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“My Paper, My Paper”: Reflections on the embodied production of postcolonial geographical responsibility in academic writing

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ABSTRACT

This article asks the question: what are my responsibilities as a postcolonial geographical writer? It takes as its starting point three extracts from texts written by the writer on their journey towards becoming an academic: a catalyst moment, a moment of self-production as an academic, and a moment of (failed) academic production. This journey raises a problematic around the ways in which the body speaks in academic writing, and the remainder of the piece reviews the geographical literature on materiality in relation to the body, arguing that Deleuzian views of matter as agentic and creative are particularly helpful in comprehending and engaging responsibly with the indeterminate but insistent ways in which the body speaks in postcolonial academic writing.

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1. Introduction

This article asks the question: what are my[1] responsibilities as a postcolonial geographical writer? Academic responsibility has become a particularly fraught ethical question in recent years, cast and re-cast for example through notions of citizenship and civic responsibility (Nixon, 2001; Halliday, 1999; Macfarlane, 2005), as well as pedagogic responsibility (Hay, 2001; Wellens et al., 2006). Geographers in particular have been formulating a range of geographies of responsibility in which responsibility, defined most succinctly as ‘the requirement to do something about [inequality]’ (Massey, 2004, p. 10), is based variously on relationality (Massey, 2004), obligation (Corbridge, 1993), economic connections (Allen, 2006) and generosity (Barnett and Land, 2007). This article contributes to these geographies of responsibility by focusing on “the geography closest in” (Simonsen, 2000, p. 7), arguing that it is within the multiple materialities of the *body* that, in particular, a responsible politics of postcolonial geographical *writing* can most fruitfully be located.

The structure of the piece is as follows: First this lengthy introduction will highlight the inter-relationships between academic responsibility as a politics of postcolonial geographical writing and a multiple materiality, giving a justification for this approach. The second section is an extended reflection on three moments in my own writing in which I have confronted or reflected on my own embodied experience as a postcolonial geographical writer. Its aim is to open up and unpack a problematic around embodiment as a material postcolonial politics of academic writing. Section three traces the issues raised through postcolonial geographical theory, focusing particularly on the tensions between different kinds of materiality and their implications for academic practice. It reviews the ways in which postcolonial geography’s struggle for a complex materiality frames responsibility in multiple ways and brings this complex view of materiality to bear on the notion of embodied practice in writing. Finally, the concluding section suggests a series of questions to ask about the embodied context, content and form of postcolonial geographical writing.

The title of this article, ‘My paper, my paper’, is a conscious echo of the title of a much more famous essay, published in 1942 as part of the autobiographical writings of the African–American writer Zora Neale Hurston: ‘My people, my people!’

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[1] I use the first person, both singular (e.g. I/me) and plural (e.g. we/our), throughout this text. There is of course a long history of feminist politics around the use of the first person in academic writing, which is part of a wider challenge to the supposed ‘neutrality’ of the writer/researcher (see below). However, I also use it here deliberately, particularly in the plural, as part of a problematisation of identity, in which I include myself in a number of identities from which as a black woman I either risk exclusion (e.g. the category ‘academic’, see below) or want to affirm inclusion (e.g. the category ‘black’). Its sliding signification – between different communities (academic, black, feminist, postcolonial etc), and between inclusion and exclusion (we meaning ‘you and I’, or we meaning ‘us not you’) – is intended to incite the reader to reflect on my positions and theirs in relation to me. It is emphatically not an assumption that every reader will be a black British female postcolonial geographer, but rather a reflection on the ‘limbonalities’ (Jagessar, 2005) of my own identity (see also Tang and John, 1999).

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(Hurston, 1996). Hurston's essay reflects on the complexities and responsibilities of constituting black identity. This is a complex process partly because of the painful anger and self-loathing that comes from often being despised and abused. As Hurston observes, at the time some African–Americans tried to draw a blurred line between themselves and the more inconvenient aspects of black community: "When somebody else eats fried fish, bananas, and a mess of peanuts and throws all the leavings on the floor, they gasp, 'My skin-folks but not my kinfolks'. And sadly over all, they keep sighing, 'My people, my people!'"(Hurston, 1996, p. 215). However Hurston recognises that black identity is primarily hard to constitute because black people are highly differentiated, and therefore she has a responsibility as a writer to recognise that black identity is always contested. To pretend otherwise is, as Spivak noted 20 years ago, to empty out of the signifier 'black' any relationship with the living, breathing, bodies of people (Spivak, 1988). Hurston concludes her article by making the point that it is precisely the contestation between living subjects who are aware of their differences as well as their commonalities that constitutes responsible identity for her as a writer, so that when she meets a group of people "who won't agree on a thing, *those* are My People". (Hurston, 1996, p. 218). The article below seeks to cast the question of the responsibilities of postcolonial geographical writing in the context of the constitution of this kind of contested postcolonial geographical identity.

In relation to academic writing and responsibility, the work of black, third world and indigenous writers has consistently critiqued the ways in which knowledge production – even knowledge about the 'non-West' – has been skewed towards the perspectives and modes of articulation of western writers and institutions (Mohanty, 1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Hill Collins, 1991; Hooks, 1992). These writers therefore highlight the importance of 'clearing space' for a much wider range of perspectives on an irretrievably interlinked world (Alasuutari, 1995; Spivak, 1992; Chakrabarty, 2000). These writers have always been clear, however, that the politics of difference surrounding which 'voices' would fill any 'space' is complex, not least because it is the mutual constitution of west and non-west, (post)coloniser and (post)colonised, that defines postcoloniality when it is seen as the *material condition* of modern life. This means that there is no unified or authentic, 'white/black', 'western/non-western' or 'indigenous/non-indigenous' perspective that can be responsibly 'represented' (Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1996; Langton, 2003), either as 'self' or as 'other': responsibility becomes a complex negotiation of the politics of identity and difference.

This being the case, it becomes all the more important that postcolonial geographical writers like myself – situated in a relatively rich country, and (for the moment at least)[2] in a relatively high-status geography department in a relatively well-resourced UK university (Deem, 2003; National Audit Office, 2007) – at the very least reflect carefully on how to write responsibly within this location. As many have noted, there is Anglo-American dominance in geography worldwide (Bonnett, 2003); there is a culture of productivism engendered by the Research Assessment Exercise and the neo-liberalisation of the academy more widely (Rennie Short, 2002); critical perspectives remain relatively marginal (Harvey, 2006); and knowledge production is indissolubly tied to global capital (including postcolonial work itself) (Huggan, 2001; Heiss, 2003). In these circumstances, the postcolonial contestations over meaning that could arise from a multiplicity of voices may be rather difficult to either stage or hear (Robinson, 2003; Noxolo et al., 2008). Those of us located in or near centres of global publication therefore have to carefully negotiate what roles our writing can responsibly play in shifting these centres.

