



Section 7

BEYOND THE WEST

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Introduction: Cultural Geographies Beyond the West

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In 1999, a new episode in the popular British spy series, James Bond, was released: *The World Is Not Enough*. Since 1962, when Bond found himself in Jamaica tracking down the archvillain Dr No, he had been sent to save the world in a repertoire of countries and cities whose geographical reach puts the British empire in the shade – from New Orleans to Rio, Haiti to New York, Istanbul to Moscow, Los Angeles, Berlin, Casablanca, Calcutta ... but, in 1999, the action opened in London. Bond crashed out of the very openly secret headquarters of MI6 (see Pile, 2001) on the Thames in pursuit of the villain who had just blown a hole in its side, and careered down the usually placid river. In Q's latest design model speedboat, which handily turned into a car, the chase moved into the City of London and the back streets of the East End and former Docklands. James Bond's city-wrecking tactics had finally come home – just in time to christen the vast Millennium Dome by sliding down its roof. It was the beginning of the film, so he never caught up with the baddie. But the Bond genre had caught up with the times. The adventures and character of James Bond have shifted over time to cope (sort of) with détente, the end of the Cold War, new kinds of enemies, and tetchy cooperation with effective and tough female agents (and villains).

The Bond genre draws the world into a particular geography in its space of action, glamour and prejudice of various kinds. The inclusion of London as a site to be trashed in the course of saving the planet marked, for me, a symbolic moment in which the action of British interests drew closer in, turned back on itself as the ordering of the world shifts once again. As we seek to address long-standing forms of cultural imperialism embedded in the very concepts which are deployed in the service of academic research and writing, we could do worse than to keep in mind the ageing yet perennially popular figure of Bond. Not simply as a reminder that reinvention is possible – new lead actors, new sexual politics, new geopolitical orders – but, and equally instructive, always with the same plot: to prevent someone (else?) taking over the planet! So, a cautionary tale for postcolonializing intellectual enterprises, which, it has been noted, might so easily reinscribe relations of power and domination into their revisionist efforts. But the Bond genre also works as a vivid metaphor of how geography is embedded in the ways in which as scholars we come to know about and engage with the world.

Geographers have, like Bond, travelled the planet, but to produce knowledge about it rather than to save it. Initially this was about

extracting information about other places to draw them into the expanding database (and economic and political empires) of the west. Over time, and by the late twentieth century, geography has settled into the western academy, but with some profound divisions in its production of knowledge. For example, as Jackson and Jacobs noted in 1996, geography conferences saw almost no overlap between audiences in sessions on racism and those on postcolonialism. Sessions on racism confronted contemporary political issues, while those on postcolonial geographies were (and still are) embedded in analyses of the past. The irony here is that one of the key imperatives of a broader postcolonial critique in cultural studies and social theory has been to help scholars 'attend to the complex ways that the past inheres in the present' (1996: 3). It is in this spirit that this section turns from the more usual round of geographic engagements with the historical phenomenon of the colonial or postcolonial moment, and suggests ways in which the postcolonial gaze might be cast back on the production of (western) cultural geography itself. And here, other divisions, in conferences and in the literature, are also significant: the great distance, for example, which has arisen between many geographers who work on and in different regions of the world; and the circulations of a hegemonic, unmarked and apparently unlocated realm of geographic theory, which is in fact profoundly tagged by its production in the dominant Anglo-American 'heartland' of graduate schools, research funds and publication outlets (Yeung, 2001).

There is a geography, then, to how cultural geographic knowledge is produced, the sites of production of its theory, the routes it tracks as it travels and is transported across the globe, the places it never reaches, and the vast zones of the world which never inform its imagination. Like James Bond's adventures, though, the western geographical imagination follows certain restricted pathways around the world, enabled and inscribed by the geopolitical moment. Its journeys also track a form of imperialism and are shaped by deeply entrenched global divisions and inequalities. But it certainly does not always have its own way (unlike Bond, who usually lives to see off another baddie). So while this section sets out

some of the ways in which cultural geography's knowledges have been and still are embedded in western hegemony, our ambition is equally to demonstrate how the empire has already been assailed from a range of different places and perspectives. The empire has indeed written back – and like the villain in *The World Is Not Enough*, have taken their grievances to the heart of the empire. Geography's knowledges are profoundly shaped by colonial pasts and geopolitical presents. But they have also already been shaped, as we will demonstrate, by the demands and challenges of people in poor countries (women, rulers, activists, NGOs, popular movements); in the west (black and working-class women, diasporic intellectuals, internationalist activists); and in the academy (the field of area studies, scholars working outside the western academy, an emerging postcolonial critique). So while there is a long way to go before western geography redresses its inheritance of neo-imperialist practice, in some fields of the discipline, we argue, there have already been important changes, which could perhaps serve as an inspiration for those working in other fields.

