Title	Colonialism and anti-colonialism
Author(s)	Morrissey, John
Publication Date	2014
Publication Information	Morrissey, John. (2014). Colonialism and anti-colonialism. In John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer & Yvonne Whelan (Eds.), Key concepts in historical geography. London: SAGE Publishing.
Publisher	Sage Publishing
Link to publisher's version	https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/key-concepts-in-historical-geography/book230471
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6937

CHAPTER 2

Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism

Introduction

The range of ideologies of even one former imperial power and the manner in which its colonial modalities were differentially applied in varying geographical and historical contexts makes it difficult to simplify any grand theory of colonialism. However, if imperialism was imagined and legitimized via different discursive logics or discourses, its manifestation in practice typically resulted in expropriation, violence and resistance to the imposition of political and cultural values over alien peoples by an integrated system of colonial power. This chapter interrogates that historical geographic system of power by connecting *discourse* to *practice* and by examining the profound impact colonialism had, and continues to have, on people and places on every continent.

Thinking through colonialism: discourse and practice

Colonialism can be thought of as a distinct western modality of power; an intrinsically exploitative and dehumanising system of control. As Dan Clayton puts it, it can be viewed as 'symptomatic of an epistemological malaise at the heart of western modernity – a propensity to monopolise and dictate understanding of what counts as right, normal and true, and denigrate and quash other ways of knowing and living' (2009c: 94). As explored in the previous chapter, this system was envisioned through discourse. However, it is important to not only recognize the import of *discourse* in the justification of colonialism but also to see its very real connections to colonial

practice (see table 2.1 for a broad sketch of some of the connections). By way of illustration, I want to use here the example of England's first colony, Ireland, in the sixteenth century. The beginnings of the English colonial project in Ireland was preceded and underpinned by a long sequence of specific geographical discourses that effectively *Othered* the existing Gaelic-Irish population as barbaric, unlawful and in desperate need of civilizing. Such treatises or discourses were advanced by leading contemporary English government officials and travel writers in Ireland. Consider, for example, one such individual, John Derricke, whose pictorial and narrative depiction of Gaelic lawlessness, cattle-raiding and house-burning in 1581 (seen in figure 2.1) formed part of a wider series of contemporary discursive representations that served to demonize the Gaelic-Irish and simultaneously garner the Elizabethan royal court's ideological and economic backing for the Munster Plantation in the south of the country. Some ten years later, the endgame was a new colonial economy brought about by colonial violence, dispossession and settlement and buttressed by a new military and political order (Morrissey, 2003).

In the various civilizing missions of the main European imperial powers of the nineteenth century (sometimes referred to as the age of *high colonialism*), essentialist geographical discourses, underpinned by Western conceptions of order and truth, continued to form central constitutive components (Mitchell, 1991). The effective operation of power in the contemporary world still relies, of course, on specific discursive formations and legitimations. In one of his last works before he died in 2003, Edward Said wrote of the import of Manichean geographical knowledges in the latest *mission civilisatrice* of the war in Iraq, appealing to his readers not to

'underestimate the kind of simplified view of the world that a relative handful of Pentagon civilian elites have formulated for US policy in the entire Arab and Islamic worlds' (2003: xx). For Said, the dreadful consequences of a long-established series of essentialized, demeaning and triumphalist discourse of *us* and *them* underpinned the outbreak of the war:

Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like "us" and didn't appreciate "our" values – the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma [or western colonial discourse] – there would have been no war (2003: xv).

Table 2.1   Imperialism, discourse and colonialism

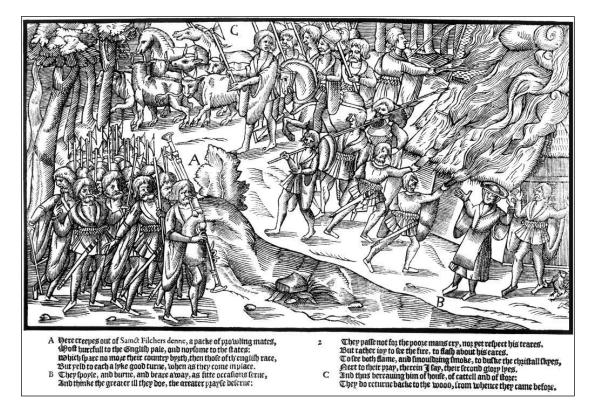| **Imperialism**

- Empire and interventionism
- Empire and economics
- Empire and nation-building |
|---|
| **Imperial/Colonial Discourse**

