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# Decolonising Geography: Postcolonial Perspectives

> The aims of a post-colonial geography might be defined as: the unveiling of geographical complicity in colonial dominion over space; the character of geographical representation in colonial discourse; the de-linking of local geographical enterprise from metropolitan theory and its totalizing systems of representation; and the recovery of those hidden spaces occupied, and invested with their own meaning, by the colonial underclass. (Crush, 1994: 336–337)

## Postcolonialism

The term 'postcolonialism' is contested and diverse, encompassing a range of work in disciplines such as literary studies, cultural studies, anthropology and history as well as geography (see the following edited volumes, which reflect the diversity of postcolonial studies: Ashcroft *et al.*, 1995; Williams and Chrisman, 1993; Clayton and Gregory, forthcoming). Such interdisciplinary postcolonial studies have become increasingly important over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, and are likely to continue to challenge geography and other disciplines in profound and far-reaching ways in the future. As the quotation from Jonathan Crush suggests, the aims of a postcolonial geography are themselves diverse, encompassing the history as well as the present status of the discipline, the ways in which geographical imaginations have underpinned colonial power and knowledge, and the need to recover the experiences and agency of colonised peoples.

Broadly speaking, postcolonial perspectives are *anti-colonial*, exploring the impact of colonialism in the past and in the present; investigating the links between colonial forms of power and knowledge; and resisting colonialism and colonial representations of the world. Postcolonial critiques of geography as a discipline have included studies of the colonial importance and complicity of the subject as it became institutionalised and increasingly influential, particularly in Britain, France and Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bell *et al.*, 1995; Driver, 1992; Godlewska and Smith, 1994; Livingstone, 1993).

Many people argue that this colonial history continues to shape geography as a discipline today, pointing to why and how certain subjects are studied and critiquing ethnocentric tendencies of western geography (Gregory, 1994). In discursive terms, geography has been shown as central to the exercise of colonial power and the production of colonial knowledge as people and places throughout the world were brought under external control and were represented in often stereotypical and derogatory ways over space (Gregory, 1995a; Said, 1978). Postcolonial perspectives highlight the *importance* of representing people and places across different cultures, traditions and contexts but also point to the *difficulties* of such endeavours. At the same time, postcolonial critiques stress the need to destabilise what might be taken for granted and assumed in our own cultures, traditions and contexts. So, for example, postcolonial studies challenge the production of knowledges that are exclusively western and ethnocentric by not only focusing on the world beyond 'the West' but also by destabilising what is understood by and taken for granted about 'the West' (Young, 1990). Postcolonial studies are concerned with the impact of colonialism on western and non-western cultures and societies and aim to 'decolonise the mind' from the ethnocentrism of dominant western culture and society. Decolonising geography is a multifaceted task, reflecting the need to reassess the history of geography; to challenge ethnocentric tendencies in geography today; to reveal the geographical underpinnings of colonial power and knowledge; to resist these geographies of colonialism and colonial knowledge; and to write postcolonial geographies that focus on people and places that have been marginalised in colonial and neo-colonial representations of the world.

This chapter will begin by introducing the contested and diverse meanings of the term 'postcolonialism'. Then the importance of imperial and colonial geographies will be discussed, tracing the differences and connections between imperialism and colonialism; different stages of imperial expansion; and the emergence of colonial discourse analysis. The influential work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak will be introduced here. In the next section, the links between geography and imperialism will be explored, focusing on critical histories of British geography. Then the importance of decolonising geography in the present will be assessed by investigating cross-cultural representations over space today and the importance of recovering 'hidden spaces' beyond the West while, at the same time, destabilising notions of 'the West' and its centrality to the exercise of power and the production of knowledge. Finally, an example of postcolonial geographical practice will be examined with reference to the work of Action from Ireland in commemorating the Irish Famine.

## Postcolonial perspectives

At its broadest, postcolonialism 'deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 186). The effects of colonisation are studied both in the past and in the present, with many commentators arguing that present inequalities in the world have not only been shaped by a colonial legacy but also persist today because of neo-colonial power relations that

continue to exploit poorer countries and regions for the material benefit of their wealthier counterparts. Recognising the persistence of neo-colonial domination, postcolonialism is 'a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1995: 3), exposing and challenging power relations that both result in and depend upon neo-colonial inequalities.

The term 'postcolonial' was first used after the Second World War as a chronological marker, referring to the 'post-independence' era that followed decolonisation. But, from the late 1970s, the term came to be significant in more than just a chronological sense, as shown by its importance in studies of Commonwealth literature and New Literatures in English (see Boehmer, 1995, for a clear and wide-ranging introduction to 'the writing of empire, and ... writing in opposition to empire': 1). Since then, the term has been widely used to refer to 'the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 186), encompassing the effects of colonisation and decolonisation.

In theoretical terms, postcolonial studies have been greatly influenced by marxist and poststructuralist analyses. The differences between marxism and poststructuralism have often been caricatured as an unbridgeable gulf. But, as much postcolonial work reveals, these two diverse schools of thought are marked more by their connections and productive tensions than by a polarised hostility. Many of the earliest and most influential critiques of imperialism have been written within a marxist tradition, exploring European conquest and territorial expansion as inseparably bound up with the global extent and inequalities of late capitalism (see Chapter 2). The ideas of many poststructuralist critics developed from within a marxist tradition and share its anti-humanism and historical materialism. In the context of postcolonialism, the political-economy of marxist analyses has been important alongside the cultural and linguistic analyses of poststructuralism. Poststructuralist influences on postcolonial studies include a focus on the connections between power and knowledge, the politics of representation and questions of identity and difference (see Chapter 3 for an introduction to poststructuralism, and see Young, 1990, and Gandhi, 1998, for further explorations of the postcolonial implications of both of these schools of thought).

The 'post' of 'postcolonialism' has two meanings, referring to a temporal aftermath – *after* colonialism – and a critical aftermath – *beyond* colonialism. But these two meanings do not necessarily coincide and it is their problematic interaction that often makes 'postcolonialism' a contested term. A great deal of discussion has focused on the limits of thinking that postcolonialism refers to a period *after* colonialism. First, this temporal distinction implies a clear break with a colonial past, often obscuring the continuities in international relations that persist even after formal decolonisation might have occurred. Second, the persistence of international inequalities in a neo-colonial world throws the very possibility of decolonisation into question. Third, it can be argued that the temporal underpinnings of the term 'postcolonialism' continue to define the world purely in terms of western expansion. In other words, colonised peoples and places become the subject of study only by virtue of having been colonised. As Anne McClintock writes, the focus on temporal difference

(between a colonial and a postcolonial era) comes to supersede a focus on power relations (between colonisers and colonised) and 'colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance' (McClintock, 1995: 11).

In light of the difficulties of referring to a clearly defined postcolonial era, many writers refer to postcolonialism as being *beyond* rather than only and necessarily *after* colonialism. In this case, the 'post' in 'postcolonialism' refers more to a *critical* than to a *temporal* aftermath as postcolonial perspectives explore and resist colonial and neo-colonial power and knowledge. In this way, postcolonialism offers widely ranging critiques of colonialism which are underpinned by anti-colonial politics. As Ania Loomba suggests, 'it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the *contestation* of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism' (Loomba, 1998: 12, emphasis added; also see Moore-Gilbert, 1997). In a similar way, Jane Jacobs writes that 'Postcolonialism may be better conceptualised as an historically dispersed set of formations which negotiate the ideological, social and material structures of power established under colonialism' (Jacobs, 1996: 25). This chapter will stress that postcolonialism should also be understood as a *geographically* dispersed contestation of colonial power and knowledge.

Postcolonial perspectives challenge colonial power and its legacies today. They do so in part by examining the *basis* of colonial power and the associated production of colonial knowledge. In other words, postcolonial studies address the ways in which colonial power was exercised, legitimated, resisted and overturned over time and space. Rather than generalise about colonial power and knowledge, postcolonial critiques reveal the historical and geographical diversity of colonialism and the need to ground such critiques in material and specific contexts. A specific location in time and space is vital because 'Every colonial encounter or "contact zone" is different, and each "post-colonial" occasion needs … to be precisely located and analysed for its specific interplay' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 190). The effects of colonialism were not just one-way, transported from the metropolis to colonies. Rather, as Loomba writes,

> Postcolonial studies have shown that both the 'metropolis' and the 'colony' were deeply altered by the colonial process. *Both* of them are, accordingly, also restructured by decolonisation. This of course does not mean that both are postcolonial *in the same way*. Postcoloniality, like patriarchy, is articulated alongside other economic, social, cultural and historical factors, and therefore, in practice, it works quite differently in various parts of the world. (Loomba, 1998: 19)

As an important foundation for understanding postcolonial critiques, the next section will explore the spatial extent and diversity of imperialism and colonialism.

## Imperial and colonial geographies

Although the terms 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' are often used interchangeably, there are important differences between them (see Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998,

for helpful definitions of these and other 'key concepts' in postcolonial studies). Imperialism refers in general terms to a system of domination over space, encompassing 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory' (Said, 1993: 9). As one tangible manifestation of imperial power, 'colonialism' refers more specifically to 'the implanting of settlements on a distant territory' (Said, 1993: 9). Colonialism, which is 'almost always a consequence of imperialism' (Said, 1993: 9), depends on conquest, territorial expansion, and processes of colonisation whereby people, goods, and capital move from a metropolitan centre to a colony. Both colonialism and imperialism bind metropolitan centres and colonies together in an unequal system of power and dependence. But colonialism represents the direct imposition of imperial rule through settlement and political control over 'a separate group of people, who are viewed as subordinate, and their territories, which are presumed to be available for exploitation' (Jacobs, 1996: 16). Imperialism is therefore a more general term, which can refer to economic, political and cultural inequalities and dependencies whereby a country, region or group of people are subject to the rule of a separate and more powerful force. Imperial power can be exercised by nation states (such as the UK, France and Germany in the nineteenth century), companies (as shown by the transnational operations of, for example, oil companies such as Shell in Nigeria) and organisations (including the regulatory power of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund). Within the broad parameters of imperial rule, colonialism represents the imposition of political control through conquest and territorial expansion over people and places located at a distance from the metropolitan power.