We have chosen to look in this section at feminist cultural geography; culture and development; and cultures of democracy. In each of these fields, we track the routes whereby knowledge and academic and political practice have been dislocated from their hegemonic western centres. The authors show how the roots of imperial knowledge are often found in other places, yet denied (as with democracy); how challenges to the limited scope of theory and politics have fundamentally changed international intellectual and political agendas (in relation to feminism); and how the 'objects' of powerful forms of knowledge and institutional capacities have variously embraced, criticized and even rejected them (in the case of development studies) – but how such challenges have in all three cases certainly changed both theory and practice. The three authors, and the three fields they have chosen to engage with, each come to the politics of postcolonializing cultural geography from somewhat different positions. But all of them track ways in which thinking spatially (or geographically) about the circuits and tracks of knowledge brings into view not only the persisting power

relations in these academic and institutional fields, but also the sources of potential alternatives and opposition to hegemonic forms of geographic knowledge and practice.

In this introduction I will draw out how an emergent postcolonial form of cultural geographic knowledge is being produced in the realm of theory and politics across the three examples covered by the chapters in this section. And here, I suggest, geography has an important potential contribution to make to efforts to postcolonialize western academic practices. To a broader cultural studies, geography can offer a nuanced way to think about the spatiality of how knowledge is produced, circulated and transformed. Importantly for this book, then, the intersection between cultural studies and geography is a particularly fertile zone in which to explore the potential to move beyond western hegemony in the production of knowledge. For the geography of culture, as Gupta and Ferguson (1999) so clearly point out, has to be imagined in quite different ways from the mosaic of nationally bounded and discrete units which predominated in cultural anthropology until recently. And, following Clifford (1997), the object of study of anthropology can no longer (if it ever was) appropriately be thought of as the bounded unit of the village or community. Rather, we need to attend to what he calls the 'discrepant cosmopolitanisms' of people everywhere, whose routes and connections beyond their place of abode have been and perhaps increasingly are as important as any 'local' culture or social network. In an era where diasporic links and transnational relations of all kinds are increasingly definitive of cultural dynamics, the idea that academic knowledge, or the political practices which so often flow from such knowledge, can remain bounded in unreflective and hegemonic national entities, or only attach themselves to and follow the tracks of dominant forms of transnationalism, is quite problematic.

The ambition of this section is to demonstrate some of the ways in which prominent forms of western cultural geography have been challenged to acknowledge their locatedness; and to engage with alternative forms of transnational connectedness. In so doing, the close association between geographical knowledge and hegemonic geopolitical formations

has, at least to some extent, been disrupted. As all three authors acknowledge, these power relations are not so easily displaced – but their chapter highlight the importance of ongoing efforts to 'decolonize the disciplinary gaze' (Jacobs, introduction to Section 6 in this volume). They do not suggest that dominant forms of knowledge are easily overturned, or that alternatives are inevitably going to succeed (see also Sidaway, 2000). Through the three chapters, each of the authors treads a close path between the capacities of powerful institutions and ideas, and the already existing alternatives which can and might displace, if not dislodge, forms of patriarchy, capitalism and western hegemony.

A significant contribution of these chapters is to trace some of the 'discrepant' intellectual cosmopolitanisms which have shaped important areas of cultural geographical knowledge, in the fields of feminism, democratic politics and development.

For development studies, the 'object' of its enquiry has always suggested a broad geographic scope for the production of its knowledge. But this field has historically been profoundly divided between a dominant base of western academies and agencies, and the subordinate fields of practice and application. As Michael Watts shows, while appreciating the continued significance of these divisions and power relations (as his conclusion suggests), there are many different trajectories along which the field of development studies has travelled. Modernizing elites in poor countries have embraced the ambition of progress and industrialization; and intellectuals in 'developing' countries have critically reflected on the practice of development and its impacts, to find it substantially wanting. Underdevelopment theory and post-developmentalism are just two examples of trends in development which have been led by scholars arguably 'beyond' the west, inspired by and challenged to respond to opposition to the consequences of development in many places around the world.