- Power/knowledge couplet
- Representational and performative binaries
- Regimes of truth |
| **Colonialism**

- Dispossession, settlement and capitalist accumulation
- Discrimination, biopolitics and regulation
- Contact zones, resistance and violence |

Figure 2.1 The demonization of the Gaelic-Irish. Source: John Derricke's *Image of Irelande, 1581* (reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

Notwithstanding Edward Said's invigorating and irrevocable impact on studies of colonial geographies, his work has tended to homogenize and generalize the discourses and practices of western imperial powers. As Alan Lester argues, 'the image of an overarching metropolitan representation of other places and peoples, or a uniform European agenda, needs to be disaggregated' (Lester, 2000: 102). Much work in geography has also tended to affirm primacy to the western metropole or centre in exploring colonialism, which runs the risk of reifying notions of colonial Eurocentrism and over-stating the spatial and ideological separations between core and periphery (for a largely metropolitan focus, see for example Godlewska and Smith, 1994). Using the example of the British Cape Colony in nineteenth-century southern Africa, Lester (2002) has carefully divulged on the contrary the discursive

connections and co-constitution of emerging colonial discourses of race, class and cultural subordination that operated across a trans-imperial network between Britain – as the metropole and centre of imperial power – and the Cape – as a colony and site of colonial practice. In recent years, more sustained engagement with the particularity of the discourses and practices of colonialism in the colonized worlds themselves has emerged (see, for example, Morrissey, 2003; Raju et al., 2006). This work has drawn close attention to what Jim Duncan and Denis Cosgrove have argued is the need for the complexities of imperialism and colonialism to be 'unravelled through localized and historically specific accounts' (1995: 127; see also Clayton, 2003).

Locating colonialism: scale, the frontier and the contact zone

A key role that geography can play in studies of colonialism is to demonstrate the import of locating analyses in necessarily grounded and differentiated ways. From the 1990s particularly, postcolonial critiques in historical and cultural geography have demonstrated amongst other things the fluidity and hybridity of the multiple *geographies of encounter* in the colonial past, with particular attention paid to the racialized and gendered spaces of colonialism (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Lester, 2001; Blunt and McEwan, 2002). A key conceptual inspiration for much of this work lies in the writings of Homi Bhabha, and particularly his theorization of what he refers to as *third spaces* or *in-between spaces* in which hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry came to characterize colonial cultures, rather than the simple binary opposites of Self and Other, developed by Edward Said (Bhabha, 1994).

The concern with sifting out the social and cultural geographical complexities of colonial encounters has seen a number of key themes explored, including: the agency of the colonized; the nuances of colonialism's in-between spaces; and the co-constitution of colonial cores and peripheries (Kearns, 1984; Lester, 2002; Morrissey, 2005). This has also raised important methodological questions of scale and locationality, which historical geographers are well placed to address (Clayton, 2008). Core-periphery relationships, for instance, were typically complicated geographically by a range of geopolitical, geoeconomic and symbolic hierarchies and networks. For example, the city of Calcutta operated as core-imperial at the Indian scale but periphery-colonial at the British Empire scale (Legg, 2007).

In addition, geographers have also brought the notion of the frontier into question. In thinking through colonial geographies of encounter, envisioning the past via a frontier lens reinforces notions of geographical boundedness and typically posits self-enclosed regions and ethnicities. This serves to dissuade a reading of the diverse interconnections of cultural contact. As David Wishart reflects, the nature of regions reveals their 'tendency to emphasise differences rather than commonalities, and their limited scope as generalizations' (2004: 305). Conversely, the concept of the *contact zone* has proven particularly useful to historical social and cultural geographical analysis (Pratt, 1992; Routledge, 1997; Morrissey, 2005). Using the idea of the contact zone forms part of a postcolonial dismantling and complicating of the reductive character of colonialism's prioritized geographical knowledges – past and present.

Colonialism and anti-colonialism

In the general context, colonial expansion in any given geographic setting typically involved key modalities on the ground, subsequent to military, strategic and economic planning (planning that was often more ad hoc than systematic). These include: military conquest and occupation; the establishment of new legal registers to ensure that colonial violence, economic expropriation and dispossession of property were carried out through the law; the mapping of the various lands to be colonized; and the settlement of colonists in new spaces to forge new political, economic and cultural enterprise. All of these colonial modi operandi were not of course always utilized, nor was there any set chronological sequence for colonialism's diverse geographical practices in multiple geographic contexts. However, once established via various mechanisms, colonial order subsequently relied on a networking of power that facilitated legal, military and political control.