Throughout human history, imperial and colonial power has brought different parts of the world and different groups of people under external control:

> At its height in the second century AD, the Roman Empire stretched from Armenia to the Atlantic. Under Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century, the Mongols conquered the Middle East as well as China. The Aztec Empire was established when, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, one of the various ethnic groups who settled in the valley of Mexico subjugated the others. Aztecs extracted tributes in services and goods from conquered regions, as did the Inca Empire which was the largest pre-industrial state in the Americas. In the fifteenth century too, various kingdoms in southern India came under the control of the Vijaynagara Empire, and the Ottoman Empire, which began as a minor Islamic principality in what is now western Turkey, extended itself over most of Asia Minor and the Balkans. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, it still extended from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, and the Chinese Empire was larger than anything Europe had seen.
> (Loomba, 1998: 2–3)

Such a far-reaching catalogue of territorial expansion reveals the diversity and global extent of imperial and colonial power throughout human history. But the extent and effects of modern European expansion far surpassed these previous empires. From the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, countries such as Belgium, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain

were all colonial powers, with their influence extending over vast areas in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australasia. While modern European expansion should not be viewed in isolation from earlier empires, its scale, longevity and unprecedented levels of organisation meant that it was 'a constitutively, radically different type of overseas domination from all earlier forms' (Said, 1993: 221). By the 1930s, European colonies and ex-colonies accounted for 84.6% of the globe and 'only parts of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Siam and Japan had never been under formal European government' (Loomba, 1998: xiii).

Unlike earlier empires, the colonial power of Western European countries from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries represented the territorial expansion of capitalism, drawing distant countries into a capitalist world system of production, distribution and exchange (Corbridge, 1986). Referring to imperialism as 'the highest stage of capitalism' in 1915, Lenin argued that surplus finance-capital in western economies, where there was a lack of labour resources, would be invested in colonies where there was a lack of capital but an abundance of labour. This capital investment was seen as a necessary condition for capitalist accumulation to continue and to expand. But, at the same time, Lenin argued that imperialism represented the *final* stage of capitalism because the rivalry between different imperial powers would lead to war and, eventually, to the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system (Lenin, [1915] 1978; see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

Modern European empires were capitalist empires, whereby 'the expansion of the accumulative capacities of capitalism was realised through the conquest and possession of other people's land and labour in the service of the metropolitan core' (Jacobs, 1996: 16). But, as Loomba suggests, 'Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries' (Loomba, 1998: 3). Three main stages of modern European expansion have been identified, each associated with distinctive flows of human and natural resources between metropolitan centres and distant colonies. The first stage of European colonial expansion dates from the sixteenth century, when a crisis of feudalism, the emergence of new European states, and wars over sovereignty, led countries to search for new sources of revenue, particularly in the form of silver and gold. At this time, Spanish and Portuguese trade led to settlement in South America, the exploitation of mineral resources and the large-scale, forced conversion of indigenous peoples to Roman Catholicism. From the seventeenth century, an era of mercantile imperialism was characterised by new forms of settlement and trade which were closely linked to the development of manufacturing in Europe. The colonial expansion of Britain in North America and of Britain, France and the Netherlands in the West Indies relied on the slave trade. Between 1701 and 1810, more than six million slaves were transported from Africa to the Caribbean, Brazil and what are now the southern states of the United States (see Figure 5.1). A triangular trade linked West Africa, Europe

**Figure 5.1** Slavery in America, New Orleans, 1835

and the 'New World' of the Americas. West African slaves were transported as labour to the Americas where they worked on plantations that produced goods such as cotton, tobacco, sugar, indigo and rum. These goods were then exported to Western Europe, where they were sold for profit or manufactured into other goods, which were then, in turn, exported to West Africa and other parts of the world. Ports in Britain such as Liverpool and Bristol played a central role in this triangular trade until the slave trade was abolished in 1807 (Gilroy, 1994; Meegan, 1995). But, despite the abolition of the slave *trade* in 1807, Britain did not outlaw slavery in its colonies until 1833. Plantation slavery persisted in the West Indies and parts of South America until the 1830s and was not outlawed in the southern United States until the victory of the North in the American Civil War. The abolition of slavery in the United States was only formally ratified in 1865 (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998).

The third stage of European expansion lasted from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and has been called 'the age of empire' or an era of 'high imperialism' (Hobsbawm, 1989). At this time, European states played increasingly

important roles in co-ordinating the expansion of capitalist imperialism. New types and unprecedented volumes of raw materials such as cotton were needed to support the rapid pace of industrialisation in Western Europe. At the same time, colonies provided extensive new markets for factory-produced commodities, and the export of such commodities was facilitated by the development of new forms of transport and communications. What Marx called 'the annihilation of space by time' accelerated as the telegraph, steamships and railways bound colonies and colonial powers into greater proximity than ever before (see Chapter 2). Among imperial powers, the British Empire was the most extensive and profitable and incorporated settler colonies as far-flung as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Kenya and South Africa; (Figure 5.2; and see Morris, 1968, for an account of the British Empire at its height). India, which came under the direct governance of the British Crown in 1858 after three centuries of economic rule by the East India Company, was known as the imperial 'jewel in the crown'.

In many countries, the 'age of empire' ended with decolonisation and independence (see Box 5.1; Betts, 1998; Chamberlain, 1985; Darwin, 1988). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Dominion Status was achieved by settler colonies such as Canada (1867), Australia (1900), New Zealand (1907) and South Africa (1910). Elsewhere, the rising tide of nationalist and other independence movements, coupled with the political and economic consequences of the Second World War, led to the large-scale dismantling of Western European empires from the late 1940s. British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, which became independent nations in 1947, as discussed in Box 5.2. As Chamberlain writes,

> [British India] was the largest single country decolonized, as well as the first important example of decolonization after 1945. ... [I]t seems beyond dispute that India was the great exemplar to which colonial nationalists in other countries looked and that the relinquishment of India in 1947 set the British empire (by far the largest of the European colonial empires) inexorably upon the path to dissolution. (Chamberlain, 1985: 1–2)

Many other colonies did not become autonomous and independent until the 1960s and, most recently, Hong Kong was handed over from the United Kingdom to China at the end of a 99-year lease in 1997.

## Box 5.1  Decolonisation

As Betts writes, 'decolonization is most easily appreciated and measured as a series of political acts, occasionally peaceful, often confrontational, and frequently militant, by which territories and countries dominated by Europeans gained their independence' (Betts, 1998: 98). Although the term 'decolonisation' was first used in the 1930s, it came into more general use only in the 1950s and 1960s (Chamberlain, 1985). Many people would argue that the term is problematic, implying that the initiatives for decolonisation were taken by the metropolitan, ruling powers rather than by colonised peoples themselves. As Chamberlain shows, decolonisation varied over time and space and usually

## Box 5.1 *continued*

involved 'the policies of the colonial powers and the ideas and initiatives which
came from the colonized' (Chamberlain, 1985: 1). Figure 5.1.1 maps the
political decolonisation of the main colonies and colonial territories over the
course of the twentieth century. Several of these places changed their names after
independence and their new names appear in parentheses. As the map shows,
there were three main periods of political decolonisation: the late 1940s in
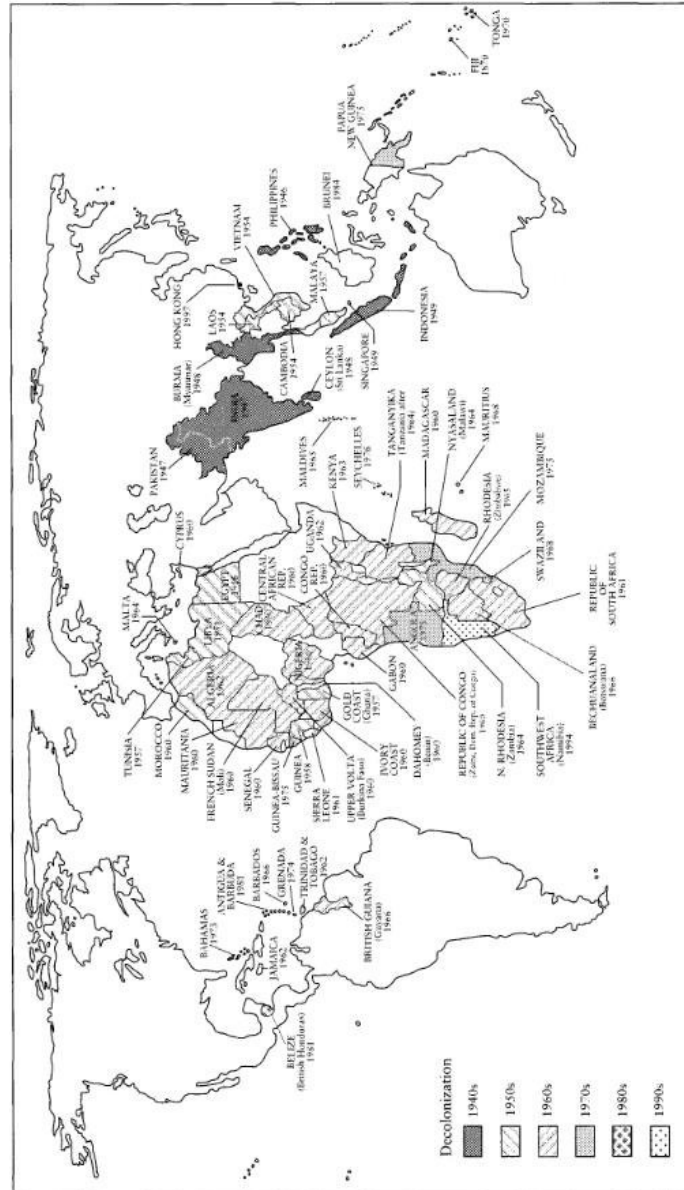Southeast Asia, the 1950s in North Africa, and the 1960s in Sub-Saharan Africa.