There have recently been a number of calls for postcolonial geographers to take on a form of responsibility that is more personally challenging than the repeated call for alternative voices or the repeated critiques of historical colonialism. For example, Le Heron and Lewis (2007, p. 6) have recently challenged the 'power geometries' through which postcolonial 'experts' from the Anglo-American academy are in a position to go to Australia and preach postcolonial politics, effectively "asking East Asian voices to reproduce their peripherality in journals controlled by the centre". Similarly, Gilmartin and Berg (2007, p. 122) have criticised the tendency of British postcolonial geographers in general to focus on "faraway pasts and geographically distant spaces", rather than highlighting the ongoing and more intimate colonialisms that might be more directly challenging to the everyday practices and epistemologies of present-day geographers themselves. Given these recent criticisms of privilege and distancing in postcolonial geography, perhaps Clare Madge's comments 15 years ago still have a disturbing validity: "the mainstream hegemonic belief still prevails in geography that it is acceptable, justifiable, even a 'right' to undertake research in the Third World, which is perhaps a reflection of geography's conservative Eurocentric nature and the colonial roots of the discipline" (Madge, 1993, p. 290). The material contexts of geographical writing, both historical and contemporary, still have an impact on its politics. In tackling the paternity and eurocentrism of Geography, McEwan (1997, p. 373) argues specifically for an exploration of the historical positioning of women's and subaltern groups' writing, not so much in relation to the discipline, but in relation to "the gendered and racialised context of specific imperial encounters". In a more contemporary context, King's (2003, pp. 180–181) call to consider the significance of different postcolonial writers' "cultural and political positions, life experiences, social agendas, memories and intellectual perspectives [as]... at the heart of the politics of writing itself" needs careful thought. That is, how do aspects of my embodied positionality speak within the writing that I produce, and what are the implications of this for the contestation of difference and identity that is at the heart of postcolonial writing?

The politics of writing has of course been examined from a range of postcolonial and feminist perspectives, centring around a sustained critique of the 'neutrality' of western white male speaking positions, in terms of "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 1988, p. 287; see also Boyce Davies, 1994; Henderson, 1990; Smith, 1990; Bondi, 1997). As McEwan (2001, p. 101) has observed, bringing feminist and postcolonial geographies together highlights "a constant interrogation of the conditions of knowledge production, particularly in relation to who gets to write about whom". This has led to an emphasis on the writer being increasingly explicit about their own positionality and about the specificities and effects of the power relations that exist between researcher and respondent and between writer and audience (Armstead, 1995; Pini, 2004; Bressey, 2003). However, this emphasis on reflexivity has itself generated some debate amongst feminist geographers in recent years, and there have been calls for change. For example, Kobayashi (2003) has offered a trenchant threefold critique of the pitfalls of reflexivity. First, she highlights its potential for self-centred and selfish writing. Second, she argues that, in staying at home and worrying about writing rather than going out to change the world, reflexivity has become the antithesis of activism. Finally she points out the paradoxical power of the western feminist to use reflexivity to name who is to be designated the 'other', and to label

[2] At the time of writing I occupy a temporary lectureship.

power relations. Rose (1997, p. 311) has memorably critiqued the conventions of the writing of reflexivity itself: firstly she points out the forms of distancing between researcher and researched conjured up in the rhetorical 'landscape of power' through which people structure their writing on reflexivity; secondly she labels a 'goddess trick' the counterbalancing of the original 'god trick' of supposed neutrality by the supposition that one academic can ask and answer so many questions that the power relations in any situation can become totally transparent.

This three part critique of the politics of writing – of privilege and inequality in the *conditions* of writing; of self-centredness and self-distancing in the *form* of writing; and of the relationships between writing and 'real-world' activism in the *content* of writing – forms the basis of the set of questions with which this article finishes. En route towards this version of postcolonial responsibility however, this paper takes up McEwan's call (2003, p. 343) for postcolonial analysis to combine the textual and the material, in order to highlight the "connections between the relations of power that order the world and the words and images that represent the world". The paper therefore explores the multiple materiality of the body in terms of the ways in which it speaks through academic writing, and frames our responsibility as postcolonial geographers in terms of the way we respond to its demands.

2. My papers, my papers: towards a problematic of responsibility in postcolonial geographical writing

In this Section, I want to present three extracts from three different texts that I wrote over a 15-year period. I have chosen them because they offer a sketch of my development as a postcolonial geographical writer, offering three very specific moments: a catalyst moment, in which I reflected on being a black British development practitioner, which led me to go back to university; a moment of self-production as an academic; and a moment when I was encountering and attempting to come to terms with the realities of academic production. Mine is a very specific and particular journey, in which I have been very aware of my big black body as a locus of difference in the conditions of production of my writing, as there are so very few black female geographers in Euro-America (Pulido, 2002; Monk, 2000).

This awareness of embodiment is routed through my own complex postcolonial geography, as I live the "double consciousness" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 1) of being black (African-Caribbean heritage) and British. It has been noted many times how impossibly complex it is to locate and map postcolonialism either temporally (Schwarz, 2000; Hall, 1996) or spatially (Sidaway, 2000). Quite apart from perfectly valid disagreements over whether and where colonialism still exists, is 'post', or is 'neo' (Alexander, 1995; Anderson, 2003), historical forms of colonial rule and therefore of their legacies are diverse and have specific local contexts. Though the generalised framework of postcolonial theorising around the mutual constitution of coloniser and colonised can be applied in a wide range of circumstances globally, offering ways of understanding "the geopolitics of today's 'stretched-out geographies'" (Power et al., 2006, p. 231), one of the first steps towards a consideration of the embodied politics of postcolonial geographical writing is to consider the specific geographies of postcolonial theory itself. This is of course a mammoth task that goes well beyond the boundaries of this article (but see for example Ashcroft et al., 1995). However it is possible to surmise that different local histories of colonising/being colonised, as well as formal independence or otherwise – for example in Africa (for example Mbembe, 2001; Ngugi wa'Thiongo, 1981), in India (for example Prakash, 1999; Chakrabarty, 2000); in Ireland (for example Carroll and King, 2003; Howes, 2001); in China (for example Ning, 2005); and in Australia (for example Langton, 2003) – will engender different emphases in relation to postcolonial theorising.

