

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Griffiths, Mark (2017) From heterogeneous worlds: western privilege, class and positionality in the South. *Area*, 49 (1). pp. 2-8. ISSN 0004-0894

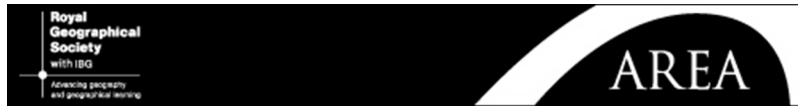
Published by: Wiley-Blackwell

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/area.12277> <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/area.12277>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/28523/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



From heterogeneous worlds: western privilege, class and positionality in the South

Journal:	<i>Area</i>
Manuscript ID	AREA-RP-Nov-2015-0122.R1
Manuscript Type:	Regular Paper
Keywords:	positionality, ethnography, postcolonialism, social class, privilege, research ethics
Abstract:	<p>The aim of this paper is to meet a repeated challenge that comes from within postcolonial writing: to turn postcolonial theory and strategies “inward”, and to examine our postcoloniality. Specifically I use social class to interrogate the idea of western privilege in a postcolonial context, examining whether postcolonialism can enable the politics of class to intersect with the politics of ‘Otherness’ in such a way to open up ethnography to a more ethical geographical praxis. The paper first presents a genealogy of the figure of the privileged western researcher, drawing attention to the historical contingency within subsequent issues of positionality in the South. Taking this figure, the discussion is then guided by two “heteros” of postcolonial writing – heterogeneity and heterotemporality – to disrupt the assumption of historical contingency. I use my own class history as a heterotemporality to insist on a more heterogeneous conceptualisation of western postcoloniality that accounts for the varied experiences of the British working classes. The paper closes with the crucial question of what this largely theoretical work might offer the empirical business of ethnography in (especially) poor areas of the South, asking explicitly: can class, like gender and ethnicity, qualify western privilege in a way that reduces researcher-researched power imbalance? The main argument made is that geography’s imperial past is an elite historiography that cannot draw the contours of western researcher relations with postcolonial “Others”. Consequently, I propose social class an aspect of subjectivity that moves hyper self-reflexivity towards a more ethical praxis across difference.</p>

From heterogeneous worlds: western privilege, class and positionality in the South

The critical turn in geography brought a healthy, if unresolved, concern to doing ethnographic research in the South, where the South is understood as a “postcolonial context”. Broadly, this came out of an acute awareness of geography’s imperialist past: from initial inquiry in the late 1970s (e.g. Hudson 1977) to more extensive engagement (prominently: Driver 2001; Godlewska and Smith 1994; Livingstone 1992; Pratt 1992), no geographer can be incognisant of, as Jenny Robinson put it, our discipline’s ‘past littered with the skeletons of murderous neglects and encounter’ (2003, 277). Concurrently, feminist perspectives on ethics and the situatedness of knowledge (Haraway 1988; Katz 1992) informed introspection on the relational and personal nature of researcher positionality (England 1994; McDowell 1992; Rose 1997); we and the field are now understood as co-constitutive, our subjectivities and positionalities ever changing against people and place. At the intersection of these literatures - in a debate shaped initially in the pages of *Area* - the “skeletons” of the past bear on considerations of positionality where our contemporary privilege derives from and replicates, or may replicate, colonial-era power relations between researchers and Southern Others (see especially: Madge 1993; Potter 1993; Sidaway 1992). This work has done much for the ambitious and ongoing project towards a de- or post-colonial praxis for geography (McEwan 2003; Robinson 2003; Sidaway 2000) and no geographer should travel South without careful deliberation of what it means to be a “privileged western researcher” in a postcolonial field.

Building on these literatures, the aim of this paper is to meet a repeated challenge that comes from within postcolonial writing: to turn postcolonial theory and strategies “inward” to examine *our* postcoloniality. Specifically I explore what Gayatri Spivak terms ‘hyper self-reflexivity’ to interrogate the idea of western privilege, examining whether postcolonialism can enable the politics of class to intersect with the politics of ‘Otherness’ in such a way to open up ethnography to a more ethical geographical praxis. The politics of class here are understood as less to do with structural Marxism than a cultural