**Figure 5.1.1** Decolonisation since 1945

**Figure 5.2** The extent of the British Empire, 1902 (G. Amato in the *Illustrated London News* special issue for the coronation of Edward VII)

### Box 5.2  British India: independence and partition in 1947

The Indian subcontinent achieved independence from British rule at midnight on 14/15 August, 1947. Independence was achieved at the expense of a united India. The partition of the subcontinent into a largely Hindu India and a largely Muslim East and West Pakistan (Pakistan and Bangladesh since 1971) led to the migration of up to 14 million people, communal conflict, and the deaths of about one million people (see Butalia, 1998, and Menon and Bhasin, 1998, for more on partition). According to Patrick French,

> few moments in modern history have had a more lasting impact on so many people. As the writer and politician André Malraux suggested, Britain's decision to get out of India was 'the most significant fact of the century'. It removed three-quarters of King George VI's subjects overnight, reduced Britain to a 'third rate power', and proved that the practice of European imperialism was no longer sustainable.
>
> The nature of the political settlement in 1947 had a calamitous impact on the subcontinent, leading to the reciprocal genocide and displacement of millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, three Indo-Pakistan wars, the blood-drenched creation of Bangladesh, and the long-term limitation of the region's global influence. Although more than a fifth of the world's population presently lives in the territory of Britain's former Indian Empire, continued internal conflict has left South Asia with little cohesiveness and minimal international clout. Nearly half of all Pakistani government expenditure still goes on the cold war with India, focused on the running sore of Kashmir. (French, 1998: xxii–xxiii)

One of the most important figures in the struggle for independence was Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian National Congress (see Figure 5.2.1). Gandhi worked as a lawyer in South Africa for 22 years, where he fought racist legislation and developed his faith in the power of passive resistance or 'satyagraha'. He returned to India in 1914, aged 45, where he supported the British throughout the First World War. The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in 1919 proved a turning point in the struggle for self-rule and in Gandhi's leadership. General Dyer ordered his soldiers to open fire on a crowd that had gathered in this public courtyard, killing at least 300 Indians and injuring a further 1500. After a public inquiry, Dyer was dismissed from the army, but he was hailed as an imperial hero by many people in Britain. In India, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League escalated their campaigns for independence or 'swaraj'. Gandhi told his followers that 'Co-operation in any shape or form with this satanic government is sinful' (James, 1997: 154).

Although Gandhi was extremely influential in his non-violent campaigns and his calls for communal harmony, the struggle for independence was often violent and bloody and included bombings, assassinations, riots and the mass imprisonment of many thousands of people. Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu extremist in January 1948, who blamed him for the partition of India. As French writes, 'For all his failings and contradictions, he remains the central figure in India's journey to independence and division, and an iconic leader in twentieth-century world history' (French, 1998: 361). In her biography of Gandhi, Judith Brown writes that he may not have found

**Box 5.2** *continued*



**Figure 5.2.1** Mahatma Gandhi

lasting and real solutions to many of the problems he encountered. Possibly he did not even see the implications of some of them. ... [Yet he] asked many of the profoundest questions that face humankind as it struggles to live in community [and it is this] which marks his true stature and which makes his struggles and glimpses of truth of enduring significance. As a man of his time who asked the deepest questions, even though he could not answer them, he became a man for all times and all places. (Brown, quoted in French, 1998: 362)

Although the formal structures of colonial rule might have been overturned, the legacies of colonial rule remain intact in many spheres of life both in metropolitan centres and in ex-colonies. The political, administrative, legal, educational and religious systems in many ex-colonies continue to reflect past European colonial influence. As Box 5.3 and Figure 5.3 show, the Commonwealth is an international association that links many countries that had been part of the British Empire. In economic terms, colonial rule often led to regional specialisation so that regions, or even whole countries, became focused on producing a specific raw material or food crop for export, as shown by the commodity dependence on bananas in Central America, tea in Sri Lanka and rubber in Malaya (Enloe, 1990). But this dependence on export and global exchange has made regions and countries vulnerable to crop failures, price fluctuations and changes in international demand, continuing to bind ex-colonies to the crises of

Figure 5.3 The Commonwealth



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Antigua & Barbuda | 21 Kenya | | |
| 2 Australia | 22 Kiribati | | |
| 3 The Bahamas | 23 Lesotho | | |
| 4 Bangladesh | 24 Malawi | | |
| 5 Barbados | 25 Malaysia | | |
| 6 Belize | 26 Maldives | | |
| 7 Botswana | 27 Malta | | |
| 8 Britain | 28 Mauritius | | |
| 9 Brunei Darussalam | 29 Mozambique | | |
| 10 Cameroon | 30 Namibia | | |
| 11 Canada | 31 Nauru | | |
| 12 Cyprus | 32 New Zealand | | |
| 13 Dominica | 33 Nigeria | | |
| 14 Fiji Islands | 34 Pakistan | 41 Sierra Leone | 48 Tonga |
| 15 The Gambia | 35 Papua New Guinea | 42 Singapore | 49 Trinidad & Tobago |
| 16 Ghana | 36 St Kitts & Nevis | 43 Solomon Islands | 50 Tuvalu |
| 17 Grenada | 37 St Lucia | 44 South Africa | 51 Uganda |
| 18 Guyana | 38 St Vincent & The Grenadines | 45 Sri Lanka | 52 Vanuatu |
| 19 India | 39 Samoa | 46 Swaziland | 53 Zambia |
| 20 Jamaica | 40 Seychelles | 47 Tanzania | 54 Zimbabwe |

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global capitalism. International flows of people, capital investment, aid and debt repayments often continue to reflect past colonial ties. Different conflicts in the world often have colonial roots, as shown by the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland. Direct colonial rule continues in many places, as shown by the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the Indonesian control of East Timor (Pilger, 1998).

### Box 5.3  The Commonwealth

In 1926, the Imperial Conference in London accepted the Balfour Report that described dominions such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa as 'autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another ... united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations' (quoted in Chamberlain, 1985: 53). But the modern Commonwealth is usually dated from 1949, when India was admitted as the first republican member and 'British' was dropped from the title of the association. While the original Commonwealth comprised white settler colonies and was referred to as a 'White Man's Club', the modern Commonwealth has 54 member states from Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and Asia and is committed to policies of racial equality and national sovereignty. Today, 33 member states are republics, five have their own national monarchies and 16 are constitutional monarchies that recognise Queen Elizabeth as their head of state (*Guardian*, 28 October 1997). In 1995, Mozambique was the first country with no colonial ties to Britain to join the Commonwealth. In the same year, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other human rights activists. Commonwealth Principles include international peace and order, individual liberty and international co-operation. Two other Principles are 'We recognise racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness' and 'We oppose all forms of colonial domination' (*Guardian*, 28 October 1997; also see Chamberlain, 1985, and Darwin, 1988; and the websites of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Commonwealth Institute at *http://www.rcsint.org* and *commonwealth.org.uk*).

Imperial and colonial geographies continue to shape the world. While the political and economic basis and effects of colonialism should not be underestimated, the *cultural* basis and effects of colonialism have been attracting a great deal of critical attention in recent years. As Nicholas Dirks writes,

> Although colonial conquest was predicated on the power of superior arms, military organization, political power, and economic wealth, it was also based on a completely related variety of cultural technologies. Colonialism not only has had cultural effects that have too often been either ignored or displaced into the inexorable logics of modernization and world capitalism, it was itself a cultural project of control. Colonial knowledge both enabled colonial conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, culture was what colonialism was all about. (Dirks, 1992: 3)

For Dirks, colonialism was a cultural as well as a military, economic and political project of control over space, mobilising different webs of meaning,

practices, objects of knowledge and ways of knowing that helped to legitimate and to perpetuate colonial power. But a focus on the cultural basis of colonial power does not efface the violence of conquest and control. Rather, an examination of the cultural 'structures of meaning' that underpinned colonial rule can reveal the ways in which the violence of conquest and control was exercised, justified and represented. According to Nicholas Thomas,

> colonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress. Rather, colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process; its discoveries and trespasses are imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives; even what would seem its purest moments of profit and violence have been mediated and enframed by structures of meaning. Colonial cultures are not simply ideologies that mask, mystify or rationalize forms of oppression that are external to them; they are also expressive and constitutive of colonial relationships in themselves. (Thomas, 1994: 2)

In his 'geographical inquiry into historical experience', Edward Said refers to imperial and colonial struggles in explicitly geographical terms: 'Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography'. As he continues, these geographical conflicts are not only military but also cultural: 'That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings' (Said, 1993: 7). Rather than separate the military, economic, political and cultural basis and effects of colonialism, it is important to emphasise their links and material consequences in particular contexts. So, the military might of soldiers and cannons cannot be isolated from the structures of meaning – ideas, imaginings, images and representations – that have helped to legitimate both conflict and resistance to such conflict (see Dawson, 1994, for a discussion of gendered representations of 'soldier heroes'). In recent years, such structures of meaning and cultural representations over space have been a central concern of colonial discourse analysis.

## Colonial discourse analysis

'Colonial discourse' refers to the apparatus of power that legitimates colonial rule over people and places at a distance. 'Colonial discourse analysis' involves the interrogation of colonial power through the critical study of colonial discourses. Colonial discourse analysis challenges the ways in which colonial power and western knowledges become taken for granted and naturalised by questioning 'Western knowledge's categories and assumptions' (Young, 1990: 11). Colonial discourse analysis involves the study of colonial ideas, images and imaginings to explore the basis and effectiveness of colonial power and knowledge. In the words of Ania Loomba,

> 'Colonial discourse' ... is not just a fancy new term for colonialism; it indicates
> a new way of thinking in which cultural, intellectual, economic or political
> processes are seen to work together in the formation, perpetuation and
> dismantling of colonialism. It seeks to widen the scope of studies of
> colonialism by examining the intersection of ideas and institutions,
> knowledge and power. (Loomba, 1998: 54)

The postcolonial work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakra-
vorty Spivak has been particularly important in widening the study of colonial
ideas and institutions, knowledge and power.

