

1 The Colonial Present

The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, new pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble.

J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Foucault's Laughter

THE French philosopher Michel Foucault once explained that his interest in what he called “the order of things” had its origins in a passage from an essay by the Argentinian novelist Jorge Luis Borges. There Borges had described “a certain Chinese encyclopaedia,” the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, in whose “remote pages” it was recorded that

[A]nimals are divided into: (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) *et cetera*; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies.¹

When he read this, Foucault said that he roared with laughter, a laughter that seemed to shatter all the familiar landmarks of European thought,

breaking “all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things.” In his wonderment at this strange taxonomy, Foucault claimed to recognize the limitation of his own – “our” own – system of thought: “the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”²

But what makes it impossible for us to think that – what lets demons and monsters loose in our own imaginary – is not so much the categories themselves. After all, the classification carefully distinguishes the mermaids and fabulous animals from the real creatures that are trained, stray, and tremble. As Foucault realized, our incomprehension arises from the series in which they are all placed together. In short, it is not the spaces but the *spacings* that make this “unthinkable.”

Foucault was not in the least surprised that the spacings that produced such a “tableau of queerness” should be found in a Chinese encyclopedia. “In our dreamworld,” he demanded, “is not China precisely this privileged *site of space*?”

In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space; we think of it as a civilization of dikes and dams beneath the eternal face of the sky; we see it, spread and frozen, over the entire surface of a continent surrounded by walls. Even its writing does not reproduce the fugitive flight of the voice in horizontal lines; it erects the motionless and still-recognizable images of things themselves in vertical columns. So much so that the Chinese encyclopaedia quoted by Borges, and the taxonomy it proposes, lead to a kind of thought without space, to words and categories that lack all life and place, but are rooted in a ceremonial space, overburdened with complex figures, with tangled paths, strange places, secret passages, and unexpected communications. *There would appear to be, then, at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak and think.*³

Although it would be a mistake to collapse the extraordinary range of Foucault’s writings into the arc of a single project, much of his work traced just those orderings of space, at once European and modern, that appear in what he called “the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language” – and in other registers too – which *do* “make it possible for us to name, speak and think.” He showed with unsurpassed clarity how

European modernity constructed the self – as the sane, the rational, the normal – through the proliferation of spacings. But these were all spacings *within* Europe. And precisely because Foucault was so preoccupied with these interior grids – the clinic, the asylum, and the prison among them – the production of spacings that set Europe off against its exterior “others,” the very distinction between interior and exterior that initiated his journey into the order of things, was lost from view. “The other extremity of the earth,” as he called it, was literally that: extreme.⁴

It would be perfectly possible to quarrel with Foucault’s stylized characterization of China, whose cultural landscapes can be read in ways that do not confine its spaces to the bizarre and immobile geometries of French Orientalism.⁵ But that would be to miss the point. For the strange taxonomy set out in the *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* was not composed by some anonymous Chinese sage. *It was invented by Borges himself.* In one sense this is unremarkable too. For, as Zhang Longxi remarks with exemplary restraint, “What could be a better sign of the Other than a fictionalized space of China? What [could] furnish the West with a better reservoir for its dreams, fantasies and utopias?” But notice the enormous irony of it all. The nominally “unthinkable space” that made it possible for Foucault to bring into view the modern order of things *turns out to have been thought within from within the modern too.* The joke is on Foucault. For Borges was writing neither from Europe nor from China but from “Latin America,” a topos where he was able to inscribe and to unsettle the enclosures of a quintessentially colonial modernity that Foucault was quite unable to see.⁶

I realize that this may not seem ironic at all. Foucault’s laughter – and the rhetorical gesture that provoked it – has become so commonplace that it has become axiomatic, so much part of our established order of things that it is easy to forget that this order has *been* established: that it is a fabrication. This does not mean that it is simply false. On the contrary, it is validated by its own regimes of truth and it produces acutely real, visibly material consequences. Its currency – its value, transitivity, and reliability: in a word, its “fact-ness” – is put into circulation through the double-headed coin of colonial modernity. If we remain within the usual transactions of French philosophy then one side of that coin will display the face of modernity as (for example) an optical, geometric, and phallogocentric space; a partitioned, hierarchical, and disciplined space; or a measured, standardized, and striated space. And the reverse side will exhibit modernity’s other as (for example) primitive, wild, and corporeal; as

mysterious, capricious, and excessive; or as irregular, multiple, and labyrinthine. Although the coin is double-sided, however, both its faces milled by the machinations of colonial modernity, the two are not of equal value. For this is an economy of representation in which the modern is prized over – and placed over – the non-modern.