In terms of the postcolonial relationships between Britain and the Caribbean, the figure of the slave has become iconic in terms of typifying the mutual constitution of coloniser and colonised (Beckles, 1989; Wood, 2002).[3] This emphasis on the processes and legacies of enslavement – the disavowal of place and belonging, the ugly licence for abuse of a body that was seen as owned by others, and the longstanding effects of inequality and racism – is perhaps in turn what leads to a focus on the body as a space to stage a struggle towards a "politics of fulfilment" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 37), through dance (Stanley-Niaah, 2004), through sexuality (Cooper, 1993), through fashion and ornamentation (Weekes, 1997), and sometimes through the "collective autodestruction" (Fanon, 1967, p. 54) of violence. Although clearly not every black British person of Caribbean heritage will feel this way, and it is certainly possible that many other people also feel this way, I acknowledge this postcolonial geography as informing my writing and its embodiment.

I have chosen three extracts that particularly illustrate my personalised embodied experience of becoming a postcolonial geographer, in terms of the *conditions* of the pieces' production, in terms of the *content* of the particular extracts, and in terms of the *form* in which they are written. My aim in presenting them is not to give an empirical illustration or to substantiate or 'flesh out' the theory in the third section: they are presented as the context in which the problematic of this piece has been produced. This problematic travels via my reflections on the particular responsibilities of my own racialised and gendered body in relation to academic writing but it does not stop there – it pushes towards a wider postcolonial responsibility that I will explore in more detail below.

The first piece is a field report that I wrote when I was about 25, at the end of 1 year working in Ghana with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), a large British non-governmental organisation (NGO) which is part-financed by the British government. I was a teacher in a secondary school in western Region but I was also a British development worker during this time, receiving significant financial support[4] through British development assistance funds (governmental and non-governmental), trained and supported professionally and personally within the traditions of the perceived needs of a British person overseas. An extract from this report appears below:

[3] Of course this construction of British/Caribbean experience has its own specificity within African diasporic experience, which illustrates the complexity of constructing a geography of postcolonial writing. Though Caribbean writing around slave societies brings into play a number of key postcolonial terms in relation to their complex racialisation, such as 'creolization' (Brathwaite, 1995) and the notion of 'crossroads' (Nettleford, 1994), yet that racialisation has had a number of internal specificities which can be separated heuristically (e.g. indo-, sino-, Caribbean; Anglophone, francophone) in relation to colonial and post-independence experiences that have been heavily differentiated in diverse ways (Vertovec, 1993), but which have often resisted isolation (see for example Shibata, 1999).

[4] Although I had chosen to live a lifestyle that was very different to what I was used to, like other VSO 'volunteers' I was paid by the education authority in Ghana. Additionally, VSO also paid for my air fare, and gave me financial help *in situ*, such as interest-free loans and medical expenses, both of which made a significant difference to my financial circumstances in comparison with some of my Ghanaian colleagues. It is for this reason that I problematise (but do not replace) the word 'volunteer', which emphasises the element of choice (and freedom to make that choice), but has connotations of unpaid work (see www.vso.org.uk; see also (Howes, 2001; Unterhalter et al., 2002).

Extract from VSO Field report:

My experiences here as a Black volunteer of Caribbean extraction have been very interesting though sometimes disturbing. I would have appreciated some formal discussion around this during orientation and would be willing to help in some way with training in the future....

Working within this culture and beside local people I have gained many insights into the way other people work as well as the way I work – I am much more 'British' than I thought I was – a black person born in Britain is not always encouraged to feel any more at home than the phrase 'second generation immigrant' implies, but when one is abroad one becomes very aware where 'home' is, especially since I have never been to my parents' land – Ghanaians make it very clear, though not in an unfriendly way, that this is not your home, not permanently anyway... I have always taken the unity of all Black people as self-evident but I have found it disturbing sometimes that on the whole Ghanaians do not. Sometimes this has led to hurt that people don't accept me as Black like them but rather white in a black skin, sometimes to pride in their pride in their (and probably my own) traditions and finally I think an acceptance of how I stand as a British Black with this and many other traditions to take pride in...

This extract is redolent with painful confusion about national and racial identity. Before going to Ghana I had completed a French degree and had been teaching in a secondary school in inner-city Manchester for 1 year. This was the first time I had been to Africa, and it was not until I got to Ghana and experienced the complexity of my similarities and differences with Ghanaians, that I recognised how mythical the continent had become in my mind as a Black person in a postcolonial world, how closely it was identified with a distilled and distorted 'essence of blackness' that drew on simplified linear narratives of 'roots' and 'unity' (see Gilroy, 1993, p. 191). At the same time, my experience with VSO was my first contact with international development as an institutional structure, and by becoming a British development worker I became embodied as peculiarly and specifically British. I experienced this as a very intense fragmentation within my bodily performance as black British, in a context in which, since almost all the other 'volunteers' were white, I felt I had to struggle in isolation to work with the dissonances between these fragments.

In my field report, which I locate as the catalyst and starting point for my academic writing, I tried to be responsible in relation to each of the several identities that I embodied, whilst struggling hard not to fragment under the pressure of their differences. First, the report had to be submitted to the VSO office on a standard institutional form – divided into sections, directed by questions, and complete with the VSO logo – so the British development institution was very clearly its audience and seemed to me clearly agentic in relation to any recommendations I might make. I had received training and had spent a year embodying the ethics of development work, being a temporary part of a community of British development practitioners. I therefore tried very hard to write in a language that I thought my new-found community would understand: I made evaluations of the region in terms of lack, and recommended ways in which VSO could fill those gaps (Mitchell, 1995; see for example Baaz, 2005; Goudge, 2003; Noxolo, 2000 on development as discourse). Second, I felt this was an opportunity to talk to a powerful institution that had resources available to make life easier for other black people – I could, 'represent' (Said, 1994) the viewpoints of a wider black community. I therefore tried to express some of my experiences as one of the very few black 'volunteers' at the time, offering my services to train future black 'volunteers' so that they would not be so confused and alone as I was, and I made recommendations for VSO to bring more resources into the area, trying to voice some of the concerns that some of my Ghanaian colleagues had expressed to me. In this 'representative' role I worked with care, tempering observations based on difference with universalist comparisons that played down the differences between Ghana and Britain, between black and white, attempting to avoid the total fragmentation that might make it impossible for me to 'represent' one meaningfully to another.

This first experience of development practice led me on a journey to try to explore the complex relationships between race, nation and development. For about 8 years I delivered training for those who were about to go overseas with VSO, including (partly in response to my field report) reflections on what anti-oppressive development practice might mean for them. During this time, I also went back to university. I studied part-time to complete a masters and PhD in development geography, submitting when I was about 35. An extract from the methodology chapter of my PhD, which was primarily concerned with the ways in which British governmental development discourses are racialised, forms the second moment in my journey towards becoming an academic writer. The following extract includes reflections on black identity as a basis for the dialogic methodology I had adopted.