1
2
3 language of ‘deliberate, self-conscious articulation’ that serves individuals and communities as an often
4
5 adversarial (though not necessarily antagonistic) descriptor of social difference (Cannadine 1999, 5-11).
6
7 The paper thus shares the same critical trajectories of reflection from feminist (Chacko 2004; Sultana
8
9 2007) and diaspora (Jazeel 2007; Noxolo 2009) perspectives whose difference from white, male “master
10
11 subjects” ‘positions [them] in opposition to dominant discourses and structures of power’
12
13 (Visweswaran 1994, 140). Western researchers in these cases insist on complex and variegated relations
14
15 with imperial histories, and their positionality in the field is nuanced by different forms and degrees of
16
17 privilege. Complementing these interventions, the discussion here is guided at various points by two
18
19 “heteros” of postcolonial writing, Spivak’s (1988; 1993) heterogeneity of subjects and Dipesh
20
21 Chakrabarty’s (2009) heterotemporalities of historiography, two important themes of postcolonial
22
23 writing that offer the opportunity to bring into contact the politics of class with the politics of
24
25 ‘Otherness’. Thus, I seek to allow class to interrupt the binding of privilege and western to the end that
26
27 research encounters may play out on more ethical ground. The main argument I make is that
28
29 geography’s imperial past is an elite historiography that cannot draw the contours of western researcher
30
31 relations with postcolonial “Others”. Consequently, I propose social class an aspect of subjectivity that
32
33 moves hyper self-reflexivity towards a more ethical praxis across difference.
34
35
36

37
38 The paper proceeds in three sections. First I present a genealogy of the figure of the
39
40 privileged western researcher, drawing attention to the historical contingency within subsequent issues
41
42 of positionality in the South. Second I turn to the ‘subjective picture’ of autobiography to use my own
43
44 class history to open ‘a space for subjugated perspectives and voices’ (Roth 2001, 131) as a
45
46 heterotemporality to explore a more heterogeneous conceptualisation of western postcoloniality. The
47
48 third section reflects on the crucial question of what this largely theoretical work might offer the ethics
49
50 of ethnography in (especially) poor areas of the South.
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1. A concise genealogy: geography's skeletons past and present

Discourse on positionality in postcolonial research centres on the politics of knowledge abstraction and representation. Drawing on postcolonial writers such as Spivak, serious questions are asked in terms of speaking *to*, *for* and *about*. For Spivak the voice of the 'subaltern' – or oppressed colonial subject – cannot be recovered without appropriation and even attempts to let 'the oppressed speak for themselves' evidences a 'first world analyst' 'masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter' (1988, 292). Such transparency sweeps away the historical effects that open spaces of encounter and once again transform the South into a 'resource', a 'repository of an ethnographic "cultural difference"', which draws together intellectual production with western imperialism (1999, 388). Others such as Benita Parry and Ania Loomba have sought to nuance Spivak's insistence on the impossibility of recovering oppressed voices: Parry warns against 'deliberate deafness to the native voice where it can be heard' (1987, 39) and Loomba seeks subaltern testimony that 'militates against too absolute a theory of subaltern silence' (2005, 197). Connectedly, yet in a different direction, Qadri Ismail (2005) has written a complex wide-ranging critique of disciplinary emphasis on interpretation from the outside, advocating an ethic of intervention that 'abides by' difference while all the time resisting an empirical imperative to generalise singularity. While there is no resolution within these debates (for instance Ismail and Parry are quite distinctly at odds), what unites the different perspectives is a more thoroughgoing examination of the 'first world analyst' in the context of the politics of 'Otherness'.

Social scientists have taken quite seriously these and other theoretical positions, seeking to work them through methodologies of ethnography and writing in the doing of research. Largely this has centred on issues of reflexivity, positionality and identity as sites of more ethical engagement, with the objective of enabling western researchers to write about people in the South without at the same time claiming to speak *for* Others (e.g. Nagar and Ali 2003). Moves towards 'talking back' (hooks 1989), 'being with' (Probyn 2010) and 'abiding by' (Ismail 2005) take different directions that indicate a common belief that subaltern perspectives may not be entirely irretrievable. This does not, however,

1
2
3 provide an affirmative answer to the question “can the subaltern speak?”, rather the large amount of
4 literature investigates the ‘irretrievable’, while holding as axiomatic the ‘heterogeneity’ on which Spivak
5 famously insists (1999, 270).
6
7