Colonial power of course was resisted all over the world. Anti-colonialism typically emerged on a counter-ideological level that initially focused on envisioning the recovery of territory. As Edward Said notes, the political and cultural imagination of anti-colonialism centres on geography:

For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first through the imagination (1993: 271).

From oral histories to radical print cultures, counter-colonial discourses, or what Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 1994) calls *autoethnography*, underpinned and legitimated strategies and practices of resistance (again, the link between discourse and practice). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially, from India to Ireland, from Algeria to Vietnam, that resistance involved a range of practices – from political and economic non-compliance to violence – all mobilized to counter the military and biopolitical control of colonial regimes, with an envisioned endgame of independence.

Practices of political, economic and cultural anti-colonialism ensured the materialization of complex new spaces emerging under the shadow of colonialism. It is important to remember, then, the co-constitution of colonizer and colonized, core and periphery in colonial studies; what Foucault called the 'boomerang effect' (Foucault, 2003: 103). Imperialism in its nineteenth-century form, for example, emerged as 'the ideology of the imperial ruling classes in the very same period that the first substantial freedom movements were developing in the colonies […] indeed imperialism itself was in part a defensive response to the freedom movements' (Young, 2001: 28). In other words, the colonized worlds informed the nature of the colonial project itself and were a constitutive part in its construction (Lester, 2001).

In many colonial accounts, however, sufficient space is not given to the agency and practices of anti-colonialism (Morrissey, 2004b). Indeed, this equates to a key gap in the historiography of colonial and postcolonial studies. Much remains yet to be done in incorporating the historical geographies of decolonization and anti-colonial resistance into our conceptions of the colonial past and present (Clayton, 2008). Given

the ongoing military, political and ideological failure to comprehend and conceptualize elements of insurgency and counter-insurgency in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the theatre of the war on terrorism, the argument for allowing the historical geographies of anti-colonialism to speak to the present becomes both compelling and urgent.

The colonial/imperial present

Despite the end of formal colonialism through the course of the twentieth century, many geographers have alerted us to the imperial power and still hegemonic position of the west and particularly the United States of America in political and economic world affairs (Harvey, 2003; Smith, 2003). In this context, historical geographical work on the twentieth century has addressed a variety of themes, including the operations and spatial strategies of western interests overseas and the geopolitical and geoeconomic logics of contemporary western military interventions. Recognising the echoes of the colonial past in the present has enabled geographers to reveal how global power structures today still mirror the exploitative economic and spatial arrangements of the imperial era. Contemporary geographical work that is historically contextualized has also divulged the enduring import of discourse in the present (particularly the Manichean discursive logics of friend and enemy and good and evil) and its links to a well-established imperial register of Orientalism.

Various apologiae for the legacies of colonialism, citing its modernising and civilizing effects, have also emerged in recent years (see particularly the work of Niall Ferguson). Underpinned by a latent imperial nostalgia, such works have reflected on

the positive (and apparently bloodless) legacies of colonial endeavours without any critical engagement with the violence, death and destruction of colonialism's civilizing missions, or a recognition of the subaltern contribution to the spaces of colonialism. Much of these accounts can be linked to vociferous calls in the post-9/11 period for a more effective American empire (Ferguson, 2004; Ignatieff, 2004). That *empire*, as various geographers have shown, frequently exempts itself from international law and the Geneva conventions, and is allowed to strip individuals of their most basic human rights and citizenship protections by the invocation of so-called exceptional emergency powers that have insidiously become a norm in the prosecution of the *war on terror* (Minca, 2005).

Conclusion

In *The Colonial Present*, Derek Gregory traces the specific strategies of contemporary western interventions and illuminates them as 'one more wretched instance of the colonial present' (2004: 145). Gregory helps us to understand the *war on terror* and its shameful amnesia of past colonialism and indeed perpetuation of an interminable sense of *us* and *them*. The practices and spaces of colonial violence and anti-colonial resistance in the past not only complicate the story of colonialism but also speak specifically to the current moment of global danger and the dichotomy between its representation and materiality, and the frequent effacement of the latter from mainstream western media.

Summary

- Colonialism can be thought of as an intrinsically exploitative and dehumanising system of control that relied on a networking of legal, military and political power.

