concerned with the locations from which they apprehend the imperial/colonial past. They recognize that they work 'after empire' but in crucial respects not beyond colonialism.

Second, the geographical literature we have explored is animated by one of postcolonialism's most significant and obdurate analytical problems. Stuart Hall (1996: 249) puts the problem this way:

while holding fast to differentiation and specificity, we cannot afford to forget the overdetermining effects of the colonial moment, the 'work' its binaries were constantly required to do to re-present the proliferation of cultural difference and forms of life... We have to keep these two ends of the chain in play at the same time – over-determination and difference, condensation and dissemination, if we are not to fall into a playful deconstructionism, the fantasy of a powerless utopia of difference.

Geographers have judiciously sought to recover the diversity, complexity, and contradictions of colonialism and empire, and in so doing, Livingstone (2000a: 8)

reflects, have helped to relativize and pluralize understanding of "the historical geography of geography." They hold fast to multiplicity and dispersal, in part, no doubt, because geography is traditionally concerned with issues of diversity and areal differentiation. However, geographers have not lost sight of what Hall describes as the "over-determining effects of the colonial moment." One of main empirical insights to be gleaned from reading geographers' eclectic work on the imperial/colonial past is that heterogeneous geographical projects had more universal and uniform colonizing effects. Diverse colonial and colonizing geographies cohered in the bounding and classification of land and resources, the compartmentalization of peoples and places, the segregation of populations, the creation of center and peripheries of power, and in a logic of displacement and dispossession. As Harris (2002: xvii-xxi) puts it, "It may be important not to be too fancy with colonialism." Some basic -"primal" - lines of power were drawn on the colonial map (such as those between native reserves and the rest the land open to white settlement and exploitation). Harris insists that we cannot get away from colonialism's fundamental and changing geographies. However, we also need to remember that geographers' critical accounts of colonialism's logic of geographical violence are intellectual constructs, and that they are implicated in their constructions. Geographers write of colonizing geographies, normalizing discourses, and imperial imaginaries, and their critical attempts to decenter, decolonize, expose, and subvert to some degree depend on such standardized images of what colonialism and empire were about. They thus run the risk of presentism and of homogenizing understanding of colonialism's spatiality - of aggrandizing the grip of geography's imperial/colonial past on the present, and of accentuating difference by making assumptions about the sameness of imperial/colonial geographies (see Jacobs 2000). Driver's (1992) argument that geography has been "saturated" with imperial/colonial themes provides an instructive example of this first problem. To what extent is this a retrospective understanding that serves the needs of the postcolonial present? In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, for instance, geographers complained about their discipline's shameful ignorance of colonial affairs (see e.g. Wooldridge 1947), and we might surmise from this that geography's imperial embrace was never as strong as many now want to think.

Third, this analytical problematic inevitably draws the positionality of the scholar into the critical frame, and geographers, like other postcolonial scholars, have a duty to work out the ways and extent to which their revisionist accounts get past the problem of Eurocentrism. What place do western disciplinary tools and concerns have in the analysis of colonialism? How and on whose terms are marginal voices and other ways of knowing incorporated into the center and the mainstream? Work on 'geography's empire' surely decenters geographical knowledge, may satiate geographers' thirst for multiplicity and dispersal, and may even be ameliorative for geography and therapeutic for geographers. But in what ways is it postcolonial? There is a danger that work on geography and empire can become a seductive but sanitized intellectual pastime that fixates on the power/knowledge equations that inhere in a discipline like geography and bypasses the practical problems faced by formerly and currently colonized peoples. I am not suggesting that historical work that is in touch with 'real' postcolonial places is more postcolonial or critically respectable than that which seeks to 'decenter' an academic center such as geography. Rather, I think there needs to be more dialogue between geographers working within the different orientations identified above, and that we need to remind ourselves that we are all creatures and creators of situated knowledge. Jacobs (2003: 534) suggests that while work on geography's empire is vexed, it does raise one viable question: "would it be possible for modern geography to effectively decolonize its practices without this kind of critical revisionist scholarship?" She suggests that we might only create alternate postcolonial geographies by looking back, for such geographies cannot emerge "outside of the histories . . . of the geographies that preceded them." This is surely one of the basic postcolonial messages that geographies will only emerge "*in medias res.*" It would be a mistake to think that we can find some great divide between a geography forgets its place in the imperial/colonial past, and turns a blind eye to the place of that past in the present, it will narrow its critical compass and geo-graphic ambit.

## NOTES

- 1. The focus of this chapter can be further qualified in three ways. First, I pass over a gamut of work on contemporary postcolonial issues, though it should be recognized that scholarship on the past works out of the present (and vice versa). Second, there are some biases and blinkers in the geographical literature that an overview like this can do little to rectify. Geographers who hail from Britain and its former colonial possessions seem more caught up with their countries' imperial/colonial past (and present) than geographers from other western countries (notably France and the US) seem to be with theirs, though there are obviously exceptions (see e.g. Bruneau & Dory 1994). Nor have geographers done as much as they might to assuage the false impression that imperialism and colonialism are exclusively modern western phenomena. There is a dearth of geographical research on nonwestern and premodern imperial/colonial dynamics. And third, the chapter says a great deal more about the impact of postcolonialism on geography than it does about the rich geographical tenor of postcolonialism. Suffice it to note that the terms place, space, location, and geography have become coveted critical commodities.
- 2. 'Imperialism' and 'colonialism' are complex and contested terms, but I will distinguish between them along the spatial lines suggested by Edward Said (1993: 9) and Ania Loomba (1998: 7): that imperialism is the metropolitan-based process that leads to domination, whereas colonialism is what happens in colonized areas as a consequence of imperial expansion, conquest, and rule.

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