

INTRODUCTION

Along with language, it is geography – especially for the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself – that is at the core of my memories of those early years.

[...]

... the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place. Thus it took me about fifty years to become accustomed to, or, more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with, 'Edward,' a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said. True my mother told me I had been named Edward after the Prince of Wales, who cut so fine a figure in 1935, the year of my birth, and Said was the name of various uncles and cousins. But the rationale of my name broke down both when I discovered no grandparents named Said and when I tried to connect my fancy English name with its Arabic partner. For years, depending on the exact circumstances, I would rush past 'Edward' and emphasize 'Said'; at other times I would do the reverse, or connect these two to each other so quickly that neither would be clear. The one thing I could not tolerate, but very often would have to endure, was the disbelieving, and hence undermining, reaction: Edward? Said?

The travails of bearing such a name were compounded by an equally unsettling quandary when it came to language. I have never known which language I spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was really mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other.

Edward Said (1999) *Out of Place: A Memoir*, pp. xvi, 3–4

I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape.

However, there have been compensations for this *mestiza*, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on. I have the sense that certain 'faculties' – not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored – and dormant

areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? Any yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, p.vii

I was born in Palo Alto, California, into the lap of an Iranian diaspora community awash in nostalgia and longing for an Iran many thousands of miles away. A girl, raised on the distorting myths of exile. I imagined myself a Persian princess, estranged from my homeland – a place of light, poetry, and nightingales – by a dark, evil force called the Revolution. I borrowed the plot from *Star Wars*, convinced it told Iran's story. Ayatolla Khomeini was Darth Vader. Tromping around suburban California, I lived out this fantasy. There must be some supernatural explanation, I reasoned, for the space landing of thousands of Tehranis to a world of vegan smoothies and Volvos, chakras, and Tupak.

Growing up, I had no doubt that I was Persian. Persian like a fluffy cat, a silky carpet – a vaguely Oriental notion belonging to history, untraceable on a map. It was the term we insisted on using at the time, embarrassed by any association with Iran, the modern country, the hostage-taking Death Star. Living a myth, a fantasy, made it easier to be Iranian in America.

As life took its course, as I grew up and went to college, discovered myself, and charted a career, my Iranian sense of self remained intact. But when I moved to Tehran in 2000 – pleased with my pluckiness, and eager to prove myself as a young journalist – it, along with the fantasies, dissolved. Iran, as it turned out, was not the Death Star, but a country where people voted, picked their noses, and ate French fries. Being a Persian girl in California, it turned out, was like, a totally different thing than being a young Iranian woman in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Azadeh Moaveni (2005) *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, p. vii

These three autobiographies are all the products of a globalised world where home and identity are complex constructs emerging from cultural contact, mixing and mobility. Each experience is post-colonial, of a world after the colonial period in which these three people – like each of us – are created by the powers, connections and imaginations that were written into the world during Europeans' first explorations of the world and the making and remaking of these geographies ever since. Said's identity was directed by Middle Eastern politics and memories of place and belonging, and as a Palestinian his sense of self and identity was entangled with exile, dispossession and displacement; Anzaldúa's experiences are fundamentally structured by the size and power of the US-side of the borderlands she inhabits; and Moaveni's sense of self has been formed through her inherited imagined geographies of her origins in the exotic land of 'Persia'. Each is a postcolonial subject constituted through real and imagined geographical processes and identities,

through on-going conflicts, stereotyping and the fantasising of different parts of the world.

The geographies that make up these people's experiences and identities reflect the fluidity of our contemporary globalised world, at the same time as recognising the continued existence of differences and barriers (of outside, exotic, alien ...) that were formed in previous periods and continue to shape our geographical imaginations. These identities are the result of cultural mixing and hybridisation – the processes of globalisation we hear so much about – but these are not free combinations. Certain parts of the mix have greater power to influence the direction of change (the power of English over Arabic as a global language; the greater constraints of movement over the US-Mexican border for Mexicans over citizens of the USA; the power of the western imagination to conjure up the exotic east). Postcolonial geographies then are this ambiguous mix of the fluid and the unchanging that shapes the identities of people like Said, Anzaldúa and Moaveni ... and all of us. Postcolonialism is structured through geographies of imagination, knowledge and power, and it is these geographies that will be at the heart of this book.

WHAT IS POST(-)COLONIALISM? THE IMPORTANCE OF A HYPHEN

Since the early 1980s, postcolonialism has developed a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed ... postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples of the world. (Young, 2003: 2)

To understand how it is that relations have formed between western and non-western peoples, it is necessary for postcolonialism to have a historical vision. Before we can move on to post(-)colonialism, we need a definition of colonialism.