This supplies one reason for speaking of an intrinsically *colonial* modernity. Modernity produces its other, verso to recto, as a way of at once producing and privileging itself. This is not to say that other cultures are the supine creations of the modern, but it is to acknowledge the extraordinary power and performative force of colonial modernity. Its constructions of other cultures – not only the way in which these are understood in an immediate, improvisational sense, but also the way in which more or less enduring codifications of them are produced – shape its own dispositions and deployments. These all take place within a fractured and highly uneven force-field in which other cultures entangle, engage, and exert pressure. But this process of colonial transculturation is inherently asymmetric, and colonial modernity's productions of the other *as* other, however much they are shaped by those various others, shape its constitution of itself in determinate and decisive ways.⁷

In his critique of Orientalism, Edward Said describes this unequal process as the production of *imaginative geographies*, and anthropologist Fernando Coronil connects it umbilically to what he calls Occidentalism. By this he means not the ways in which other cultural formations represent “the West,” important though this is, but rather the self-constructions of “the West” that underwrite and animate its constructions of the other.⁸ This has two implications that bear directly on the arguments I pursue in the essays that follow. First, the stories the West most often tells itself about itself are indeed stories of self-production, a practice that (in this case) does induce blindness. They are myths of self-sufficiency in which “the West” reaches out only to bring to others the fruits of progress that would otherwise be beyond their grasp. The subtitle of historian Niall Ferguson's exculpatory *Empire* provides a parochial proclamation of such a view: *How Britain Made the Modern World*. “As I travelled around that Empire's remains in the first half of 2002,” he enthuses, “I was constantly struck by its ubiquitous creativity”:

To imagine the world without the Empire would be to expunge from the map the elegant boulevards of Williamsburg and old Philadelphia; to sweep into the sea the squat battlements of Port Royal, Jamaica; to return to the

bush the glorious skyline of Sydney; to level the steamy seaside slum that is Freetown, Sierra Leone; to fill in the Big Hole at Kimberley; to demolish the mission at Kuruman; to send the town of Livingstone hurtling over the Victoria Falls – which would of course revert to their original name of Mosioatunya. Without the British Empire, there would be no Calcutta; no Bombay; no Madras. Indians may rename them as many times as they like, but they remain cities founded and built by the British.⁹

Ferguson's triumphant celebration of "creativity" crowds out any recognition of that same empire's extraordinary (and no less ubiquitous) powers of destruction, but it also removes from view the multiple parts played by other actors – "subalterns" – in furthering, resisting, and reworking the projects of empire. Secondly, as that patronizing nod to native names and Indians reveals, self-constructions require constructions of the other. To return to Borges's world, it is through exactly this sort of logic that philosopher Enrique Dussel identifies 1492 as the date of modernity's birth. That fateful year saw both the Christian Reconquista that snuffed out Islamic rule in Andalusia and Columbus's voyage to the Americas. It was only then, so Dussel says, with Europe advancing against the Islamic world to the east and "discovering" the Americas to the west, that Europe was able to reposition itself as being at the very center of the world. More than this, he argues that the sectarian violence that was unleashed in the closing stages of the Reconquista was the model for the colonization of the New World. By these means, he claims, Europe "was in a position to pose itself against an other" and to colonize "an alterity [otherness] that gave back its image of itself."¹⁰