Extract from PhD methodology chapter:

The point I want to make... is that, if there is to be dialogue or a truly global black politics, the position of first world black people must be recognised as thoroughly ambiguous in relation to people in the third world. Though we live with discrimination, yet we also experience the benefits of living in a first world society, which can separate us both experientially and discursively from the third world. This is "l'historicisation des hommes (sic)[5]"(Fanon, 1961, p. 158*) which Fanon sees as undermining any international black identity... Though many of us feel a sense of solidarity with the third world, particularly with the countries from which our parents or grandparents migrated, still: "Il n'est pas si facile de s'évader, par l'esprit, d'une situation concrète, d'en refuser l'idéologie tout en continuant à en vivre les relations objectives[6]"* (Memmi, 1985, p. 48)... *When black British people approach the third world with an idea of alliance, there is therefore a strong possibility that we will bring with us many of the same racialised assumptions about the possible power relations within the encounter as any other British person.*

The argument here is not that black people in the first world need to simply 'count our blessings' and ignore discrimination if we are to enter into dialogue with people in the third world... Looking at development discourse as racialised may entail an insistence on the inclusivity of blackness as an identity which can include both first and third world in a critique of racism. However, in order to address the numerous global inequalities (see for example Barff, 1995*) and consequent differences in interpretation within that black identity without imposing solutions based on global inequalities, there is also a need for a recognition that black identity is also too small and too leaky a container to be effective on its own. My analysis of the racialisation of development discourse therefore departs of necessity from a dialogue between myself as a black first world woman and people who live within third world realities. There needs to be a recognition that this is a dialogue across difference, in which shared agendas, critiques and solutions may (or may not) be the outcome of dialogue but will not necessarily be its departure point.*

[5] This translates as "the historicisation of men (sic)", which is to say the difference in the specific historical circumstances of black people in different places.

[6] It is not so easy to escape, by pure imagination, from a concrete situation, to refuse an ideology while you continue to live its objective relationships.

By the time I submitted my PhD I had been working on it, with some gaps, for a period of 6 years. I had read widely in cultural geography and completed field work in Barbados, during which I engaged in dialogue with a small number of Caribbean academics based at the University of the West Indies, and tried to combine insights from these dialogues with my reading to subject British governmental white papers on development to sustained analysis and critique. My finished thesis can be read as a moment in which I was attempting to complete a long birthing process, becoming a member of an academic community. It is a piece for examination by Anglo-American examiners, to be defended in a viva, and the piece heavily references respected French theorists in order to fully display academic literacy (Boughey, 2000) and sophisticated language skills. At the same time, however, I use the collective personal pronouns 'our' and 'we' to include myself within a globalised black intellectual community, whose work I consciously reference in long lists of citations. I imagine my audience as multiple in its racialised embodiment.

However, whilst my thesis was a confident textual assertion of the embodiment of black community through difference, it was not until 5 years later that I made a more engaged academic attempt to look again at the more painfully confusing aspects of racialisation as embodied experience. After finishing my PhD I took a 3-year career break, during which time I gave birth twice and was almost completely occupied with looking after babies and toddlers. The third extract in this story is a draft article submitted to and turned down by an academic journal not long after I came back from that career break (when I was about 40). I was on a temporary research contract that I had taken to re-launch my career, in which the subject matter did not relate directly to my PhD research and the salary was relatively low. This failed journal article[7] was an attempt to squeeze into the corners of an extended working day (mainly in the evenings while the children slept) the time and energy to resurrect and update material from my PhD. My renewed awareness of embodiment therefore had three sources: first, it was a consequence of my having spent a few years focused on what I experienced as a heavily embodied lifestyle – pregnancy, childbirth, and the physical/emotional care of small children (Longhurst, 2001; Madge et al., 2004); second, it was a consequence of working on a temporary research contract, in which pressures of time, uncertainty of tenure and relatively low income were taking their toll on my health and relationships (see for example Ní Laoire and Shelton, 2003); third, it was a consequence of being aware that I was writing for the first time as a fully-qualified black academic about my experiences of being a black British development worker for an audience (including reviewers, editors and other gatekeepers) that was likely to be largely white, an isolating experience that was/is likely to characterise much of my academic career.[8] The theorising agency of the body had forced itself into my consciousness through periods of bodily isolation, strain and maintenance. Significantly, the piece that came out of this enhanced corporeal awareness featured a reflection on an extract from a personal journal that I kept while in Ghana, and reflected on the shifting modes of racialised body image, linking these with the work of Fanon and others:

> **Extract from unpublished draft article**:
> *An excerpt from the journal I kept in Ghana illustrates the constancy of this relationship between black and white identities, even when the immediate physical presence of white people is rare. As the only British 'volunteer' working in the village, it was possible for weeks to go by without seeing any white people at all. This was very new for me, having been born and brought up in the centre of Birmingham, England's second largest city. It focused my mind on meanings of race and nation, identity and difference, and my journal is full of reflections on these themes. During one school holiday, after I had been in Ghana for several months, a group of white British 'volunteers' came to visit me for a few days. I spent a lot of time with them, taking them around the area. When I went back to school, however, and worked alongside my black Ghanaian colleagues, I made this entry in my journal:*
>
> *"After a few days spent with [my white British friends] that borrowed white self-image returned after months of being comfortably black – the slight shock of suddenly seeing all the other [Ghanaian] teachers as black, noticing the texture of the hair, the contrast of the skin, everyone suddenly looking coloured-in – the insidiousness of being an 'ethnic minority', educated into unfamiliarity with my own exterior. [The feeling] is gone again [but] I know that when I first see [a white British friend who was to visit again soon] I will look at the pallid colour and the heavy, snakelike hair, alive and moving, and feel I have to make an effort to be Pat the minority, slightly exotic, an ambassador for blackness".*
>
> *. . .This excerpt carries echoes of* Fanon's (1986) *observations (which I had not yet read) about the over-determination of black bodies in a world that has become discursively white: "In the white world the man (sic) of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his (sic) bodily schema. . ."* (Fanon, 1986, p. 110–111*). As Fanon's famous essay 'The Fact of Blackness' goes on to show, this goes well beyond the physical encounter: "Look, a Negro"* (Fanon, 1986, p. 111*). Through colonialism and development, it is a question of education, of material relations, of the hierarchisation of cultural difference, all of which become explained and perpetuated through globalised forms of racialisation of individuals in a wide variety of national contexts (see also* Baaz, 2005, pp. 96–103*;* Goudge, 2003, p. 6*). It is ". . . a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world". (*Fanon, 1986, p. 110–111*).*