## 'Orientalism': Edward Said

Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, was first published in 1978 and represents a
landmark in the field of colonial discourse analysis. Many critics credit *Orien-
talism* with inaugurating a new area of academic inquiry, claiming that it is
'commonly regarded as the catalyst and reference point for postcolonialism'
(Gandhi, 1998: 64). Said's work should not be seen in isolation from earlier
studies of colonial power and ways of knowing that include work by Fanon,
Memmi and Césaire (see Box 5.4 for an introduction to Fanon's work and the
Algerian War of Independence). But Said's work has inspired an unprecedented
reorientation of research into the colonial politics of representation and
identity across many disciplines.

### Box 5.4 Frantz Fanon and the Algerian War of Independence

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was born in the French Caribbean colony of
Martinique and trained as a psychiatrist in France. His work on racism and
colonialism is most closely associated with the Algerian liberation movement
and has been extremely influential in theorising an anti-colonial revolutionary
consciousness. Fanon's best-known books are *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952),
*A Dying Colonialism* (1959) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon
combined his clinical insights into the psychic effects of colonial domination
with a marxist understanding of social and economic domination. As Ashcroft
*et al.* explain, 'From this conjunction he developed his idea of a *comprador*
class, or élite, who exchanged roles with the white colonial dominating class
without engaging in any radical restructuring of society. The black skin of these
compradors was "masked" by their complicity with the values of the white
colonial powers. Fanon argued that the native intelligentsia must radically
restructure the society on the firm foundation of the people and their values'
(Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 99; also see Gordon *et al.*, 1996).

Fanon moved to Algeria in 1953. Algeria had been a French colony since
the early nineteenth century and was the only part of the French empire that
had attracted a significant number of French settlers (Chamberlain, 1985).
The Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action was formed by young
nationalists in 1954 and 'divided the country into a number of districts (*wilayas*)
each with a rebel leader at its head, a well-organised group of activists and
whatever armaments could be procured. On 31 October, a CRUA declaration
demanded independence and called Algerians to arms. In the early morning of

## Box 5.4 *continued*

1 November, simultaneous insurrections broke out in each *wilaya*; although the French ignored the manifesto and not all of the attacks were successful, the Algerian war of independence had begun' (Aldrich, 1996: 292–293). This war lasted until Algeria gained independence on 3 July 1962. The CRUA developed into the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* or FLN). The Battle of Algiers (see Figure 5.4.1.) from September 1956 to October 1957 was 'the ugliest phase of the war' (Aldrich, 1996: 294), with the terrorist attacks of the FLN punished by French torture and brutality. By the end of the war, France estimated that 12,000 French soldiers, 227,000 Algerian soldiers and 20,000 civilians had been killed, while the FLN estimated that 1 million Algerian Muslims had been killed. More recent estimates suggest that there were half a million casualties (Aldrich, 1996).



Figure 5.4.1 The Battle of Algiers, 1956–57

During the war, 'Fanon supported the revolutionaries by utilizing hospital resources to train them in emergency medicine and psychological techniques for resisting torture, as well as fighting techniques' (Gordon *et al.*, 1996). In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon analysed the revolutionary transformations in Algerian consciousness over the course of the war. As he wrote, 'What we Algerians want is to discover the man behind the colonizer; this man who is both the organizer and the victim of a system that has choked him and reduced him to silence. As for us, we have long since rehabilitated the Algerian colonized man. We have wrenched the Algerian man from a centuries-old and implacable oppression. We have risen to our feet and we are now moving forward. Who can settle us back in servitude? We want an Algeria open to all, in which every kind of genius may grow' (Fanon, 1967: 32). Fanon concluded that 'The Revolution in depth, the true one, precisely because it changes man and renews society, has reached an advanced stage. This oxygen which creates and shapes a new humanity – this, too, is the Algerian Revolution' (Fanon, 1967: 181)

In *Orientalism*, Said examines the complex interactions of power, knowledge and representation. Geography lies at the heart of his analysis, as he focuses on the 'imaginative geographies' produced by the West about the East (Gregory, 1995a, 1995b). More specifically, Said discusses British, French and American imaginings of the Middle East over the last two centuries. Said is concerned to trace and to critique the orientalist discourses that imagined and, indeed, *produced* 'the Orient' as distinct from the western 'Occident'. As Said writes,

> The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences .... The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. (Said, 1978: 1–2)

As this quotation suggests, the Orient and the Occident were defined in relation to each other. While the Orient was represented as romantic, exotic, mysterious, and dangerous, the Occident was assumed to be the norm against which it was different or 'other'. In this way, Orientalism produced knowledges about colonised people and places as 'other', inferior and irrational in contrast to a powerful, rational, western 'self'. As Said stresses, imaginative geographies of *both* West and East were produced by orientalist discourses, suggesting the relational constitution of identity and a spatial politics of difference. As Gillian Rose puts it, 'The Orient was defined as exotic, decadent and corrupt, but these verdicts were passed in relation to a West which implicitly situated itself as civilized and moral in contrast .... What were seen as Oriental vices were made to define Western European virtues' (Rose, 1995: 93). Imaginative geographies of the Orient came to be seen as the *reality* of the Middle East. But rather than reveal the reality of life in the Middle East, such Orientalist representations revealed more about western life, culture, fears and desires: 'Orientalism ... has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world' (Said, 1978: 12).

Said identifies three, interrelated meanings of Orientalism. First, he points to the scholarly tradition of Orientalism that came to prominence in post-Enlightenment Europe and encompassed work in literature, history, philology and archaeology. European academics produced a wealth of research on the Middle East at this time, extending a fascination with the Orient that stemmed from before the Crusades. Second, Said refers to Orientalism in a more general sense, away from the libraries and colleges of academic research. Here, he refers to more widely diffused perceptions of the differences between West and East that were produced through, for example, travel writing, art and literature. Crucially, Said points to the constant interchange between these Orientalist knowledges, within but also beyond the academy. Finally, Said highlights the status of Orientalism as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 1978: 3), demonstrating the ways in

which imaginative geographies of the Orient underpinned imperial and colonial rule. The prevalence and authority of Orientalist ways of seeing, thinking and knowing in the West 'justified colonialism in advance as well as subsequently facilitating its successful operation' (Young, 1990: 129). These three, connected meanings of Orientalism reveal the imbrication of power and knowledge, the ways in which Orientalist representations came to be seen as reality, and their material effects in shaping, maintaining and justifying imperial and colonial geographies. For Said,

> without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. (Said, 1978: 3)

It is important to remember that *Orientalism* is 'a book not about non-Western cultures, but about the Western representation of these cultures' (Loomba, 1998: 43). But this distinction was blurred within Orientalist discourses as western representations of non-western cultures were seen to reflect reality. According to Said, 'Orientalism was ultimately a *political* vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")' (Said, 1978: 43). This political vision of reality was an imperial and a colonial vision.

Edward Said's work on Orientalism has inspired an enormous amount of research into the colonial politics of representation, the intersections of power and knowledge, and identity formation over space and time. Such research has focused not only on past Orientalist discourses but also on the persistence of similar discourses and strategies of 'othering' in the world today. Just as Said explored the imaginative geographies produced by the West about the East, a similar process can be seen in First World stereotypes about the 'Third World' as less advanced and powerless (Bell, 1994). Many people and places beyond the West continue to be represented as 'exotic', suggesting that the West is the norm against which 'others' are defined as different. So, for example, tourist brochures often represent people and places as exotic and 'other' to western life, as shown in Figure 5.4, in which the white woman seems to embody the norm against which the Long Neck Paduang woman in Thailand appears to be exotically different (also see Cook, 1993; McClintock, 1995; and Richards, 1990, for parallel examples in the advertising and consumption of commodities such as bananas and soap and the emergence of 'commodity racism'). Both in the past and in the present, western desire for the 'other' is often explicitly sexualised (see Chapter 4). In the nineteenth century, written and visual representations of Middle Eastern harems (Kabbani, 1986) revealed much about the sexual fantasies of many western male travellers that could be more easily played out away from the confines of life at home: 'Europe was charmed by an Orient that shimmered with possibilities, that promised a sexual space, a voyage away from the self, an escape from the dictates of the bourgeois morality of the metropolis' (Kabbani, 1986: 67). In a similar way, the growth of

**Departures** - Every Sunday by Royal Orchid service of Thai International.
(Also available daily on request/supplement).
**Meals** - As outlined *(B), (L).*　　　　　　　**Sightseeing** - Included on days 5-9 as outlined.
**Alternative Hotels** - As featured in the brochure on request/supplement.

un, Bangkok at sunset



Long Neck Paduang, Mae Hong Sorn



Beachside, Phuket

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**Figure 5.4** Representing Thailand to tourists

international sex tourism in Southeast Asia since the Second World War (Enloe, 1990; Law, 1997; Lee, 1991) owes much to stereotypical representations of 'Oriental' women as more sensuous and sexually available than their western counterparts. Just as Said argued in *Orientalism*, these representations say more about the West than about an Oriental reality and they have material consequences in the form of violence, exploitation and dependence.