- It is important to not only recognize the import of *discourse* in the justification of colonialism but also to see its connections to colonial governmentality and *practice*.

- A key role that geography can play in studies of colonialism is to demonstrate the import of locating analyses in necessarily grounded and differentiated ways, and to this end, the concept of the *contact zone* has been fruitful in sifting out the nuances of social and cultural contact.

- Political, economic and cultural anti-colonialism ensured the materialization of complex new spaces emerging under the shadow of colonialism.

- Historical accounts of the practices and spaces of colonial violence and anti-colonial resistance resonate with and illuminate the current moment of global danger in the colonial present.

- Recognising the echoes of the colonial past in the present has enabled geographers to reveal how global power structures today still mirror the exploitative economic and spatial arrangements of the imperial era.

Further reading

Blunt, A. and McEwan, C. (eds) (2002) *Postcolonial Geographies*. London: Continuum.

Godlewska, A. and Smith, N. (eds) (1994) *Geography and Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gregory, D. (2004) *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bibliography

Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Blunt, A. and Rose, G. (eds) (1994) *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*. New York: Guilford.

Blunt, A. and McEwan, C. (eds) (2002) *Postcolonial Geographies*. London: Continuum.

Clayton, D. (2003) 'Critical imperial and colonial geographies', in K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds) *Handbook of Cultural Geography*. London: Sage, pp. 354-368.

Clayton, D. (2008) 'Le passé colonial/impérial et l'approche postcoloniale de la géographie Anglophone', in P. Singaravélou (ed.) *L'Empire des Géographes: Géographie, Exploration et Colonisation, XIXe–XXe Siècle*. Paris: Belin, pp. 219-234.

Clayton, D. (2009c) 'Colonialism', in D. Gregory, R. Johnston, G. Pratt, M. Watts and S. Whatmore (eds) *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (5th edn). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 94-98.

Duncan, J. and Cosgrove, D. (1995) 'Editorial. Colonialism and postcolonialism in the former British Empire', *Ecumene*, 2(2): 127-128.

Ferguson, N. (2002) *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Allen Lane.

Ferguson, N. (2004) *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*. New York: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2003) *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Trans. D. Macey). London: Penguin

Godlewska, A. and Smith, N. (eds) (1994) *Geography and Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gregory, D. (2004) *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ignatieff, M. (2004) *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kearns, G. (1984) 'Closed space and political practice: Frederick Jackson Turner and Halford Mackinder', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22: 23-34.

Legg, S. (2007) *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lester, A. (2000) 'Historical geographies of imperialism', in B. Graham and C. Nash (eds) *Modern Historical Geographies*. Harlow: Prentice Hall, pp. 100-120.

Lester, A. (2001) *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth Century South Africa and Britain*. London: Routledge.

Lester, A. (2002) 'Constructing colonial discourse: Britain, South Africa and the Empire in the nineteenth century', in A. Blunt and C. McEwan (eds) *Postcolonial Geographies*. London: Continuum, pp. 29-45.

Minca, C. (2005) 'The return of the camp', *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(4): 405-412.

Mitchell, T. (1991) *Colonizing Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Morrissey, J. (2003) *Negotiating Colonialism*. London: HGRG, Royal Geographical Society.

Morrissey, J. (2004b) 'Geography militant: resistance and the essentialisation of identity in colonial Ireland', *Irish Geography*, 37(2): 166-176.

Morrissey, J. (2005) 'Cultural geographies of the contact zone: Gaels, Galls and overlapping territories in late medieval Ireland', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6(4): 551-566.

Pratt, M.L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Pratt, M.L. (1994) 'Transculturation and autoethnography: Peru, 1615-1980', in F. Barker, P. Hulme and M. Iversen (eds) *Colonial Discourse / Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 24-46.

Raju, S., Kumar, M.S. and Corbridge, S. (eds) (2006) *Colonial and Post-Colonial Geographies of India*. New Delhi: Sage.

Routledge, P. (1997) 'A spatiality of resistances: theory and practice in Nepal's revolution of 1990', in S. Pile and M. Keith (eds) *Geographies of Resistance*. London: Routledge, pp. 68-86.

Said, E. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Said, E. (2003) *Orientalism* (Penguin classic edn; first published 1978). London: Penguin.

Smith, N. (2003) *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wishart, D. (2004) 'Period and region', *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(3): 305-319.

Young, R.J.C. (2001) *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.