In this third piece I refer back to an earlier painful awareness of the body that was present in the diary that I wrote in Ghana. This awareness of my body as racialised speaks again clearly to me in my heavily embodied situation at the beginning of an academic career, and I reflect on the weight of the forces determining the racialisation of that embodiment. There is little sense of the comfortable negotiation of ambivalence around identity that is present in the second piece, nor of the ability to 'represent' a range of identities that is present in the first. Though painfully confused, in my VSO report I felt brave enough to try to make my writing speak to the development community on behalf of various other communities. Though I had learnt that speaking on behalf of others was not so simple, I was confident when I wrote my PhD that I could make

[7] It is not my intention here to exhibit what could only appear as sour grapes by 'outing' the publication or trying to intuit what the external politics of this failure to get published may have been, apart from my having so little time and space in which to do to it (for example, what publishing priorities the editors may have had, what may have stood in the way of the reviewers understanding what I had to say). Though there doubtless is a politics to publishing, which I touch on in the series of questions below, from my perspective as a writer in a system of anonymous review I can only go by what the reviewers told me, which was that the piece needed more development than the editors (or I as it turned out) had time to give it.

[8] I have to accept that by publishing work about my embodiment as a black British academic within academic journals I am not addressing a majority African-Caribbean audience, even seen globally. The majority of my readers will probably be white and Anglo-American. Apart from the global publishing practices mentioned above, there are various historical reasons for this, not least high levels of functional illiteracy, particularly amongst women in some parts of Africa (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005), and amongst men disproportionately in the Caribbean (Ellis, 2003, p. 13), as well as the relative failure of educational systems in affluent countries with large black populations to produce proportionate numbers of black academics (Jones, 2006 ; Kulis et al., 2000), all of which must of course be set against a background of the continued exclusivity and elitism of academic work seen as a whole (Reay, 2004).

my writing address a range of identities in relation to which I could make myself responsible through dialogue. Now that I was nervously tapping on the door of an academic community from which I felt acutely estranged, largely because of my embodied experience, I was no longer so sure of my ability to live comfortably with the negotiation of difference and I referred back to some very personal writing by my 25-year-old self to make that point.

I do not wish the last extract to be interpreted as either 'false consciousness' or delayed wisdom, nor is it simply a loss of nerve when the going gets tough. I am presenting neither painful representation, nor confident ambivalence, nor a nervous focus on overdetermination (as in my first, second and third pieces respectively) as the 'correct' position of an embodied politics of writing. Instead I want to present a problematic about the body and writing that arises from these three moments, which can be summarised like this: how does the body 'speak' in our writing and how can postcolonial geographers be responsible in relation to what it says? This problematic is all the more complex because, as the clear but inconclusive effects of embodiment in my writing illustrate, the body sometimes speaks loudly, but it does not always speak clearly. In commenting on a much more famous case of embodiment in black women's writing, Toni Morrison's novel 'Beloved', Steve Pile points out that the very tangibly embodied 'haunting' that the novel relates (itself a clear engagement with the very intimately embodied legacies of slavery)[9] cannot be interpreted as offering one clear message for postcolonial politics: the very tangibility and ambiguity of this 'haunting' highlights the ways in which embodied demands can be "inarticulate... and simply demanding" (Pile, 2006). The body therefore raises questions for writing that are often both insistent *and* indeterminate: how can postcolonial geographers be responsible in relation to such questions?

The question of *how* the body speaks in academic writing (by what mechanisms, devices or channels) raises issues around the body, writing and matter that I will explore below. The ways in which writing can construct the body has been asked in numerous ways within many forms of poststructuralism, including postcolonial theory, notably around gender, but also around the ontological existence or otherwise of 'race' (see for example Gilroy, 1998; Saldanha, 2006). The next section will begin by reviewing recent calls to 'materialise' postcolonial geography, and, though critical of the call itself, I will show that the power of 'the word' to produce material inequalities, both in and through the body, has galvanised the politics of writing within postcolonial and feminist geography. However, I will argue that a view of matter itself as both agentic and creative is emerging strongly within the discipline and is highly relevant to the question of whether and how the body is active in the process of theorisation and writing. I will argue that recent moves within the discipline more broadly, in particular towards Deleuzian views of materiality, may link with aspects of postcolonial and feminist theory that theorise materiality not only as contested, but also as holding out a politics of the possible that relies precisely upon the kind of indeterminacy that the body presents. In my conclusion I set out a series of questions to consider in thinking through our responsibilities as embodied postcolonial geographical writers.

3. Postcolonial geography, materiality and responsibility

There has been an encouraging reception, particularly amongst development geographers, for postcolonial theory's potential to rework globalisation as mutual dependency – firstly by criticising processes of marginalisation (Sylvester, 1999) and secondly by 'provincialising' the first world (Chakrabarty, 2000) – which involves not only privileging peripheral voices (see Robinson, 2003), but also exploring how European thought "may be renewed from and for the margins" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16). However, postcolonial geography can also be understood as a struggle for materiality (McEwan, 2003; Radcliffe, 2005), with repeated calls to get past the textuality which is perceived as dominating postcolonial theory more widely (Legg, 2007; Cook and Harrison, 2003). Though in some ways this paper is a response to these calls, Anderson and Tolia-Kelly's (2004, p. 670) response to a similar call for the re-materialisation of social and cultural geography, highlights three problems with the call itself that are illuminating here. The first is that the teleology of 'dematerialisation' and 're-materialisation' tends to ignore the work on materiality that is already being done, and the second is that the divide between matter and text, 'world' and 'word' that is assumed in the call to move *from* textuality *to* materiality is a false dichotomy. These two objections certainly apply to calls to re-materialise postcolonial theory, in which in particular most of the writers who have been concerned with rethinking the enslavement of African peoples, including notably those concerned specifically with the quotidian sexual exploitation of female slaves (Beckles, 1999; Wood, 2002), have been centrally concerned with finding words to express the awful material suffering consequent upon both this institution and upon other aspects of European colonialism (Kincaid, 1996; Fanon, 1967), including the repeated genocides and displacements left in its wake (see for example Mbembe, 2003). 'Word' and 'world' meet in important ways through this extended reflection on slavery, as part of the legacy of this institution was specifically a discourse of racialised binary division between mind and body, between intellectual and physical capacity (hooks, 1982; Fryer, 1984). To reinforce this divide through calls to 're-materialise' is a particularly unproductive cul-de-sac in relation to this version of postcolonial theory.