8
9
10 Against the problematic of retrieving oppressed voices, Spivak, throughout her writing, turns
11 the focus inwards, insisting on interrogation of ‘positionality as investigating subject’. Her, and many
12 others’, concern is that even well intentioned representation displaces testimony and resituates Others
13 within a colonial textuality, amounting to the appropriation of voice and, therefore, a further silencing
14 of the postcolonial subaltern (Spivak 1988; 1993). Spivak calls for ‘hyper self-reflexivity’, cognisant of
15 the privilege of postcolonial scholars in the South from which educational and institutional interests are
16 skewed westwards. In both recognition and defiance of this seeming compromise she insists: ‘rather
17 than continue pathetically to dramatise victimage or assert a spurious identity, [the postcolonial writer]
18 must say ‘no’ to the ‘moral luck’ of the culture of imperialism while recognising that she must inhabit it,
19 indeed invest it, to criticise it’ (1993, 228). Arif Dirlik takes up this theme in his work, seemingly going a
20 step further in the assertion that academic iterations of postcoloniality do little but ‘cover up the origins
21 of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as
22 beneficiaries’ (1994, 353). In fact, he goes onto argue (with a touch of irony), ‘postcoloniality is little
23 more than the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism’, and presents a similar challenge to
24 that of Spivak in asking whether postcolonial critique, ‘in recognition of its own class-position in global
25 capitalism ... can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of
26 resistance against a system of which it is a product’ (ibid., 356).
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45

46 Through these foci we get quite a clear sense of heterogeneity to both “researched” and
47 “researchers” in the South. Postcolonial writers have opened critical debate on authorial voices, and
48 those of testimony: experience is beyond ‘capture’, and representation always risks appropriation.
49 Postcolonial Others – the oppressed – and postcolonial critics – the ‘beneficiaries’ (Spivak and Dirlik
50 included) - are thus opened to intense, multi-faceted and unresolved critical attention.
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 For western geographers these postcolonial literatures have played an integral role in the
4 effort to de- or post-colonialise the discipline. Travelling South and doing ethnography now means,
5 rightly, engagement with complex (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives on privilege and
6 difference. The concomitant imperative to look on and within ourselves in the West ostensibly deals
7 with an exaggerated form of Spivak's 'investigating subject': with regards to mobilities, institutional
8 prestige, access to publishing avenues and so forth, western geographers are likely more privileged and
9 therefore obliged to contend with the politics of Otherness evermore attentively. In terms of 'imperial
10 logic' and 'positionality as investigating subject', western researchers have sought to problematise their
11 presence in the postcolonial South through critical histories and reflexive considerations of
12 positionality, two bodies of thought that come together to produce a broadly coherent figure of the
13 "privileged western researcher".
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

26
27 Critical histories of geography began to take shape in the early 1990s, drawing attention to
28 geographers' importance to imperialist expansion and domination. Prominently: geographers past are
29 figured as the 'foot-soldiers' (Driver 2001) or 'midwives' (Bell et al. 1995) of empire, 'a quintessentially
30 geographical project' (Godlewska and Smith 1994, 2). In a widely cited passage of *The Geographical
31 Tradition*, David Livingstone characterises geography as 'the science of imperialism *par excellence*' whose
32 focus on 'exploration, topographic and social survey, cartographic representation and regional
33 inventory - the craft practices of the emerging geographical professional - were entirely suited to the
34 colonial project' (1992, 170). In the field, the 'craft practices' of geography became inextricable with the
35 intellectual production of Empire as 'explorer-conquerors' travelled and evidenced a world that *needs* or
36 *is open to* European expansion. Subsequent calls came for geography to put its 'geopolitical house in
37 order' (Robinson 2003, 65) and reflect seriously on how to post- or de-colonialise the discipline
38 (prominently: McEwan 2003; Raghuram and Madge 2006; Sidaway 2000), recalling always that
39 geography's intimacy with empire means 'we ourselves are representatives of this Europe-based
40 tradition' (Godlewska and Smith 1994, 3).
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Aware of this tradition, travelling South involves a sensitivity to what Mary Louise Pratt termed the 'contact zone', where ethnographic meetings play out in 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (1992, 6). Pratt's historical evocation of the geographer-explorer resonates through much of the literature within the ranging project of postcolonialising geography. James Sidaway refers to 'First World' geographers in the 'Third World' and Cheryl McEwan explicates that 'within the international division of labour most academics are privileged' (2003, 348). Richa Nagar and Frah Ali, in a nuanced and well cited consideration of positionality, contrast a rich heterogeneity to Southern constituents whose contact is with the 'relative privileges' of 'overseas academics' (2003, 358). These important reflections quite rightly emphasise the privilege we enjoy as "western" or "first world" geographers. They recognise our relative wealth, ability to shape knowledge and they emphasise hierarchical relationships with research participants. They ensure we look into ourselves, take our power seriously and realise the relational nature of positionality – while always, of course, resisting – attempting to resist - 'transparent reflexivity' (Rose 1997).