The Present Tense

The story of those European voyages of discovery (or self-discovery) can be told in many different ways. Joseph Conrad once distinguished three epochs in the history of formal geographical knowledges. He called the first "Geography Fabulous," which mapped a world of monsters and marvels. It was "a phase of circumstantially extravagant speculation which had nothing to do with the pursuit of truth." It was succeeded by "Geography Militant," which was advanced most decisively by Captain Cook and those who sailed into the South Pacific in his wake. By the nineteenth century, exploration by sea had given way to expeditions into the

continental interiors. Conrad was fascinated, above all, by the replacement of the mythical geographies of Africa with “exciting pieces of white paper” – “honest maps,” he called them – that were the paper-trail of “worthy, adventurous and devoted men” who had “nibbled at the edges” of that vast continent, “attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling.” But by the early twentieth century this heroic age of exploration had yielded to “Geography Triumphant.” Exploration had been replaced by travel, and even travel was being tarnished by tourism. The world had been measured, mapped, and made over in the image not only of Science but also of Capital.¹¹ Conrad’s was not an innocent narrative, of course, even if he described geography as “the most blameless of sciences.” Although his own *Heart of Darkness* illuminated the menace of Geography Triumphant with a brilliant intensity, his threnody for Geography Militant should blind us neither to the predatory designs advanced through those colonial cultures of exploration nor to their continuing impress on our own colonial present.

In his spirited reflection on these matters, Felix Driver writes about the “worldly after-life” of Geography Militant. This turns on what he calls “trading in memory,” but these selective exchanges involve more than the cargo cult of relics and fetishes (“cultural forms”) that he describes with such perspicacity. It is not just that our investments in these objects are, as he says, “thoroughly modern”: “financial, emotional, aesthetic.”¹² For we invest in more than objects. *We also invest in practices and dispositions.* “Culture” and “economy” are intimately intertwined and, as Nicholas Thomas reminds us, “relations of cultural colonialism are no more easily shrugged off than the economic entanglements that continue to structure a deeply asymmetrical world economy.”¹³ One way to persuade ourselves otherwise is to agree with L. P. Hartley that “The past is another country; they do things differently there.” In some respects, so they do: distance conveys difference. But we should also listen to the words of another novelist, William Faulkner, writing about the American South. “The past is not dead,” he remarked. “It is not even past.”

What, then, are we to make of the *postcolonial*? How are we to make sense of that precocious prefix? My preference is to trace the curve of the postcolonial from the inaugural moment of the colonial encounter. To speak of an “inaugural moment” in the singular is a fiction – there have been many different colonialisms, so that this arc is described in different

histories and different geographies – but it is none the less an effective fiction. From that dispersed moment, marked by the “post,” histories and geographies have all been made in the shadow of colonialism. To be sure, they have been made in the shadow of other formations too, and it is extremely important to avoid explanations that reduce everything to the marionette movements of a monolithic colonialism. Seen like this, histories and geographies are always compound, at once conjunctural and foliated. The French philosopher Louis Althusser wrote about the impossibility of cutting a cross-section through the multiple sectors of a social formation so that their connections could be displayed within a single temporality. It was necessary, he said, to recognize the coexistence of multiple temporalities. Or again, in a dazzling series of densely concrete experiments, Walter Benjamin demonstrated the need for a conception of history that could accommodate the spasmodic irruptions of multiple pasts into a condensed present. These two figures were not writing on the same page, and whether they belong in the same book is debatable. They were also working within a European Marxism that (for the most part) made little space for a critique of colonialism. But the importance of these ideas – in this, the most general of forms – is captured by Akhil Gupta when he argues that “the postcolonial condition is distinguished by heterogeneous temporalities that mingle and jostle with one another to interrupt the teleological narratives that have served both to constitute and to stabilize the identity of ‘the West.’”¹⁴

To recover the contemporary formation that I have described as an intrinsically colonial modernity requires us to rethink the lazy separations between past, present, and future, and here modernism itself offers some guidance. Nineteenth-century modernism was haunted by the fugitive, the passing, the ephemeral, and had its face pressed up against the window of the future. But Andreas Huyssen has suggested that since the last decades of the twentieth century – in response to the vertigo of the late modern – the focus has shifted from “present futures to present pasts.”¹⁵ What has come to be called postcolonialism is part of this optical shift. Its commitment to a future free of colonial power and disposition is sustained in part by a critique of the continuities between the colonial past and the colonial present. While they may be displaced, distorted, and (most often) denied, the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present. There are many critical histories of colonialism, of course, and many studies that disclose its viral presence in the geopolitics and political economy of uneven development. But