The third problem that Anderson and Tolia-Kelly (2004, p. 670) highlight with the call to re-materialise is that "[m]atter is too unruly as a term to simply be 'included' at the expense, or in addition, to a focus on 'culture'" – in other words, before 'materialising', it is important to be clear precisely what the matter is. In the case of postcolonial geography specifically, it is possible to distinguish (at least) three different understandings of matter with different theoretical routes – in terms of matter as the lived realities of economic inequality, in terms of the material production of power, and in terms of tangible aspects of cultural and geographical practice. I will argue that each of these has different implications for the context, content and form of postcolonial geographical writing.

Development geographers have recently argued strongly for postcolonial geography to address material suffering. Broadly within a developmentalist (post) Marxist view of materiality, Radcliffe (2005, p. 293), for example, contrasts postcolonial criticisms of development with post-development's rejection of developmentalism, arguing that postcolonial development geography is at its most constructive when it "aims to raise living standards within an emancipatory politics". In line with the practical, developmentalist orientation of this work, McEwan (2003, p. 346) contends that postcolonial geography needs to be encouraged more in this direction, arguing that "postcolonialism might be translated from a sometimes dense and obfuscating theory into a methodology... facilitating participation and giving voice to the previously voiceless".

This desire to give voice to the voiceless encapsulates the postcolonial politics of yearning for multiple voices from which this article began. However, as Sangari (1990, p. 226) pointed out almost 20 years ago, "heteroglossia – the genuine plurality of unmerged and independent voices – is not an achievement but a

[9] 'Beloved' tells the story of Sethe, an African-American woman who, when she was a slave, killed her baby daughter in order that the child could be spared the experience of growing up a slave. After emancipation, an enigmatic young woman who arrives one day out of the blue seems to be the dead child returning in the flesh and Sethe becomes obsessed with her (Morrison, 1987).

continuing struggle between contending social forces that... has no natural culmination". In other words, far from dispensing with the need for difficult theory, the search for heteroglossia returns always to a demand for complexity and contestation, not only about the specific historical and contemporary conditions (the significant events, the important actors, the relevant circumstances, the narratives of change) that form identities, but also about the terms in which they can be voiced (Lambert, 2001; Mbembe, 2001; Spivak, 1992; Dominy, 2002). In other words, what if the voiceless choose to speak in a voice that is other to what we 'give' them (Ngugi wa'Thiongo, 1981)? This is not an abstract or deliberately obfuscating argument. For example, much of the recent critique of participation, using postcolonial and Foucauldian analyses, argues that participation is a way of imposing particular meanings, concepts and structures on poorer people, speaking in the language of choice whilst often effectively removing it (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Bryant, 2002). Such a critique is not a denial of material inequality and the need to address it; it is an insistence on the continued need for postcolonial geography to *also* address the terms in which material suffering and inequality are understood, i.e. to maintain complexity, not for its own sake, but to deny the convenient illusion that that which is seen (by funding bodies, development agencies and others), and the language through which it is understood, is simply all that there is.

This contestation over materiality can be explored in more detail through the second understanding of materiality found in postcolonial geography. Geographies of colonial and post-independence landscapes, often deploying Foucauldian theories of governmentality (Legg, 2007; Huxley, 2007), analyse the material practices of power through which difference and absence are produced spatially (Hannah, 2000). Urban landscapes have been explored as sites in which power is 'materialised' through spatial and architectural design, segregating racialised groups and lending to privilege an air of immoveable permanence (Satish Kumar, 2002; Jacobs, 1996; Bishop et al., 2003). Equally, rural landscapes are being examined increasingly in this way, for example in terms of colonial efforts to remove the traces of indigenous people from colonised terrains (Dominy, 2002). This view of the material production of landscapes, of materiality itself, as contested, as itself involving a politics of memory, in terms not only of what is 'remembered' but also in terms of what is 'forgotten' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 161) brings us to the complex materiality of the body as it has been understood in feminist theory.

In accord with feminist and postcolonial critiques of the exclusion of the body in post-enlightenment western thought (see for example Butler, 1993), the body has itself become recognised as multiple and contested matter: as a site at which material inequality is lived and experienced (Longhurst, 2001), as a location from which to perceive/produce difference (Nast and Kobayashi, 1996), and as a sensory agent in itself (Butler, 1993). As a site of material inequality, the body is produced through a set of historically contingent discursive frameworks that, for example, gender, race and (dis)able it (McKittrick, 2006; Ahmed, 1997), i.e. the production of bodily difference works in conjunction with the production of material inequality. As a location from which to perceive/produce difference, many feminist writers have sought to include their own body within their texts as a way of directly contesting the absence of the body in masculine texts, and as a way of including embodied femininity in a space from which it has often been excluded (Defromont, 1990; Simmonds, 1997). This famous passage from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, itself an extended reflection on women and writing, illustrates how this inclusion can meditate on the acute (and sometimes amusing) particularity of the embodied conditions within which the work of theorising is done, and on the ways in which body and mind can be seen as working in interaction:

> The illusion which inspired Tennyson and Christina Rosetti to sing so passionately about the coming of their loves is far rarer now than then... For truth... those dots mark the spot where, in search of truth, I missed the turning up to Fernham. (cited in Defromont, 1990, p. 118)

However, the insertion of the body as positionality has its limitations. Haraway (1991, p. 193, emphasis added) has observed that: "There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, *or wholly in any*, of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class... an optics is a *politics* of positioning". As a position from which to see then, as an optics, the body is also not fixed: Spivak (1995, p. 214) has famously encapsulated this politics of acknowledging the salience of embodied positionality, whilst recognising that this too can change, in terms of a "strategic essentialism".

The multiple materiality of the body in feminist and postcolonial writing, then, has engendered a responsibility to engage in a politics of embodied positionality which defines the context and, to some extent, the content of academic writing. Further, this combination of partiality with contingency indicates that the contemporary inequalities that, as noted in the introduction, can be seen as part of postcoloniality as a *condition*, need to be constantly seen in relationship with postcoloniality *as a politics.* This latter can be defined as "the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, in Blunt and McEwan, 2002, p. 3), and as such postcolonial geography becomes an opposition to geographically- and historically-defined inequality *in terms of* a determined affirmation of the constant possibility of radically different ways of defining both history and geography. As Kum Kum Sangari (1990, p. 220) argues in relation to magical realism, there are contexts where the historical erasure and imposition of meanings mean that official definitions of the material in terms of what is and is not 'real' do not always match people's experiences. In these contexts, this form of writing addresses the necessity:

> to assert another level of factuality, to cast and resolve the issues of meaning on another, more dialectical plane, a plane on which the notion of knowledge as provisional and of truth as historically circumscribed is not only necessary for understanding, but can in turn be made to work from positions of engagement within the local and contemporary.