A number of critiques of *Orientalism* have also been important in stimulating postcolonial studies across a range of disciplines (see Mani and Frankenberg, 1985, for an overview of these critiques and Said's response to them in Said, 1985). Said has been criticised for perpetuating the distinction between Orient and Occident that he seeks to challenge and for representing this distinction in terms that are too static and general. Moreover, Said concentrates on western representations of the Orient and pays little attention to self-representations of the colonised and strategies of resistance (but see Said, 1993, where he discusses resistance in greater detail). At the same time, several critics have argued that Said's representation of Orientalism is too internally coherent, obscuring the fissures, contradictions and vulnerabilities of imperial and colonial power and knowledge. Building on Said's work, Lisa Lowe writes that multiple 'orientalist situations' existed at different times and in different places and that each of these was internally complex, unstable and contradictory (Lowe, 1991). She argues that Orientalism was one among many discourses that included 'the medical and anthropological classifications of race, psychoanalytic versions of sexuality, or capitalist and Marxist constructions of class' (Lowe, 1991: 8). Other commentators have shown that the contradictions at the heart of imperial and colonial rule destabilised its apparent hegemony. The exposure of such internal

contradictions can begin to disrupt an essentialist, unitary view of imperial and colonial power as 'a coherent imposition, rather than a practically mediated relation' (Thomas, 1994: 3). As Nicholas Thomas writes,

> Colonizing projects were ... frequently split between assimilationist and segregationist ways of dealing with indigenous peoples; between impulses to define new lands as vacant spaces for European achievement, and a will to define, collect and map the cultures which already possessed them; and in the definition of colonizers' identities, which had to reconcile the civility and values of home with the raw novelty of sites of settlement. (Thomas, 1994: 2–3)

Furthermore, Orientalist discourses were also profoundly gendered, which is largely overlooked by Said. An increasing amount of feminist work has revealed the gendered basis of colonial discourses such as Orientalism and the different roles played by men and women as both colonisers and colonised (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Chaudhuri and Strobel, 1992; Melman, 1992; Midgley, 1998; see Chapter 3 for more on the links between imperial and feminist politics).

The next two sections introduce the work of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. While Bhabha turns his attention to the creation of colonial subjects through a focus on ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity, Spivak focuses on the gendered as well as racialised domination that characterised imperial and colonial rule and examines the difficulties of recovering the agency and experiences of colonised people.

## Ambivalent positions: Homi Bhabha

While *Orientalism* concentrated on the production of colonial discourses, the work of Homi Bhabha has examined the place of colonised people in these discourses. Unlike Said's focus on the hegemonic power of Orientalism, Bhabha turns to the fractures and ambivalences that destabilised imperial and colonial rule, stresses the relational basis and instabilities of such rule, and challenges the polarities of West and East, 'self' and 'other' (Bhabha, 1994). Inspired by the work of Fanon, Bhabha invokes the psychoanalytic term 'ambivalence' to convey 'the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 12). Rather than represent the colonised subject as simply *either* complicit *or* opposed to the coloniser, Bhabha suggests the *coexistence* of complicity and resistance. The hegemonic authority of colonial power is made uncertain and unstable because the ambivalent relationships between colonisers and colonised are complex and contradictory. Bhabha discusses the creation and efficacy of colonial stereotypes in terms of ambivalence. For Bhabha, a stereotype is profoundly ambivalent because it 'is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated' (Bhabha, 1994: 66). It is precisely this notion of excess beyond the control of the coloniser that reveals the limits and vulnerabilities of colonial authority. As Bhabha suggests,

> the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself. (Bhabha, 1994: 70)

For Bhabha, the study of colonial discourse should address the creation of colonial subjects, moving beyond the identification of images as positive or negative to a more detailed analysis of the processes of subjectification. While colonial discourse might appear to fix difference in its representations of 'the other', Bhabha stresses the ambivalent nature of this apparent fixity. For Bhabha, 'because the colonial relationship is always ambivalent, it generates the seeds of its own destruction' (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 13).

Connected with his ideas about the excess of colonial stereotypes, Bhabha also represents the ambivalent relationships between colonisers and colonised in terms of mimicry. This term refers to the ways in which colonised subjects adopt the coloniser's habits, lifestyle and values. And yet, this adoption is never a straightforward reproduction and 'mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics' (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 139). Bhabha cites the example of an Indian man in the nineteenth century, educated in English and working in the Indian Civil Service, who moves within and between the lives of colonisers and colonised. As Young explains,

> The mimic man, insofar as he is not entirely like the colonizer, white but not quite, constitutes only a partial representation of him: far from being reassured, the colonizer sees a grotesquely displaced image of himself. Thus the familiar, transported to distant parts, becomes uncannily transformed, the imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented, and the relation of power, if not altogether reversed, certainly begins to vacillate. (Young, 1990: 147)

The effect of such mimicry is to undermine colonial authority by exposing 'a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized' (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 139) and by revealing 'colonialism's own vulnerability to itself' (Jacobs, 1996: 26).

The relational identities of coloniser and colonised and the instabilities of colonial rule are also revealed in Bhabha's notions of hybridity. For Bhabha, colonial domination results in a process of transcultural hybridisation, whereby 'certain elements of dominant cultures are appropriated by the colonised and rearticulated in subversive ways' (Jacobs, 1996: 28). The hybrid subject is a split and a mobile subject, reflecting the flux between colonising and colonised identities. Bhabha locates hybridity in explicitly spatial terms, referring to a contradictory and ambivalent 'Third Space' that disrupts the binary opposition between 'self' and 'other'. For Bhabha, 'Third Space' is an in-between space – within and between the fissures of colonial rule – where resistance can be enunciated and where hierarchies between cultures, colonisers and colonised become untenable. As a result, hybridity becomes an empowering way to envisage cultural difference that contrasts with representations of an

exotic and usually inferior 'other' to a western 'self'. Bhabha writes that trav-
elling into Third Space

> may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not
> on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the
> inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should
> remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation,
> the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.
> (Bhabha, 1994: 38)

Hybrid meanings of culture overturn ideas about cultural, national and racial
'purity' by examining processes of transculturation (Bhabha, 1994; Pratt, 1992;
Young, 1995). As Mary Louise Pratt shows in her analysis of European imperial
travel writing in South and Central America, transculturation is 'a phenomenon
of the contact zone' where colonisers and colonised interact (Pratt, 1992).
But this interaction reflects and reproduces colonial power relations. As
Pratt explains, 'contact zones' are places where 'disparate cultures meet,
clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations
of dominance and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their after-
maths as they are lived out across the globe today' (Pratt, 1992: 4). Despite such
asymmetrical power relations, processes of transculturation are not just
one-way:

> While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the
> periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of
> development), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery
> determines the metropolis, beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need
> to present and represent its peripheries and its others continually to itself.
> (Pratt, 1992: 6)

For Bhabha, 'the location of culture' is in the in-between, ambivalent
spaces of contact between colonisers and colonised. As a result, an Orientalist
binary of 'self' and 'other' becomes more complicated, and nationalist claims
to a bounded, exclusive identity become unsustainable. Bhabha's analysis of
colonial discourse is clearly geographical, relating to the simultaneous distan-
cing and interchange of colonisers and colonised both on an unconscious level
and in colonial contact zones. And yet, many critics have criticised the lack of
geographical and historical specificity in Bhabha's work. As Loomba writes,
'Bhabha generalises and universalises the colonial encounter' and, ironically,
'the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact
curiously universal and homogeneous – that is to say he could exist anywhere
in the colonial world' (Loomba, 1998: 178). Loomba's gendered language is
deliberate here, reflecting the lack of attention paid by Bhabha to gender dif-
ference in colonial encounters. Moreover, Bhabha has also been criticised not
only for employing the western language of psychoanalysis in universalising
ways, but also for overlooking the gendered and sexual implications of psycho-
analytic enquiry (Young, 1990; see Chapter 4 for an introduction to Freudian
and Lacanian psychoanalysis). In the next section, the gendered nature of

colonial discourse will be introduced through a discussion of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work.

## 'Can the subaltern speak?': Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work is diverse and complicated (Landry and MacLean, 1996; Spivak, 1990; and Young, 1990, provide good starting points). This section will focus on a well-known question first posed and answered by Spivak in 1985: 'can the subaltern speak?' (Spivak's essay is reprinted in Williams and Chrisman, 1993: 66–111). Returning to the quotation from Jonathan Crush at the beginning of the chapter, this question asks whether the colonial underclass can articulate its experiences and be active, visible and audible subjects. In geographical terms, Spivak's question relates to the 'hidden spaces' occupied by the colonial underclass and whether it is possible to speak from such locations. Spivak is concerned with the difficulties of recovering the voices of colonised people and, in particular, the voices of colonised women. Spivak concludes that 'the subaltern cannot speak', for reasons that will be explored below.

The term 'subaltern' has a military origin, referring to inferior ranks below the officer class. Its meaning was broadened by Antonio Gramsci, who used it to refer to groups such as peasants and workers who are subordinate to the hegemonic power of the ruling classes and who sought to write histories from below about the experiences of subaltern groups (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998; see also Chapter 2). More recently, the term has been associated with the work of the Subaltern Studies collective. Over the course of the 1980s, this collective of historians published the first five volumes of essays relating to subalternity in South Asia, a term which they use to refer to 'the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha, 1982: vii; see Guha and Spivak, 1988, for a collection of essays from these five volumes). The histories written by the Subaltern Studies collective seek to redress the élitism of imperialist and nationalist histories. While imperialist histories often focused on an imperial élite, nationalist histories often celebrated a bourgeois, nationalist élite, neither of which left space for the experiences of subordinate subalterns and a 'politics of the people' (Guha, 1982: 4). The Subaltern Studies collective aimed to write new, critical histories of South Asia, which followed the traditions neither of imperialist histories of conquest, nor of nationalist histories that charted a singular and linear development of nationalist consciousness. Subaltern histories focused on the lives, agency and resistance of those people who had been silenced and erased from both imperialist and nationalist accounts of the past.

By posing the question 'can the subaltern speak?', Spivak challenges the assumption that it is possible to recover subaltern voices. Inspired by marxism, deconstructionism and feminism, Spivak focuses on the place of Indian women as silenced subalterns, arguing that they were doubly colonised as Indian but also as women. As Kabbani puts it:

Eastern women were doubly inferior, being women *and* Easterners. They were an even more conspicuous commodity than their Western sisters. They were part of the goods of empire, the living rewards that white men could, if they wished to, reap. (Kabbani, 1986: 51)

For Spivak, if 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (Spivak, 1993: 83).

Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak because she has been silenced and objectified by colonial power and erased from imperialist and nationalist histories. For Spivak, subaltern spaces remain hidden from view. She contends that it is a fraught and ultimately impossible task to uncover these hidden spaces and to hear subaltern voices. The task, Spivak suggests, is one of examining the operation of power that has so effectively silenced and objectified the subaltern. Rather than repeating such an operation of power through silencing and objectification, Spivak argues that it is necessary to unlearn privilege and to decolonise gender. Ultimately, the aim should be to speak *with* rather than to speak *for* or merely try to listen *to* the historically mute subaltern subject.

Spivak develops her analysis by examining discursive representations of *sati*. Sati refers to the practice of Hindu widow sacrifice, when a Hindu widow climbs onto the funeral pyre of her husband to burn with his body. Sati was outlawed by British rulers in India in 1829 but did not completely disappear. Since Independence in 1947, there have been about 40 reported cases of sati and there has been a marked increase over the last decade. While a number of attempts have been prevented by the police, about five have been successfully carried out and have been accompanied by widespread media coverage in both India and abroad (Sunder Rajan, 1993). While there have been campaigns against sati by a range of groups, particularly women's organisations, there have also been public displays that support and glorify the practice. Representing sati is a complicated issue as it is located within a nexus of complex and competing discourses (Mani, 1987, 1992; Sunder Rajan, 1993; Spivak, 1993). For Spivak, the figure of the Hindu widow committing sati embodies the subaltern subject who is unable to speak.

Spivak examines colonial and nativist representations of sati, arguing that while these views were polarised, they both served to silence the subaltern subject. British colonial rulers represented sati as a forced, primitive and barbaric act that needed to be prevented: 'she must be saved from dying'. But, as Spivak suggests, a material consequence of these representations was to extend and to strengthen British colonial power by legitimating a paternal colonialism whereby 'white men are saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak, 1993: 92). In nativist accounts, celebrating pre-colonial life and traditions, sati was represented as a voluntary practice, displaying the loyalty and devotion of a Hindu widow to her late husband: 'she wanted to die'. Spivak argues that these polarised views, representing sati as either forced or voluntary, both served to silence the Hindu widow and to erase her from view. In colonial discourses, the subaltern subject was defined only in relation to her husband and existed only to be saved from the barbarism of other Indians. In nativist

discourses, the subaltern subject was still defined in terms of her husband and became visible only in the pain and the spectacle of her death which itself took place only because of her husband's death. In both colonial and nativist discourses, the subject of sati – the figure of the Hindu widow – is objectified as a victim who is voiceless and powerless and lacks agency of her own.

Challenging the assumption that subaltern voices can be recovered independently from colonial and nativist discourses, Spivak writes that the Hindu widow 'cannot speak'. There are very few records of the feelings and experiences of women themselves who committed sati. But more than this, Spivak argues that colonial and nativist discourses made it impossible for such women to speak and to be heard. By posing the question 'can the subaltern speak?' Spivak critiques the assumption that a unified subaltern identity can be recovered that is autonomous from colonial and nativist discourses. Her declaration that 'the subaltern cannot speak'

> has sometimes been interpreted to mean that there is no way in which oppressed or politically marginalized groups can voice their resistance, or that the subaltern only has a dominant language or a dominant voice in which to be heard. But Spivak's target is the concept of the subaltern subject's ability to give voice to political concerns. Her point is that no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks. (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 219)

For Spivak, the subaltern is both created and silenced by dominant discourses.

Spivak's analysis destabilises attempts simply to recover subaltern histories and voices and points to the importance of decolonising ideas about gender. Clear parallels exist between her work on the objectification and silencing of the Hindu widow and other work that critiques the stereotypical ways in which women from the 'Third World' often continue to be represented (see, for example, the essays in Mohanty et al., 1991, and in Alexander and Mohanty, 1997). Writers such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Aihwa Ong critique the ethnocentric representations of non-western women by many western feminists and highlight the ways in which, for many women, feminism represents a white, western and bourgeois form of cultural imperialism, as discussed in Chapter 3. The diverse experiences and agency of non-western women are often reduced to a singular, passive and static category of 'Third World woman'. As Ong writes,

> The status of non-Western women is analyzed and gauged according to a set of legal, political, and social benchmarks that Western feminists consider critical in achieving a power balance between men and women .... By portraying women in non-Western societies as identical and interchangeable, and more exploited than women in the dominant capitalist societies, liberal and socialist feminists alike encode a belief in their own cultural superiority. (Ong, 1988: 82, 85)

Such ethnocentric representations are imperial because they assume that western standards and feelings are superior to those elsewhere in the world. The

status and roles of non-western women are often reported in sensationalist terms or are otherwise reduced to different indicators of development, losing 'the everyday, fluid, fundamentally historical and dynamic nature of the lives of third world women' (Mohanty, 1988: 6). Such stereotypical representations mean that non-western women are often assumed to have the same problems, needs, goals and interests. But, as Mohanty illustrates,

> the interests of urban, middle-class, educated Egyptian housewives, to take only one instance, could surely not be seen as being the same as those of their uneducated, poor maids. Development policies do not affect both groups of women in the same way. Practices which characterize women's status and roles vary according to class. Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks. (Mohanty, 1988: 63)

The lives of non-western women are as diverse as the lives of their western counterparts.

The work of Said, Bhabha and Spivak has been very influential in shaping the diverse field of postcolonial studies. As these introductions to their work have shown, geography lies at the heart of their analyses. Colonial discourses were also geographical discourses, representing difference over space and legitimating territorial expansion and control. Geographical imaginations of 'other' people and places were inseparably bound up with imperial and colonial imaginations of the world. While Said traverses the imaginative geographies of Orientalist discourses, Bhabha proposes a Third Space of hybridity that destabilises a binary and static distinction between 'Self' and 'Other'. Finally, Spivak turns to the difficulties of recovering subaltern experiences and voices from their hidden spaces of confinement and objectification. The next section considers postcolonial geographies in more disciplinary terms by examining attempts to write critical histories of geography and imperialism and to represent the world today.

## Postcolonial geographies

This section will begin by focusing on the history of geography as an academic discipline, exploring the connections between geographical knowledge, education and empire. More specifically, this section will consider the institutionalisation and increasing influence of British geography as it developed alongside British imperial and colonial policies of conquest and control in the late nineteenth century. At this time, geographical knowledge was intimately tied to imperial and colonial power. But, unlike other disciplines such as anthropology, it is only recently that geographers have started to write about the imperial complicity of the discipline, and to write about its imperial past in critical and contextual ways rather than celebrating exploration, 'discovery', and heroic explorers and geographers. It can be argued that 'geography was the science of imperialism *par excellence*' because 'exploration, topographic and social

survey, cartographic representation, and regional inventory ... were entirely suited to the colonial project' (Livingstone, 1993: 160, 170). But because imperialism and colonialism were about far more than economic exploitation alone, Felix Driver has called for critical, contextual histories of geography that examine 'the *culture* of imperialism' (Driver, 1992). Geography as an academic discipline and geographical education at all levels played fundamental roles in shaping the ideas, meanings and imaginations that helped to represent and to justify the British Empire (see Maddrell, 1998, and Ploszajska, 1998, for more on geographical education in British schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

The Royal Geographical Society was the main institution for the development and promotion of geographical research and education in Britain in the nineteenth century. From about 1870, an emerging 'new geography' was characterised by increasing professionalisation and the movement to establish the subject as a formal academic discipline (Stoddart, 1986). By the 1880s and 1890s, though, the increased specialisation of other disciplines such as geology meant that although British geography was emerging as a scientific discipline, institutions such as the RGS lacked 'strictly scientific men' (Stoddart, 1986: 67). Calls for geographical education were often explicitly tied to imperial and colonial imperatives at a time when the British Empire was at its height. This is vividly shown in a report by John Scott Keltie on the state of geographical education in Britain in 1886:

> There is no country that can less afford to dispense with geographical knowledge than England ... [yet] there are few countries in which a high order of geographical teaching is so little encouraged. The interests of England are wide as the world. Her colonies, her commerce, her emigrations, her wars, her missionaries, and her scientific explorers bring her into contact with all parts of the globe, and it is therefore a matter of *imperial importance* that no reasonable means should be neglected of training her youth in sound geographical knowledge. (Keltie, quoted in Blunt, 1994: 8; emphasis added)

For Keltie, geographical knowledge and imperial power were closely entwined and he believed that 'sound geographical knowledge' was vital for the success of the British Empire.

The most tangible relationship between imperial power and geographical knowledge was through exploration and so-called discovery, charting territory that was often thought to be unknown and mapping and naming apparently 'new' places. Of course, such places were only unknown and 'new' to their European rulers, who often represented vast areas as unoccupied, blank spaces brought into being only under a European gaze. As Box 5.5 shows, mapping previously unknown places came to *create* such places in an imperial imagination that was also quite clearly a *geographical* imagination. Maps enabled European rulers to exercise power and control over territories elsewhere in the world. The exercise of such power and control over people as well as places was supported by other techniques of 'knowing' the world, which were also

believed to be scientifically based and objective. So, for example, the natural world came to be named and classified in a systematised way, which ordered and controlled the diversity of species in apparently scientific ways (Pratt, 1992). But such ideas about classification and the standardised production of information and knowledge were not limited to the natural world of flora and fauna. Rather, imperial geography also contributed to the widespread attempt to survey and classify *people* throughout the world. Colonised people were objectified through, for example, measuring and classifying anatomical differ-ence and photographing different racial 'types' (McClintock, 1995; Ryan, 1997). Geographical methods of survey, classification and measurement were about not only knowing and controlling physical environments, but also knowing and controlling people. Geography was a tool of empire, lending apparently scientific credibility to imperial and racist ideologies. People as well as places were produced and represented as 'other' by imperial geography.