postcolonialism is usually distinguished from these projects by its central interest in the relations between culture and power. In fact, this is precisely how Said seeks to recover the past in the present. He warns against those radical separations through which “culture is exonerated from any entanglements with power, representations are considered only as apolitical images to be parsed and construed as so many grammars of exchange, and the divorce of the present from the past is assumed to be complete.”¹⁶ According to his contrary view, “culture” is not a cover term for supposedly more fundamental structures – geographies of politico-economic power or military violence – because culture is co-produced with them: culture underwrites power even as power elaborates culture. It follows that culture is not a mere mirror of the world. Culture involves the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world. Here is Thomas again:

Colonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress. Rather, colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process; its discoveries and trespasses are imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives; even what would seem its purest moments of profit and violence have been mediated and enframed by structures of meaning. Colonial cultures are not simply ideologies that mask, mystify or rationalize forms of oppression that are external to them; they are also expressive and constitutive of colonial relationships in themselves.¹⁷

If postcolonialism is not indifferent to circuits of political, economic, and military power, its interest in culture – in the differential formations of metropolitan and colonial cultures – raises two critical questions. First, who claims the power to fabricate those meanings? Who assumes the power to represent others *as* other, and on what basis? Said’s answer is revealed in the epigraph from Marx that he uses to frame his critique of Orientalism: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” This attempt to muffle the other – so that, at the limit, metropolitan cultures protect their powers and privileges by insisting that “the subaltern cannot speak” – raises the second question. What is the power of those meanings? What do those meanings *do*? This double accent on power requires postcolonialism to be understood as a political as well as an intellectual project, and Robert Young is right to remind us that that the critique of

Table 1.1 Memory and the colonial present

	<i>Colonial amnesia</i>	<i>Colonial nostalgia</i>
<i>Culture</i>	Degradation of other cultures as “other”	Idealization of other cultures as “other”
<i>Power</i>	Violence and subjugation	Domination and deference

colonialism had its origins not in the groves of academe but in a tricontinental series of political struggles against colonialism.¹⁸ Postcolonialism, we might say, has a constitutive interest in colonialism. It is in part an act of remembrance. Postcolonialism revisits the colonial past in order to recover the dead weight of colonialism: to retrieve its shapes, like the chalk outlines at a crime scene, and to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to presence. But it is also an act of opposition. Postcolonialism reveals the continuing impositions and exactions of colonialism in order to subvert them: to examine them, disavow them, and dispel them. It for these reasons that Ali Behdad insists that postcolonialism must be “on the side of memory.” Postcolonial critique must not only counter *amnesiac* histories of colonialism but also stage “a return of the repressed” to resist the seductions of *nostalgic* histories of colonialism.¹⁹

How, then, might one understand the cultural practices that are inscribed within our contemporary “tradings in memory?” In one of his essays on the haunting of Irish culture by its colonial past, Terry Eagleton describes the two moments I have just identified – amnesia and nostalgia – as “the terrible twins”: “the inability to remember and the incapacity to do anything else.”²⁰ If these are cross-cut with “culture” and “power” it is possible to use this rough and ready template to trace the arts of memory that play an important part in the production of the colonial present (see table 1.1).

On the one side, we too readily forget the ways in which metropolitan cultures constructed other cultures as “other.” By this, I mean not only how metropolitan cultures represented other cultures as exotic, bizarre, alien – like Borges’s “Chinese encyclopaedia” – but also how they acted as though “the meaning they dispensed was purely the result of their own activity” and so suppressed their predatory appropriations of other cultures. This is surely what was lost in Foucault’s laughter.²¹ We are also