The rest of this section will argue that some of the more recent ways in which geographers have begun to explore materiality are helpful in defining this "politics of the possible" (Sangari, 1990) as an embodied politics of writing.

Colebrook (2000) has argued that materiality and text need to be understood as inseparably linked within the concept of discourse. Recent work looking at material culture, allows precisely this kind of engagement with the processes of 'materialization' of cultural forms (Doel and Segrott, 2004, p. 728), that is the ways in which cultural practices take material form. In this specific context of cultural economies, geographers have looked at the ways in which material goods are produced and circulated (Cook and Harrison, 2003), and at the ways in which material goods are consumed and ascribed meaning (Tolia-Kelly, 2004), as well as the politics of speaking history through material goods (McEwan, 2006). However, this work also looks at the resistance of material goods themselves as Latourian actants (Jons, 2006; Latour, 1997) with some agency alongside people in the production of difference (Law and Hassard, 1999; Whatmore, 2002).

This view of matter as not only contested but also as agentic and creative has also been routed through Deleuzian notions of 'the fold' (Dewsbury and Thrift, 2005; Doel, 1996), in which matter is seen as composed of an infinite series of folds, (rather than a set of isolated atoms) meaning that, in each body, inside and outside

become interconnected, interacting in a dance of elasticity. As Deleuze (1988, p. 8; my translation) writes "It can be said then that a body has a degree of hardness as well as a degree of fluidity, or that it is essentially elastic, the elasticity of the body being the expression of the active compressive force exerted on matter".

In understanding the body in this way, as a sensory agent in which inside and outside interact, Sara Ahmed has shown that it is possible to define "economies of touch" (Ahmed, 2000), in which bodies are active in associating and differentiating themselves one with and from each other, by the extent, form and context of touch that each individual experiences *through the skin*. She points out that it is with reference to this economy of touching that: "encounters with others who are already recognised as strange(rs)... involve forms of discomfort and resistance that are felt on the skin". (Ahmed, 2000, p. 50). The skin can therefore be understood as a locus of theorising identity and difference. As Sara Ahmed notes in relation to the 'economy of touching': "As bodies move towards and away from each other, in relationships of proximity and distance, both bodily space (the shape of the skin) and social space (the skin of the community) expand and contract". (Ahmed, 2000, p. 50).

In an international range of writing on black expressive forms, the body as an agent in the theorising of identity and difference is understood both in terms of bringing into being different forms of relationship in a transitory moment of mutual recognition or intense experience; and as a way of representing or pre-figuring longed-for, imagined or ideal relationships. For example, Àjàyì (1998) points to the traditional importance of dance in Yoruba culture, as a form of social communication that works not only visually, but also through touch and smell, both to challenge and to reaffirm power structures as well as principles of community. Sonjah Stanley-Niaah (2004) neatly sums up the ways in which Jamaica's dance-hall culture works *through the body* to bring community into transitory but iterative being. In its most obvious form this happens in tightly-packed venues, through dancing, singing, call-and-response and gesture, in response to a baseline that reverberates in the chest. All this corporeal energy articulates intensively with the highly politicised text of the lyrics of singers like Buju Banton:

> which in true DJ style names the distributive injustice of postcolonial society: a sense of the middle and upper classes' continued identification with metropolitan lifestyles of Europe and the United States, as the orchestration of poverty by political bandits ensues ...The consumption of these lyrics in dance-halls *through bodily movement* and around specific themes reveals potent modes of community throughout history, signaling developed forms of commentary, problem solving, and memorializing". (Stanley-Niaah, 2004: 114-5; my emphasis)[10].

By the same token, Paul Gilroy (1993, p. 79) focuses on call-and-response, or antiphony, as "a democratic, communitarian moment... which symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships".

This Deleuzian framework of agentic materiality therefore suggests that in academic writing the body speaks to text through a process of theorising. This process takes place in the body during the activities that surround and support the physical act of picking up pen or coming to keyboard. The different embodied contexts of academic writing therefore do, as King suggests (see above) have some bearing on its contents, and this would need to be explored in a range of specific circumstances. However, in the formal conventions of academic writing (Crang, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004; Boughey, 2000) we usually edit out the body's indeterminacy (even when the content of our writing may meditate on the body). Our responsibility as postcolonial geographical writers may be to push the boundaries of these academic conventions in order to try to keep this indeterminacy of the body in place in our writing, precisely as a means to question the ways in which meaning is made. In this way, as a move towards heteroglossia, we can engage with postcoloniality as a politics that challenges the imposition of meaning.

Dewsbury and Thrift (2005, p. 97), meditating on Deleuze's elastic view of matter as expressed in visual art, perhaps unwittingly echo Sangari's comments on meaning (see above) in stating that "it is not enough to explore space, as geographers have traditionally been wont to do. Rather it is necessary to explore the dimensions that make space possible...". Two features of Harris's (2005) exploration of 'folding architecture' offer a route into understanding the difference that this exploration of what makes space possible can make to the form of academic writing. The first is the breaking down of fixed divisions between inside and outside, so that "there is no distinction between frame and interior... the frame emerges from the milieu rather than enclosing it" (Harris, 2005, p. 54). The second is in the process of building, which involves "a 'temporal modulation', a bottom-up process of local decisions made without any drawn plans" (Harris, 2005, p. 53), so that the work is constantly evolving both during the process of construction, when the lack of plans meant neither the observer nor the architect was clear what would be there next, and during the process of consumption, when different sightlines produce a range of different surfaces in the finished building.

The implications of both of these processes for academic writing is radical – it is the responsibility to open up meaning and leave it open. At a very simple level, an example of the change in 'frames' may be much more variation in the form of the academic article, so that it arises more organically from the material on which it is based, perhaps leaving more room to explore ideas through a combination of movement and writing (Basset, 2004); in terms of temporal modulation, the increasing tendency to engage in debates within journals (in the form thesis, critique, reply) may be pushed further into blog-like questions, suggestions, feedback, questions, drawing in a wider variety of voices and interventions to de-centre the authorial voice (see for example the journal 'Soundings').

However, it is another Harris, Wilson Harris, who reveals in its most visionary form the ways in which attention to the indeterminacy of the body understood as Deleuzian matter may change the form of academic writing. In his presentation 'Literacy and the Imagination' (Harris, 1999), Harris moves from a consideration of functional illiteracy to what he calls an 'illiteracy of the imagination' (Harris, 1999, p. 78). In the same passage he condemns the 'block functions' for which education and 'skilling' tend to prepare people, and the 'false clarities' that allow no possibility of different meanings or perspectives. Harris argues instead for seeing writing as an "infinite rehearsal" (Harris, 1999, p. 85), in which the writer rehearses a range of possibilities of what may be true (itself always cognisant that there are other possibilities that are not known), always bringing to the fore the reality of heteroglossia in the existence and possibility of a range of other texts, known and unknown, and of which the one they are writing is only one: "if you were to have a profound, creative democracy, you must have various texts playing against each other..." (Harris, 1999, p. 86).