## Box 5.5  Mapping places

Throughout history, maps have represented and shaped geographical knowledge about the world. Although maps may appear to reflect reality, locating factual information in increasingly scientific ways, many critics argue that all maps are socially constructed forms of knowledge. Rather than represent the world 'as it really is', maps are always partial and infused with different meanings. Maps are never unmediated representations of the world and even the most apparently scientific and technologically advanced map is not value-free. A map's *modes of representation* (such as its scale, projection, typography and use of colour) and *what it represents* (the features that are included and excluded, the boundaries that delimit a map's area) both reveal the intimate connections between power and geographical knowledge (Harley, 1988). Brian Harley claims that 'maps are preeminently a language of power, not of protest' (Harley, 1988: 301) and shows that imperial maps were inextricably bound up with imperial power. Imperial maps were tools of empire: 'As much as guns and warships, maps have been the weapons of imperialism' (Harley, 1988: 282). Maps were used to chart and to claim new colonies, both representing and legitimating territorial expansion. Maps also helped to shape imaginative geographies of empire by representing territories as 'blank spaces' over which imperial rule could be imposed. The imperial gaze that was codified and reproduced by imperial maps produced places for conquest and control. In a similar way, strategies of naming brought places into existence in an imperial imagination that was also a geographical imagination (Carter, 1987; Huggan, 1989).

Many attempts have been made to decolonise maps and mapping. While the complicity of imperial maps with imperial power has been explored, so too have alternative, postcolonial mappings (see, for example, Blunt and Rose, 1994; Huggan, 1989; Jacobs, 1996; Nash, 1994; Phillips, 1997). For example, Jane Jacobs has written about the design of an Aboriginal art trail in Brisbane and the ways in which 'the conceptual template for the trail is based upon the creative appropriation of the map, that over-determined signifier of colonialism'

**Box 5.5** *continued*

(Jacobs, 1996: 144). Located at J. C. Slaughter Falls on the slopes of Mount Coot-tha, the art trail is part of a community arts project that seeks 'to restore Aboriginal cultural production and articulation to city space' (Jacobs, 1996: 144). An Aboriginalised map of the art trail is juxtaposed with a topographic map of the same place, and different mappings also appear in the artwork itself. Jacobs suggests that this creative reappropriation of mapping – this example of 'counter-cartography' – parodies colonial maps and destabilises the power inherent within them.

Imperial geography was also distinctively gendered, as shown by representations of imperial travel on which the production of geographical knowledge was seen to depend (Box 5.6). Both imperialism and geography were represented as masculine endeavours whereby imperial power and the geographical knowledge that helped to legitimate and to perpetuate such power were seen as masculine domains. For example, in 1887, the President of the RGS stated that:

> What we require … is precise and accurate information of the earth's surface, however it may be obtained, and to train the minds of our youth in the powers of observation sufficient to enable them to obtain this information; if in so doing our countrymen continue to be stimulated to deeds of daring, to enterprise and adventures, to self-denial and hardships, it will assist in preserving the manhood of our country, which is more and more endangered year by year in consequence of our endeavour to keep peace within our own borders and to stave off strife with our neighbours. (Strachey, quoted in Blunt, 1994: 150)

The production of imperial geographical knowledge advocated by Strachey was embodied in exclusively masculine terms of virility and bravery. Moreover, Strachey describes this imperial masculinity as being under threat of emasculation at a time of peace. As Felix Driver contends, 'contemporary writings on "geography" were infused with assumptions about gender, as well as empire' (Driver, 1992: 28). These gendered assumptions often invoked a military as well as a scientific masculinity as geographical knowledge was closely tied to imperial conquest.

**Box 5.6 Postcolonial travels**

Ideas about travel and travel writing have been important in postcolonial studies. In recent years, an increasing amount of critical attention has been paid to the ways in which travel is bound up with the production of knowledge, power relations and identity formations. The imperial development of disciplines such as geography and anthropology was closely linked to imperial travel and the immediacy and authority of observation associated with 'being

**Box 5.6** *continued*

there' and viewing 'other' people and places at first hand. From the mid-nineteenth century, imperial travels were increasingly tied to the production of imperial knowledge and both gained scientific credibility and status. For example, a famous book published by the Royal Geographical Society stressed that 'it is the duty of every civilised traveller in countries newly opened up to research, to collect facts, plain unvarnished facts, for the information of those leading minds of the age who, by dint of great experience, can ably generalise from the details contributed from diverse sources' (Freshfield and Wharton, 1893: 446). Advice books for prospective travellers differed for men and women. While books written for male travellers focused on methods and equipment necessary for scientific observation, books written for female travellers often emphasised the appropriate appearance and behaviour of the traveller herself (Blunt, 1994). Imperial travel was clearly a gendered practice. Several writers have traced discourses of heroic masculinity that shaped imperial explorations (Driver, 1992; Pratt, 1992). Others have examined the ambivalent place of white women such as Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird who were empowered to travel and to transgress in the empire while away from the feminised domesticity of living at home (Blunt, 1994; Mills, 1991). But for many people, travel is forced rather than voluntary, as shown by the displacement, exile and alienation of slaves, refugees, asylum seekers and the dispossessed (Bammer, 1994; Clifford, 1997; Hyndman, 1998).

Ideas about travel remain significant in postcolonial geographies of the present. Said has interpreted the production of knowledge over space and time in terms of 'travelling theory' (Said, 1983) and has written about marginalised subjectivities in terms of mobility:

> liberation as an intellectual mission ... has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture, to its unhoused, decentred, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages.
> (Said, 1993: 332)

Bhabha also writes about the 'unhomely displacement' of the modern world (Bhabha, 1992), while Paul Carter suggests that 'an authentically migrant perspective ... might begin by regarding movement, not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world' (Carter, 1992: 101). Rather than celebrate travel in uncritical and ungrounded terms, it is important to explore diverse experiences of travel. James Clifford proposes the use of the term 'travel' 'precisely because of its historical taintedness, its associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like' (Clifford, 1992: 110).

Postcolonial geographies include work on the exclusions of the western academy (Crush, 1994; Robinson, 1994); written and visual representations over space (Blunt, 1994; Gregory, 1999; Phillips, 1997; Ryan, 1997); and interpreting urban landscapes (Jacobs, 1996; Mitchell, 1997). Reflecting the

importance of geographical and historical specificity in postcolonial studies, this chapter will end by considering one example of postcolonial geographies of the present in some detail: the Great Famine Project organised by Action From Ireland.

# 'Famine is a lie': Postcolonial ideas and practice

Action From Ireland, or AFrI, was founded in 1975 and is an organisation working for justice, peace and human rights throughout the world. In 1988, AFrI launched the 'Great Famine Project' to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine (see Box 5.7) and to link these past experiences in Ireland to contemporary issues of famine, injustice and human rights abuses elsewhere in the world. As Joe Murray from AFrI explains:

> The aim of AFrI's 'Great Famine Project' is to ensure that this anniversary will not be allowed to slip by unnoticed, as happened on the 100th anniversary. We see the need for ourselves as a people to revisit this experience, to remember it and to deal with the trauma and the pain which it has left on the Irish psyche. But even more importantly our aim is to commemorate it in a way that motivates people to address the injustices and the inequalities that continue to create similar conditions for millions of people throughout the world today. (Murray, 1995: 3)

### Box 5.7 The Irish Famine, 1845–50

It has been estimated that one million people died and one million people emigrated as a result of the Irish Famine (see, for example, Gray, 1995; Kelleher, 1997; Neal, 1997). As in other European countries, the potato crop was decimated by a blight in successive years during the 1840s. And yet, this was only the trigger rather than the cause of the Irish Famine. The causes of the Irish Famine – and the reasons why famine occurred in Ireland and not elsewhere in Europe – span a range of economic, social and political factors. In 1845, 4000 people out of a population of 8 million owned 80% of the land in Ireland. Many poor people rented land and grew cash crops to pay their landlords. These people were very often dependent on the potato crop for their own survival, with a working man eating up to 6.5 kg of potatoes each day. Many of those who owned land in Ireland were absentee landlords, often living in Britain because, at this time, Ireland was part of the British Empire and was ruled from London. Ireland was Britain's first and longest-standing colony. From as early as 1171, native kings in Ireland acknowledged Henry II of England as lord of Ireland. British colonial rule intensified from the sixteenth century onwards, and was marked by plantation agricultural systems and British settlement. The Act of Union in 1800 bound Ireland to Britain more closely than ever before. By the mid-nineteenth century, just as racist stereotypes characterised many British representations of colonised peoples in Asia and Africa, the appearance and behaviour of Irish people were also represented in racist terms. So, for
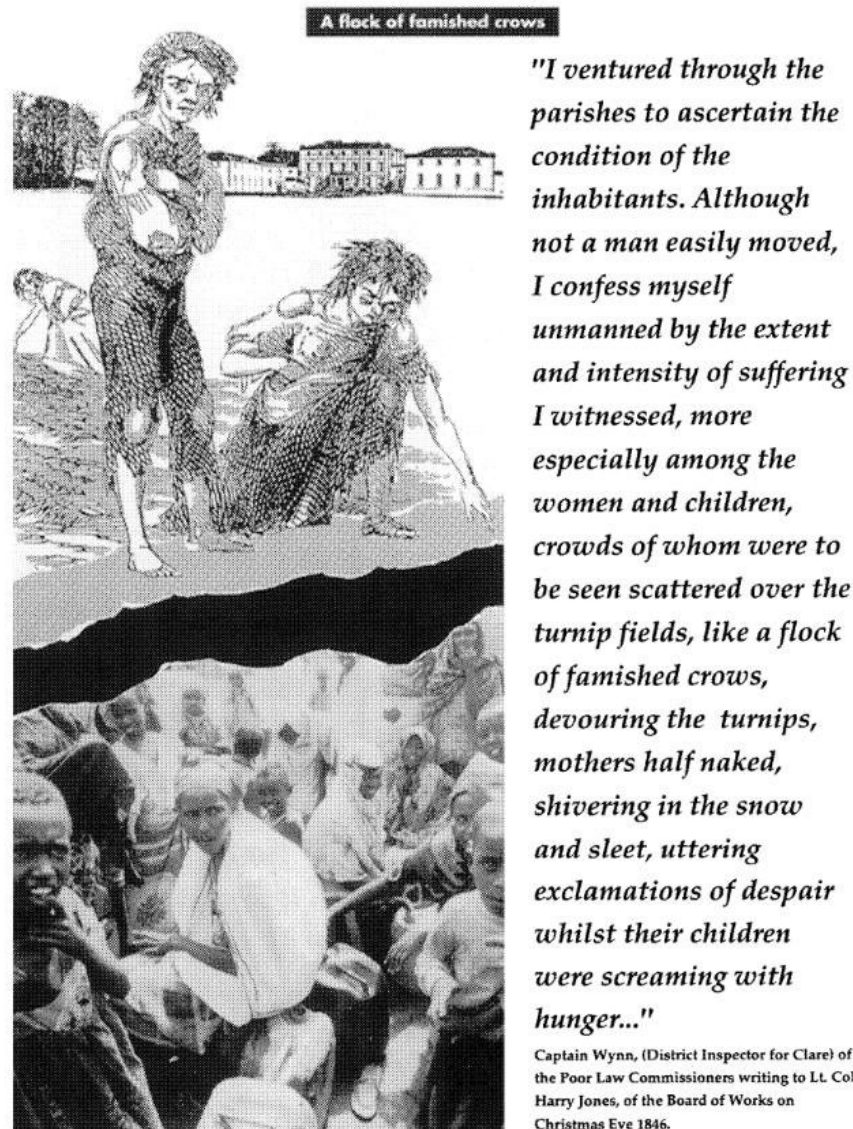
**Box 5.7** *continued*