But like the transnational form taken by the anti-globalization opposition to some of the latest rounds of development interventions (neoliberalism, genetic modification, environmental 'protection'), the tracks of academic knowledge are more complex than simply

'Third World' opposition to 'western' hegemony. That is because many of the scholars whose work has been crucial in this field have been on the move, tracking paths into the west, or from western bases to political and intellectual centres in poorer countries. The grounds for a postcolonial critique of development are possibly immanent in 'local' alternatives to western hegemony (Escobar, 2001). But they are also apparent within the circuits of hegemonic knowledge fields, amongst those working within the World Bank, as Watts explores. Transformations in knowledge can emerge amongst those speaking in the voice of modernization to challenge it, for example, or engaging with western theory to dislocate it (Gilroy, 1994). New and emergent ways of thinking about and intervening in the world are potentially found in all of these. As Watts shows in some detail, development ideas and practices are a result of the complex dynamics of intersecting knowledges and practices in specific places and institutions. This undermines any possibility of holding to a politics which pits a hegemonic development ideology against a populist resisting alterity. Tracking these complexities, or enumerating already existing alternatives to hegemonic development practices, is however, in his view, in danger of underplaying the actually existing and very powerful forms of capitalist exploitation which continue to frame economic growth and livelihoods across the globe.

Geographies of feminist cultural politics are instructive here, at least partly because they raise prominently questions about cultural incommensurability, and a politics of difference. Cherye McEwan traces some of the ways in which western feminism has been challenged by the political and intellectual voices of black and working-class women in the west, and by 'Third World' feminism. Both of these (diverse) initiatives have challenged the dominant understandings of what feminism involves, and also insisted on exposing white women's complicity in forms of neocolonial power relations within the field of feminist scholarship (classically, Mohanty, 1989).

Western feminism has been changed, both politically and in terms of theoretical endeavours, as a result. It is impossible to assume, for example, that accounts of 'home' or public/private divides can be based solely on white

western women's experiences (see, for example, Rose, 1993). But Cheryl McEwan is suggesting that the geographic tracks of feminist knowledge and practice need to be complicated even further. The field of feminist politics, she suggests, is pluralized, and the existence of different forms of feminism in different contexts perhaps marks the limits of engagement. Western feminism, then, rather than origin or exemplar, is just one amongst many different kinds of feminism, perhaps with overlapping and intersecting lineages. But to truly decentre feminism (and other kinds of knowledge and politics too?), following Chakrabarty (2000), she proposes a 'provincialization' of the west. And here the caution of many postcolonial writers – that the postcolonial critique might simply reinscribe western dominance – is also relevant. To insist that the west should necessarily engage with, learn from, write about, other places in the course of decolonizing itself, is also to open the door to a new phase of neo-imperialism in which the west remains at the centre. Moreover, in relativist vein, pluralizing feminisms suggests an equivalence which the power relations of institutions, economics and academic publishing belies. To counter this, McEwan proposes acknowledging and supporting contestation: acknowledging the fragile associations across different interests and positions within the field of international feminisms, for example, and encouraging political links and intellectual comparisons which bypass the west. Once again, a geographical imagination of routes, the connections and tracks across and between different positions and places which make those places what they are, could cut a path through the perennially intractable incommensurability and difference/universality distinctions which plague this field, and others.

As all three authors note, though, simply reimagining the discursive field – of feminism, development or democracy – is not going to make the deeply embedded power relations of the present, and the inheritances of the past, disappear. Perhaps most pressingly the circulation of certain ideas of democracy, deeply marked by their association with US exceptionalism, reminds us of this. At large in the world, the idea of democracy and the sovereign rights of people (as opposed to rulers) has supported numerous geopolitical

insurgencies on the part of powerful nations, in those of the poorest around the world. David Slater sketches out some of the ways in which theories of democracy have been tied historically to ideas and practices of exclusion, racism and slavery. 'Renarrativizing' (following Watts) democracy's histories is one path to postcolonializing this central concern of cultural and political geography. But being alert to the contemporary contestations and transformations in the practices of democracy around the world is another, which ties closely to McEwan's suggestion that it is political contestation that is most likely to provoke change. Slater concludes his chapter with an assessment of contemporary political sources of a 'beyond' to Euro-Americanism in the field of democracy. Alternative indigenous practices of democracy, new kinds of accommodations between multiple traditions of democracy within changing national contexts, or emergent oppositional forces which draw on a range of influences in constituting their forms of democracy, all speak of already existing alternatives.