Colonialism always assumes the physical occupation of one land by peoples associated with another place. The colonists do not simply remove resources and wealth from the new land (as is the case with forms of **imperialism**) but actually occupy the territory, building settlements, and often also agriculture and industry. There have been many instances of colonialism through human history, for instance the Roman Empire witnessed colonies from Britain through to the Mediterranean and into the Middle East. However, in this book we will only be looking at the period of European colonialism which was

initiated with the 'Age of Exploration' where Europeans started to explore new continents, and which reached its high point in the nineteenth century.

This form of colonialism was distinct not only because of its unprecedented scale but also because of its establishment alongside a specific form of rational knowledge (called the **European Enlightenment**) which saw science emerge as the most important form of knowledge, and also witnessed the rise of mercantile capitalism which was driven both by the possibilities available in the new lands and also by the rise of scientific knowledge which objectified the world into measurable land to be owned and resources to be exploited for the colonisers' use. Thus, the way that European colonists came to know the world has been highly influential. The combination of scientific knowledge and capitalism within the context of superiority provided the framework through which the new lands and peoples became known to the Europeans and subsequently became the basis for European control of them. In many cases, this knowledge also became the way in which the peoples the Europeans ruled came to know themselves.

There are two different ways in which post(-)colonialism is understood as a term, differentiated by the use of a hyphen, although different authors have varying interpretations of what the hyphen does mean. Blunt and McEwan (2002: 3) argue that the "post" of "postcolonialism" has two meanings, referring to a temporal aftermath – a period of time *after* colonialism – and a critical aftermath – cultures, discourses and critiques that lie *beyond*, but remain closely influenced by, colonialism'. Thus, although the definitions are clearly related, the differences in meaning can be drawn out as follows.

Post-colonialism

When the hyphen is used in the term, it refers to the common-sensical definition of post-colonialism as the period following independence from colonising powers. Thus it is both a geographical term (particular countries are post-colonial) and a historical period. Some see this definition as problematic, as it over-emphasises the break. In his analysis of the (geo)politics of contemporary Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, Derek Gregory (2004) adopts the term 'colonial present' to emphasise further still the continuities in imagined geographies between the past and present.

Postcolonialism

However, postcolonialism is also a critical approach to analysing colonialism and one that seeks to offer alternative accounts of the world. The term is written without the hyphen to recognise the problems with the first, and more conventional, use of the concept. This recognises clear tensions within this

term. For, while it is a concept that seeks to challenge colonialism and the values and meanings it depended upon, the name ties it strongly to what went before. Rather than being a positive concept it is a negative one: it is *not* colonialism. As Anne McClintock (1995: 11) has put it, postcolonialism ‘confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper ... the world’s multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them, but by subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time’. This second definition seeks to play on the ambiguity of the concept, recognising continuities from the colonial period as well as breaks from it – and also recognising that while states might be physically decolonised, this does not mean that other effects of the colonial period have all disappeared. This is because postcolonialism also represents a shift from a form of analysis based solely around politics and economics (again the conventional way of understanding the impacts of colonialism) to consider instead the importance of the cultural products of colonialism, particularly the ways of knowing the world that emerged.

Thus, postcolonialists have argued that while political, and to a less extent economic, decolonisation might have occurred with independence, cultural decolonisation – what some call the decolonisation of the mind – has been a much more difficult process. Western values, science, history, geography and culture were privileged during colonialism as ways in which the colonisers came to know the places and peoples they colonised. However, as these knowledges and values were insinuated through institutions of education, governance and media, they also became (to a greater or lesser extent) the ways in which the colonised came to know themselves. The internalisation of a set of values and ways of knowing the world is much more difficult to overturn than the physical rule of colonial regimes, postcolonial theorists would argue.

Thus, postcolonialism is an analysis and critique of the ways in which western knowledge systems have come to dominate. It is a form of analysis that is focused around cultural productions in order that, as well as looking at the ways in which the world came to be represented in the formal documents of explorers, educators and as governors, it also looks at novels, songs, art, movies and advertising as forms of knowledge about the world, and as ways in which this knowledge is communicated. As we shall see later, however, postcolonialism is also a more positive project which seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding – often talked of in terms of ‘other voices’ – in order to present alternatives to dominant western constructs.

POSTCOLONIAL GEOGRAPHIES

Postcolonial theories seem to be very geographical in that the language used talks about spaces, centres, peripheries and borders. There were distinctive

geographies of colonialism, in terms of the different ways in which colonial policy was practised across the world. The way that the British treated Indians in South Asia was different from French policies in the Middle East. Both differed from the ways in which colonial administrators ran countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Such differences were the result of national approaches to colonialism, perceptions of the environments and the natives who inhabited these places, and even, to an extent, the influence of the individuals who had responsibility for rule. Despite this, postcolonial theory has suggested a coherence in conceptual approach that transcended these differences. What this means is that in this book we will be looking at the geographical outcomes of colonial and the postcolonial processes (the influence on the landscape, representations of place and so on) rather than comparing the practices of colonialism and the postcolonial response to these in different countries. While this loses the historical detail of how specific colonial representations and policies played out in different places, it does allow us to look at the continuities in the construction of colonial knowledge (and resistance to it) which transcend conventional regional geographies (and the ways in which these processes continue into post-colonial practice).