example, the Irish were caricatured as dirty, lazy and degenerate 'bogtrotters' who lived in squalor of their own making (McClintock, 1995). The potato crop failed in the context of social, economic and political polarisations between landlords, tenant farmers and landless labourers, and between imperial rulers and ruled.

During the famine, an estimated one million people died of starvation and diseases such as typhoid, cholera and dysentery. The British imperial response to the famine took the form of minimal state intervention. Cash crops continued to be exported from Ireland while people were dying of starvation, in line with the imperial policy of free trade. For many families, the only source of relief was to enter workhouses or participate in public works schemes, often building roads to nowhere in exchange for food. Thousands of families were evicted from their homes and an estimated one million people emigrated from Ireland in overcrowded ships where disease was rife. Most of those who emigrated travelled to the east coast of the United States; others settled in British ports such as Liverpool, while others travelled to eastern Canada and Australia. In Ireland, the famine led to popular dissent, such as food riots and the rise of Irish nationalism in the form of groups such as Young Ireland.

The legacy of the Irish famine is still felt today. In Ireland, the famine led to long-term depopulation, more acute social polarisation, changing patterns of land ownership, and the increased role of the Roman Catholic Church. On an international scale, emigration led to what is known as an Irish diaspora, with large Irish populations in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia. Experiences and memories of the famine fuelled support for Irish nationalist movements over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Irish Free State gained independence from British rule in 1922, but at the price of a divided Ireland. The nine counties that form Northern Ireland have been the site of struggle between unionists and nationalists ever since. Different histories of the famine have been written that reflect different political interests. On the one hand, nationalist histories have represented the famine as genocide at the hands of British rulers. On the other hand, revisionist accounts have downplayed the significance of British imperial rule in the famine. The centenary of the famine passed with little recognition, but the 150th anniversary took place at a time when ceasefires in Northern Ireland marked the progress of the peace process. Histories of the Irish famine have come to be debated and discussed to a far greater extent than ever before. Within this context, AFrI seeks to link Irish experiences of famine, injustice and poverty with similar experiences throughout the world today.

AFrI has produced a range of educational material and has organised seminars and conferences on famine and injustice. A key part of the Great Famine Project has been explicitly geographical, marking previously hidden spaces such as mass burial sites with memorials that link Irish experiences and memories of famine with the persistence of famine in the world today (see Figure 5.5). At the Hill of Loyd near Kells, for example, AFrI erected a memorial stone in 1993 with the following inscription: 'In the immediate aftermath of the Great "Famine", this mass burial place was opened in 1851 for the poor people of the Kells district. Their memory challenges us to *end the scandal of hunger*

**A flock of famished crows**

*"I ventured through the parishes to ascertain the condition of the inhabitants. Although not a man easily moved, I confess myself unmanned by the extent and intensity of suffering I witnessed, more especially among the women and children, crowds of whom were to be seen scattered over the turnip fields, like a flock of famished crows, devouring the turnips, mothers half naked, shivering in the snow and sleet, uttering exclamations of despair whilst their children were screaming with hunger..."*

Captain Wynn, (District Inspector for Clare) of the Poor Law Commissioners writing to Lt. Col Harry Jones, of the Board of Works on Christmas Eve 1846.

**Figure 5.5** Famine, past and present

*in today's world of plenty'*. AFrI also revisits other famine landscapes through its 'Famine Walks', as described by John Pilger in Box 5.8. Since 1988, over 20 walks have brought together people from all over Ireland and the world, seeking not only to commemorate the Irish Famine but to raise and to challenge contemporary parallels that include 'injustice in the Philippines, Central America, South Africa, East Timor, the Choctaw "Indian" response to the Irish famine, and the exploitation of the Maya people in Guatemala, as well as the issues of refugees, non-violence and unemployment' (AFrI, 1998) (see Figure 5.6).

## Box 5.8  On the famine road

In County Mayo, in the west of Ireland, there is a stretch where Mweelrea rises steeply on one side of the great lake and the Sheeffry Hills on the other, where clouds tumble in silent avalanches down slopes of iron grass and scabrous rock and the sound of birds carries across the water. Without knowledge of the past, there is no doubting its special beauty .... Yet all of this is a burial ground; beneath a single pyramid of rocks there are said to be hundreds of skeletons ....

The other day I took part in the annual Famine Walk organised by the human rights body, AFrI .... With people from all over Ireland and the world, I walked the ten miles from Doolough to Louisburgh, where hundreds of starving people arrived on the night of March 30, 1849, seeking relief and workhouse shelter. The local Poor Law guardians were to 'inspect' them in order to certify them as 'official paupers'. This would then entitle them to a ration of three pounds of meal each. Instead the people were told to be at Delphi Lodge, the fishing lodge of the Marquess of Sligo, ten miles away, at seven the next morning.

Setting out in snow and gale, some were blown from the road to their deaths; others died from exposure and starvation. When they reached Delphi Lodge, they found the guardians eating their dinner and refusing to be disturbed. They waited, only to be refused relief. Many more died on the homeward journey, with the bodies remaining where they fell ....

As the Famine Walk set out, our voices echoed across the lake and its treeless landscape, a legacy of a colonialism that left Ireland one of the most deforested countries in Europe .... The actor and film-maker Gabriel Byrne said 'People think the Irish Famine has no relevance to our lives today and that the famines in Ethiopia or Rwanda or elsewhere are isolated events. The truth is that the same conditions designed to enrich a very few and deprive the majority of their rightful wealth, and not just their right to their land, but to their identity and culture – this is happening all over the world today. The famine was a symptom of social and economic policies that continue.'

This was supported by Gary White Deer from Oklahoma, whose Choctaw Indian people sent $175 to Ireland as famine relief: a huge amount at the time. Juana Vasquez and Dario Caal, representing the Mayan people of Guatemala, the survivors of the Spanish invasion of their country, lit candles, including black for the famine victims and yellow, the symbol of light. (Pilger, 1998: 361–362, 364)

AFrI's work addresses key postcolonial concerns by challenging the injustices of colonial and neo-colonial rule and by recovering hidden spaces erased by colonial and neo-colonial representations of the world. AFrI's work is intrinsically geographical, developing what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has called 'cartographies of struggle' over space and time, which link past and present local memories and experiences in a transnational network of solidarity. By reclaiming and marking mass burial sites, and by leading thousands of people on 'Famine Walks' through particularly significant landscapes, AFrI's ideas and practice seek to commemorate the past and to challenge the present.

**Figure 5.6** AFrI Famine Walk, County Mayo, Ireland

## Conclusions

Postcolonial perspectives are contested and diverse, but they share a commitment to anti-colonial dissent. Postcolonial studies across the humanities and social sciences explore the impact of colonialism in the past and in the present, investigate the links between colonial forms of power and knowledge, and resist colonialism and colonial representations of the world. While postcolonial perspectives highlight the importance of representing people and places across different cultures, traditions and contexts, they also point to the difficulties of such endeavours. This chapter began by introducing different meanings of the term 'postcolonialism', and then discussed imperial and colonial geographies, tracing the differences and connections between imperialism and colonialism, the different stages of imperial expansion, and the emergence and importance of colonial discourse analysis. The work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was introduced, with a particular emphasis on the spatiality of their postcolonial perspectives. Said explores the

imaginative geographies of Orientalist discourses; Bhabha outlines a Third Space of hybridity that destabilises a binary distinction between 'Self' and 'Other'; and Spivak examines the difficulties of recovering subaltern experiences and voices from their spaces of confinement and considers the gendered nature of colonial objectification.

Postcolonial geographies have begun to explore the imperial complicity of geography as it developed in countries such as Britain during the nineteenth century. Other work has begun to examine postcolonial geographies of the present. The example of AFrI's work in commemorating the Irish Famine by drawing parallels with famine, poverty and injustice elsewhere in the world today illustrates the contemporary relevance of postcolonial geographical perspectives. Postcolonial studies are inherently geographical, as shown by the important links between colonial and geographical discourses. But geographers have only recently begun to explore postcolonial perspectives in any great detail. Postcolonial geographies pose important challenges to the world and to the discipline of geography, and the multifaceted task of decolonising geography will continue to be crucially important in the twenty-first century.

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