Such reflexivity, premised on uneven North-South privilege, is now a default aspect of geographical reflection on positionality. Tracey Skelton, for instance, points out that 'we are not neutral, scientific observers ... if we work in a postcolonial geographical context, then being white and born in the former colonial country may have an important impact upon the relationships we can establish during our research' (2001, 89). Kathryn Besio similarly notes: 'researchers and colonial travellers share an undeniable lineage, each of us residing somewhere along the coloniser-colonised continuum' (2003, 28). And Paul Cloke and colleagues caution 'geographers ... effectively reproduce the same structural relationship with 'native' peoples as had arisen in the expeditions of the colonial explorer-geographers from earlier centuries: a relationship in which power, influence and assumptions of superiority lie with the white geographers appropriating knowledge, labour and skills from the people of colour in these places' (2004, 14). These literatures frame postcolonial positionality in the context of, on the one hand,

1
2
3 geographical-colonial histories and on the other feminist-influenced understandings of researcher
4
5 positionality as relative. What results is an imperative to reflexivity that is always shaped an acute
6
7 awareness of geography's skeletons of empire and how we, as western geographers, might embody
8
9 colonial histories in our travels South.
10

11 12 13 14 **2. Working class postcoloniality: not my skeletons?** 15

16
17 The imperative for western academics is to think through issues of postcoloniality, to recognise the
18
19 privilege we carry and to consider our advantageous positions in the context of historical cleavages.
20
21 While this is a clear and important concern, what remains less clear is the composition of the
22
23 collectives involved in *our* academic practices and *our* privileges. It seems a homogenising assumption
24
25 that neglects the complexity of imperialism and the assemblage of postcolonialisms – both *here* and
26
27 *there* - that are its legacy. As has been argued, postcoloniality (if it is to have any currency at all) cannot
28
29 only be the condition of southern constituents: 'colonial processes restructured colonial powers too –
30
31 the memory banks and histories are twinned and interpenetrate' (Sylvester 1999, 712). The question,
32
33 then, is not just of *our* practices and *our* privileges but of *our postcoloniality*, and if postcolonialism
34
35 interrogates difference and seeks out disruptive histories then we might, as postcolonial scholars,
36
37 explore how we may be - if not irretrievably so (though that may well be the case) - heterogeneous
38
39 within our own privilege. We can then begin a reconsideration of privilege, and rework a relationship
40
41 with a 'past littered with the skeletons of murderous neglects and encounter'.
42
43
44

45 The haunting of the skeletons draws contemporary geography alongside historical
46
47 imperialism, it arouses those skeletons in *our* (contemporary) closet, evoking us as the descendants of
48
49 European imperialism. The concomitant ethics of positionality rest on a collective responsibility
50
51 indelibly tied to membership of a community that is reducible to the (European) nation state. As part
52
53 of a postcolonial geography, movement beyond the nation state – provincialising national narratives -
54
55 would seem prudent in the examination of collective and individual postcolonialities. At this point the
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 second “hetero”, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s concept of heterotemporalities, comes to the fore. Proposing
4
5 that we ‘contemplate the necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a
6
7 one or a whole’ (2009, 255), Chakrabarty singles out universities as ‘part of the battery of institutions’
8
9 enforcing the ‘truth-games’ of the nation state (2009, 342). While not for a moment wishing to
10
11 implicate contemporary geographers in the willful complicity in such ‘games’, as long as the dark pasts
12
13 of empire and historical contingency remain central to our thinking, we cannot claim to have made a
14
15 committed attempt to provincialise Europe in the processes of knowledge production.
16
17