Geography is very important to postcolonialism. On the whole, postcolonial theory has been dominated by scholars from the discipline of literature. Their focus has been on the texts of colonialism in terms of the books written by travellers, academics, colonial administrators, anti-colonial resisters, politicians and novelists, amongst others. These are important texts, all the more so because previous approaches to colonialism ignored such sources. The words on the pages of these texts have had a great influence on how we see the world and the various connections between its different parts. However, these texts are perhaps ideals – how colonial societies *should* be organised in an ideal world, the maps of colonial space or treatises for how the post-colonial world order *should* play out. But when texts turn into practices, all sorts of other things come into play. Most importantly, there are all sorts of questions of translation: how will texts translate into other languages and be read by those with different cultural backgrounds? How will buildings or agricultural practices translate into environments that are very different to those dominant in the countries where the texts were written? How well will colonial administrators or development workers be able to translate their instructions into day-to-day practice (will they be distorted by ambition, corruption or misunderstandings)? And how well did the natives understand the intentions of colonial practice? They may have believed in them, they may have gone along with them, they might have actively resisted them – or perhaps they just failed to understand what was intended. Each had consequences for the ways in which the colonial texts were translated into real outcomes. A geographical version of postcolonialism is attentive to the ways in which texts are changed as they are translated into practice in particular places around the world.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I have split the book into three sections, following the first three terms introduced at the beginning of this chapter:

- 1 *Colonialisms* will consider the ways in which understandings of the rest of the world were incorporated into European knowledge, from the period prior to exploration of the lands beyond Europe's boundaries until the present. We will see how formal knowledge of the world was collected, how this was disseminated through society via education and popular culture, and how the knowledge of this world was translated (or mistranslated) into practice.
- 2 *Post-colonialisms* stresses the continuities existing between the colonial to the post-colonial periods. This section will consider the cultural similarities and differences that have emerged since the end of the colonial period, looking at the rise of the 'Third World', and development and globalisation as important post-colonial processes.
- 3 *Postcolonialisms* will think about postcolonialism as a critical theoretical project which challenges western assumptions, stereotypes and ways of knowing and offers its own alternatives. It will also look at the extent to which postcolonialism runs through cultural productions in wider society, and will finish up by examining the relevance of postcolonialism to some of the big questions about poverty and inequality faced in the world today.

As already indicated, one of the goals of postcolonialism is to include voices that have been previously excluded from academic discussions. Postcolonial writers tend to challenge the presentation of singular narratives and instead seek to include multiple voices in their works. Thus, in this book, alongside the story that I am telling about postcolonial geographies are a series of boxes that include direct and sustained quotations from other authors, both academic and popular, so that you can see how others articulate the issues discussed in each section. These include extracts from the work of travel writers, academics, politicians, novelists and others writing at the times and, sometimes, in the places we are discussing. This means you will have the opportunity to read the original sources alongside my interpretation of them – you may not always agree with my version! I hope that you will not stop at reading these excerpts: although I have attempted to choose passages that represent these other texts well, I hope that these little tasters will encourage you to seek out the originals and read further.

When we are thinking about how the world is represented, when we think about the sources from which we each get our understandings of the world around us, we cannot only look to written sources but must also closely examine images – whether these are the paintings of nineteenth century Orientalists, film stills, illustrations from the *National Geographic*, or advertising images. Thus there is a lot of illustrative material placed alongside my argument, like the text boxes mentioned above. Please give these more than

a passing glance – think about how they work; why the artist or photographer sought to create that particular image; how the meaning of the image might change over time, in different places, depending upon where the image was placed.

At the end of each chapter I have suggested a few sources for you to read up to find out more about particular issues. While these tend to be academic sources, I have also included films and works of fiction, both of which are important sources for finding out about the postcolonial world we inhabit.

Further reading on postcolonial geography

- Blunt, A. and McEwan, C. (eds) (2002) *Postcolonial Geographies*. London: Continuum.
- Blunt, A. and Rose, G. (eds) (1994) *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gregory, D. (2004) *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jacobs, J. (1996) *Edge of Empire*. London: Routledge.
- Sidaway, J. (2000) 'Postcolonial Geographies: An Exploratory Essay', *Progress in Human Geography*, 24 (4): 591–612.