But while the west's form of democracy has travelled the globe through various eras of geopolitical dominance, these alternatives, although certainly circulated internationally (e.g. the practices of the Zapatistas, or South African experiments in constitutional democracy), have no privileged circuits through which to extend or impose their agendas around the world. Slater concludes by suggesting that 'one of the key problems we face in the West is to find ways of expanding our geographies of reference and learning so we do not reproduce the arrogance and ignorance of self-contained visions of superiority'.

However, writing on the relations between postcolonialism and South African geography, Jonathan Crush asks: does 'the decolonization of the discipline require a rupture with the knowledge industry of the western heartlands of geographical enterprise, or is there room for a productive, postcolonial interface?' (1993: 62). His review shows that South African geography has followed a course which ties it to intellectual trends in Anglo-American geography (especially a radical Marxism), but also to, for example, Indian historiography, local trade unions and political movement intellectuals. In addition, the

politics of anti-apartheid conflict (and later post-apartheid governing) have profoundly shaped the direction of geography there. In many ways, South African geographers have carved a path between being a 'sink for Euro-American thinking' (1993: 63) and remaining connected to its intellectual dynamics. Part of this is because contributing to local politics, and responding to the demands of a social history inspired by subaltern studies and a Marxism committed to working with and for 'the people', have meant that esoteric international publications are not that useful. But, as Yeung (2001) points out in relation to South East Asia, the institutional demands for 'international' publications place scholars around the world in a position of having to engage with western scholarship. The practices of western-based refereeing and editorial review need interrogation here if, on a practical level, western cultural geography is to engage with and learn from scholars in other parts of the world. But the question which Crush poses on behalf of South African geography continues to be relevant. Why should geographers, writing in and about different contexts, whose intellectual worlds are shaped by a diversity of historical and contemporary influences, of which western scholarship is just one, engage with the west?

The growing interest within western cultural geography of responding to challenges to decolonize their imagination – acknowledging past influences on what is both a hybrid and a provincial Euro-Americanism, and attempting to learn from and engage with alternative and related traditions – might not always be reciprocated. Except that the geopolitics of economic and cultural dominance affect academia too, and scholars outside the west are disciplined in various ways to continue to seek the rewards attached to engagement. The entwining of dominant forms of knowledge with oppositions, outsides and alternatives, in the fields of feminism, development and democratic theory, are significant exemplars of the challenges and opportunities facing the mainstream of western geography, as well as other geographies. Not only can scholars seek to decentre and provincialize Anglo-American geography, but – and to the extent that geographers working in and on other regions choose to engage with this intellectual tradition – there is a real

opportunity to enrich and diversify the field of western cultural geography. In the words of Chakrabarty, this might ensure that the 'world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous' (2000: 46).

As Sidaway notes, 'at their best and most radical, postcolonial geographies will not only be alert to the continued fact of imperialism, but also thoroughly uncontainable in terms of disturbing and disrupting established assumptions, frames and methods' (2000: 607). The task, he suggests, is to find a path between a necessary continuing engagement with fields of knowledge which for historical and geopolitical reasons have been dominated by the west (Chakrabarty, 2000), and a search for 'forms and directions that will at the very least relocate (and perhaps sometimes radically dislocate) familiar and often taken-for-granted geographical narratives' (2000: 607).

Such an engagement, though, cannot be on the terms set by western geography. Speaking back to the self-appointed centre of the discipline will involve challenging the familiar tracks of publication and distribution through the wealthiest countries in the world, reinscribing a range of ways of writing, sources of inspiration, criteria of excellence and, most significantly, broadening the grounds of theoretical reflection. Moreover, while unlearning privilege as loss (Spivak, 1990), western geographers cannot expect reciprocation from their counterparts elsewhere. But, as the chapters which follow make clear, the conversations have already begun. And perhaps most importantly, we might return here to consider our hero Bond's family motto, 'The World Is Not Enough'. The point is not to replace one megalomaniac vision of global dominance with another: in this case, to gain the world as a

resource for western geographical scholarship is both not enough, and most definitely not what is being proposed here! Rather, it is to transform the ethics, politics and geographies of scholarly engagement.

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