This surrendering of transparency (see Rose, above), in which the definitive 'landscape of power' can never be laid out and the

[10] These lyrics, wailed as a lament by Buju Banton in his popular song 'Untold stories', exemplify Stanley-Niaah's point: "I am living, while I'm living to the father I will pray, Only He knows how we get through every day. With all the hike in the price Arm and leg we have to pay. While our leaders play... I say who can afford to run will run But what about those who can't... they will have to stay Opportunity is scarce commodity. In these times I say... When mama spend her last and send you to class. Never you ever play. It's a competitive world for low-budget people. Spending a dime while earning a nickel. With no regards to who may tickle. My cup is full to the brim. Could go on and on the full has never been told..." (Myrie et al., 1995).

definitive answer is never determined, is not a playful postmodern slippage of meaning – it speaks directly to the material realities that development geographers have been calling for (see above). Harris insists that it is within the specific context of the 'forgotten' histories of South and Central America, which no one group can now find, itself a feature of a shared condition of postcolonial memory (Harris, 2006), that he roots his refusal to assert univocal authoritative truths, in order specifically to re-find through a determined heteroglossia "a tradition in depth which returns, which nourishes us even though it appears to have vanished" (Harris, 1999). Similarly, Sangari (1990, p. 243) doubts the relevance of the postmodern crisis of meaning in itself for a postcolonial politics: "To believe that a critique of the centred subject and of representation is equal to a critique of colonialism and its accoutrements is in fact to disregard the different historical formation of subjects and ways of seeing that have actually obtained from colonization". Instead she praises the "political stamina" (Sangari, 1990, p. 230) that comes from knowing that we do not know. It is in *this* context that I argue that postcolonial geographical writers have a responsibility to refuse to offer solutions or even consensus in relation to these differently embodied ways of seeing: ultimately an embodied politics of writing should recognise the need to work towards genuine dialogue across identity and difference with living, breathing people.

4. Conclusion?

This article has tried to answer the question: 'what are my responsibilities as a postcolonial geographical writer?' It has suggested that a helpful route in thinking this question through, suggested by feminist as well as postcolonial geographical writing, is a reflection on the body in terms of its multiple materialities. It took as its point of departure three textual moments as part of a single journey of myself towards being a responsibly embodied postcolonial geographical writer (and I am not suggesting that I am there yet). This personal embodied journey raised a problematic – 'how does the body speak in our writing and how can postcolonial geographers be responsible in relation to what it says' – that is all the more complex as the body's voice is often indeterminate. The remainder of the article has explored moves towards materiality in geographical writing, and argued that in particular Deleuzian forms of materiality as agentic and creative are helpful in responding constructively in terms of the context, content and form of what we write to the indeterminacy that the body presents.

This article will finish with three sets of questions that may be applied to the work of postcolonial geographers who are trying to think through an embodied politics of writing. I want to briefly delineate these questions here, referencing them where possible in relation to multiply-routed geographers and academics who have asked similar questions. I want to emphasise that these are questions that can be asked of any piece of postcolonial geographical writing – they are not questions to be answered by a one-size-fits-all formula. Postcolonial geographical writers (particularly those based in former colonial centres) have to be very wary about writing prescriptions.

The first set of questions is about the embodied context and conditions of production of a piece of postcolonial geographical writing, touching both on how the body is read, and on the body as optics (see above). Loosely related to Bourdieu's analyses of academic work as a particular 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990), these questions include not only those surrounding identity, including nationality, race, gender, (dis)ability etc., but also include questions about professional status and the geographies/complexities of institutional affiliation and academic publishing regimes (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). What difference does it make to be writing postcolonial geography from geography departments on different continents and in different contexts? What difference does it make to be writing as a fully tenured academic, as a research assistant, on a temporary or fractional contract, as a postgraduate student or as a reflective practitioner (Ní Laoire and Shelton, 2003; Birnie et al., 2005)? How does each relate to colonial legacies and resistances in terms of the inter-relationships that are played out in the academic sphere today?

Secondly, there are questions about the extent to which the substance or materiality of embodiment can be addressed in/through postcolonial geographical writing – how can academic writing 'write' the body *both* as a social, political and economic location *and* as a sensory agent? When and how does academic writing push beyond bald statistics (the counting of bodies moving or dying, of calories consumed by bodies, of financial income available for the upkeep of bodies) and bland descriptions (McLafferty, 1995; Mattingly, 1995) towards an expression of the differential experience of being located within bodies and the multiple forms and processes of relationship and estrangement between bodies that are often distant (politically, socially, economically, temporally, as well as spatially) one from another (Book, 1999; Nast and Kobayashi, 1996; Lionnet and Heath, 1992; Àjàyì, 1998)? And crucially how do postcolonial geographers maintain a sense of the agency of bodies encountered in research – both their own and other bodies – when they sit down to write (Anderson, 1993; Crang et al., 2003)?

Finally, there are questions about the forms that postcolonial geographical writing can itself embody, which have been most extensively looked at in the context of examining pedagogical practice, i.e. academics reflecting on how to teach students to write academically. How are the parts of postcolonial geographical writing put together to make one coherent article or book, and what purposes (both academic and political) do those different parts serve? What are its rules, its conventions, its silences, its 'no go' zones, through what forms of training/disciplining are these (re)produced, and (how) are they changing (Boughey, 2000; Granville and Dison, 2005)? How do texts relate to each other, for example how do they interpellate communities of writers – which writers do anonymous referees insist on, which have become iconic references as postcolonial writing, and who is (perhaps consequently) ignored (hooks, 1994)? As Gibson and Klocker (2004, p. 424) have put it, how is "credibility... mobilized as the material objects and bodies of academic research – books and articles as well as the researchers themselves – move through international circuits of the publishing and academic industries"? And finally, how does postcolonial geographical writing relate to other forms of cultural production? Does its relatively restricted readership mean that it is almost entirely bounded and rarefied within the pages of academic journals, or does it influence/is it influenced by for example changing debates and writing/reading styles in television, in visual arts, in the public sphere (Gibson-Graham, 1996)? How do these vary globally, and to which 'publics' is postcolonial geography most responsive (Gregory, 2005; Bonnett, 2003)?

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