inclined to gloss over the terrible violence of colonialism. We forget the exactions, suppressions, and complicities that colonialism forced upon the peoples it subjugated, and the way in which it withdrew from them the right to make their own history, ensuring that they did so emphatically not under conditions of their own choosing. These erasures are not only delusions; they are also dangers. We forget that it is often ordinary people who do such awful, extraordinary things, and so foreclose the possibility that in similar circumstances most of us would, in all likelihood, have done much the same. To acknowledge this is not to protect our predecessors from criticism: it is to recall the part we are called to play – and continue to play – in the performance of the colonial present. We need to remind our rulers that “even the best-run empires are cruel and violent,” Maria Misra argues, and that “overwhelming power, combined with a sense of boundless superiority, will produce atrocities – even among the well-intentioned.” In other words, we still do much the same. Like Seumas Milne, I believe that “the roots of the global crisis which erupted on September 11 lie in precisely those colonial experiences and the informal quasi-imperial system that succeeded them.” And if we do not successfully contest these amnesiac histories – in particular, if we do not recover the histories of Britain and the United States in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq – then, in Misra’s agonizing phrase, the Heart of Smugness will be substituted for the Heart of Darkness.²²

On the other side, there is often nostalgia for the cultures that colonial modernity has destroyed. Art, design, fashion, film, literature, music, travel: all are marked by mourning the passing of “the traditional,” “the unspoiled,” “the authentic,” and by a romanticized and thoroughly commodified longing for their revival as what Graham Huggan calls “the post-colonial exotic.” This is not a harmless, still less a trivial pursuit, because its nostalgia works as a sort of cultural cryonics. Other cultures are fixed and frozen, often as a series of fetishes, and then brought back to life through metropolitan circuits of consumption. Commodity fetishism and cannibalism are repatriated to the metropolis.²³ But there is a still more violent side to colonial nostalgia. Contemporary metropolitan cultures are also characterized by nostalgia for the aggrandizing swagger of colonialism itself, for its privileges and powers. Its exercise may have been shot through with anxiety, even guilt; its codes may on occasion have been transgressed, even set aside. But the triumphal show of colonialism – its elaborate “ornamentalism,” as David Cannadine calls it²⁴ – and its effortless, ethnocentric assumption of Might and Right are visibly and aggressively abroad

in our own present. For what else is the war on terror other than the violent return of the colonial past, with its split geographies of “us” and “them,” “civilization” and “barbarism,” “Good” and “Evil”?

As Frances Yates and Walter Benjamin showed, in strikingly different ways, the arts of memory have always turned on space and geography as much as on time and history. We know that amnesia can be counteracted by the production of what Pierre Nora calls (not without misgivings) *lieux de mémoire*, while Jean Starobinski reminds us that nostalgia was originally a sort of homesickness, a pathology of distance. The late modern desire for memory-work – the need to secure the connective imperative between “then” and “now” – is itself the product of contemporary constructions of time and space that have also reconfigured the affiliations between “us” and “them.” Hence Huyssen suggests that the “turn towards memory” has been brought about “by the desire to anchor ourselves in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space.”²⁵ The kind of memory-work I have in mind is less therapeutic than Huyssen’s gesture implies, but its insistence on the importance of productions of space is axiomatic for a colonialism that was always as much about making other people’s geographies as it was about making other people’s histories.

Fredric Jameson has offered a radically different gloss on claims like these. In his view, the delineation of what Said once called contrapuntal geographies was vital in a colonial world where “the epistemological separation of colony from metropolis, the systematic occultation of colony from metropolis” ensures that “the truth of metropolitan experience is not visible in the daily life of the metropolis itself; it lies outside the immediate space of Europe.” In such circumstances, Said had proposed, “as we look back on the cultural archive,” we need to read it “with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominant discourse acts.”²⁶ In passing “from imperialism to globalization,” however, Jameson claims that

What could not be mapped cognitively in the world of modernism now brightens into the very circuits of the new transnational cybernetic. Instant information transfers suddenly suppress the space that held the colony apart from the metropolis in the modern period. Meanwhile, the economic interdependence of the world system today means that wherever one may find oneself on the globe, the position can henceforth always be coordinated with

its other spaces. This kind of epistemological transparency . . . goes hand in hand with standardization and has often been characterized as the Americanization of the world . . .²⁷

I admire much of Jameson's work, but I think this argument – in its way, a belated version of Conrad's "Geography Triumphant" – is wholly mistaken. The middle passage from imperialism to globalization is not as smooth as he implies, still less complete, and the "new transnational cybernetic" imposes its own unequal and uneven geographies. The claim to "transparency" is one of the most powerful God-tricks of the late modern world, and Jameson's faith in the transcendent power of a politico-intellectual Global Positioning System seems to me fanciful. As Donna Haraway has shown with great perspicacity, vision is always partial and provisional, culturally produced and performed, and it depends on spaces of constructed visibility that – even as they claim to render the opacities of "other spaces" transparent – are always also spaces of constructed invisibility.²⁸ The production of the colonial present has not diminished the need for contrapuntal geographies. On the contrary. In a novel that has at its center the terrorist bombing of the US embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998, Giles Foden writes about the "endless etcetera of events which led from dead Russians in Afghanistan, via this, that and the other, through dead Africans and Americans in Nairobi and Dar, to the bombardment of a country with some of the highest levels of malnutrition ever recorded."²⁹ Those connections are not transparent, as subsequent chapters will show, and the routes "via this, that and the other" cannot be made so by narratives in which moments clip together like magnets or by maps in which our unruly world is fixed within a conventional Cartesian grid. We need other ways of mapping the turbulent times and spaces in which and through which we live.

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I have organized this book in the following way. I begin by clarifying what I mean by imaginative geographies, and illustrating their force through a discussion of the rhetorical response by politicians and commentators to the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001 (chapter 2). Others have described the consequences of those attacks for metropolitan America, but my own focus is different. The central sections of the book provide a

triptych of studies that narrate the war on terror as a series of spatial stories that take place in other parts of the world: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq (see figure 1.1). Each of these stories pivots around September 11, not to privilege that horrifying event (I don't think it marked an epochal rupture in human history) but to show that it had a complex genealogy that reached back into the colonial past and, equally, to show how it was used by regimes in Washington, London, and Tel Aviv to advance a grisly colonial present (and future).

The first story opens with the ragged formation of the modern state of Afghanistan, and traces the curve of America's involvement in its affairs from the Second World War through the Soviet occupation and the guerrilla wars of the 1980s and 1990s to the rise of the Taliban and its awkward accommodations with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda at the close of the twentieth century (chapter 3). Then I track forward from September 11 to the opening of the Afghan front in America's "war on terror," and its continuing campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban as they regroup on the Pakistan border (chapter 4).

The second story begins with European designs on the Middle East, and from this brittle template I trace the ways in which the formation and violent expansion of the state of Israel in the course of the twentieth century proceeded in lockstep with America's self-interest in its security to license successive partitionings of Palestine (chapter 5). Then I track forward from September 11 to show how the Israeli government took advantage of the "war on terror" in order to legitimize and radicalize its dispossession of the Palestinian people (chapter 6).

The third story describes British and American investments in Iraq from the First World War, when Iraq was formed out of three provinces of the Ottoman Empire, through the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-8, to the first Gulf War in 1990-1 and the international regime of sanctions and inspections that succeeded it (chapter 7). Then I track forward from September 11 to show how America and Britain resumed their war against Iraq in the spring of 2003 as yet another front in the endless and seemingly boundless "war on terror" (chapter 8).

Finally, I use these narratives and the performances of space that they disclose to bring the colonial present into sharper focus (chapter 9). It will be apparent that I regard the global "war on terror" – those scare-quotes are doubly necessary – as one of the central modalities through which the colonial present is articulated. Its production involves more than political maneuverings, military deployments, and capital flows, the meat and drink

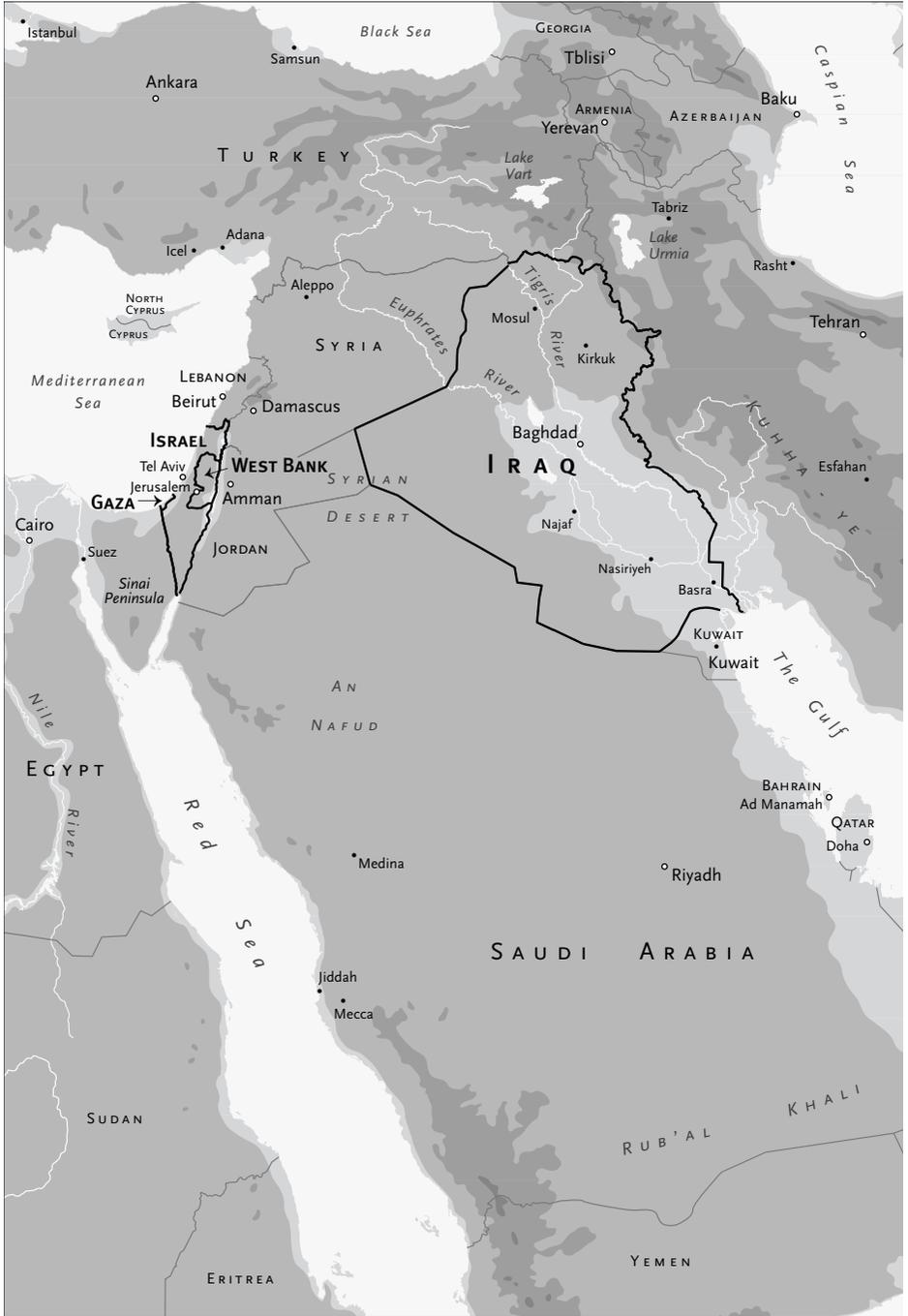


Figure 1.1 Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq



of critical social analysis, and it is for this reason that I have also summoned the humanities – including history, human geography, and literary studies – to my side. For the war on terror is an attempt to establish a new global narrative in which the power to narrate is vested in a particular constellation of power and knowledge within the United States of America. I want to show how ordinary people have been caught up in its violence: the thousands murdered in New York City and Washington on September 11, but also the thousands more killed and maimed in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq under its bloody banners. The colonial present is not produced through geopolitics and geoeconomics alone, through foreign and economic policy set in motion by presidents, prime ministers and chief executives, the state, the military apparatus and transnational corporations. It is also set in motion through mundane cultural forms and cultural practices that mark other people as irredeemably “Other” and that license the unleashing of exemplary violence against them. This does not exempt the actions of presidents, prime minister, and chief executives from scrutiny (and, I hope, censure); but these imaginative geographies lodge many more of us in the same architectures of enmity. It is important not to allow the spectacular violence of September 11, or the wars in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq, to blind us to the *banality* of the colonial present and to our complicity in its horrors.