18
19 A more committed attempt might take the remnants of the geographer-explorer that
20
21 produces us as descendants of that tradition and set those remnants against Chakrabarty’s call ‘to write
22
23 over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship and other narratives of human connections that
24
25 draw sustenance from dreamt-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals
26
27 of citizenship nor by the nightmare of ‘tradition’ that ‘modernity’ creates’ (2009, 341-2). Tradition
28
29 within the modern categories of statehood, therefore, remains a barrier to postcolonialising knowledge
30
31 production. Or, for the purposes here: the Geographical Tradition coupled with the Euro-American
32
33 provenance of researchers remains a barrier to postcolonialising knowledge production. These modern
34
35 categories must be consigned to the provinces of knowledge: ‘so that the world may once again be
36
37 imagined as radically heterogeneous’ (Chakrabarty 2009, 341). Towards such imaginings, Jenny
38
39 Robinson has pointed out that ‘a recognition of the diverse cultures of the English working class’ may
40
41 function to ‘redress the epistemic damage’ of elite histories of empire (2003, 276). Turning the gaze
42
43 inwards, then, we might look to more variegated histories of Britain that recognise the heterogeneity
44
45 within and disrupt history as ‘the invention of anachronistic space [in which] the agency of women, the
46
47 colonised and the industrial working class are disavowed’ (McClintock 2013, 40).
48
49

50
51 Towards an integration of class into a rethinking of privilege and researcher postcolonial
52
53 positionality at this point I want to call on class-based heterotemporalities to insist on a heterogeneity
54
55 to western relations to privilege. Turning to positionality as relational and personal, I wonder at my
56
57 own relationship with Empire, at what my biography may open ‘a way in which the horizons of
58
59
60

1
2
3 meaning of myself and “subjects” [can] intersect’ (Robinson 1994, 219-220). I’m a working class boy
4
5 from the Industrial North of England, my parents’ parents and so forth were not mapping Africa. They
6
7 didn’t study at any of our great public schools or prestigious universities. My maternal lineage left
8
9 Ireland during the potato famine, when the British Imperial state systematically starved a million people
10
11 on the neighbouring island. They found work in the cotton mills of the North West - Lancashire - and
12
13 when that work slowed, my great-great grandfather walked 70 miles across the Pennines to find work in
14
15 the coal mines of South Yorkshire. He brought his family to Rotherham and eventually his grandson,
16
17 my grandfather, would work in the steelworks of Sheffield. My paternal lineage begins in the coal seams
18
19 of South Wales, eventually migrating to the shipyards of Lanarkshire in Scotland and then south again
20
21 to the coal fields of North Nottinghamshire where I was born. What of my historical contingency in
22
23 terms of empire? My forebears didn’t order the passage of knowledge from Africa and the Orient to
24
25 Kensington Gore and Oxbridge; my historical relationship with imperialism is one of fuelling and
26
27 building empire in a different way: mining coal, working the mills, building the ships, losing and finding
28
29 work according to the investments and divestments of the elite – at most, ‘going along with’ rather than
30
31 directing the projection of power overseas (Cannadine 2002). Imperialism was not and is not a project
32
33 of the working classes, whatever my privilege, it’s not of the same order as that of the elites:
34
35 geography’s skeletons are not mine.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42

3. Conclusions: theoretical and empirical implications for positionality

43
44
45 But that’s too emphatic an assertion. Of course my (our) postcoloniality, my (our) privilege, derives
46
47 from the spoils of empire. British university degrees would not carry – still now – the same
48
49 opportunities without empire, this much is obvious, and my education and work affords great privilege.
50
51 Here the work of Diane Reay speaks really clearly, she writes of the ‘double bind’ of the working-class
52
53 academic: the ‘difficulty of reconciling socialisation into academic culture with a subjectivity that draws
54
55 powerfully on working class identity’ (1997, 19). Writing so personally of her positionality, Reay
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 continues: 'we worked so hard at school not primarily to be acceptable to the middle classes, who were
4 always the enemy, but to redeem our parents, to prove our family was 'just as good'' (ibid., 23). From
5 this perspective, to accept historical contingency with an elite Geographical Tradition is to consent to
6 being accepted by the middle classes, a process, Reay writes powerfully, 'of treachery and accidence to
7 institutionalised and socially endemic inequalities the middle class label holds' (ibid., 26). This cultural
8 language of class as an assertion of social difference (Cannadine 1999), can here be set in dialogue with
9 Chakrabarty's critique of universities 'complicit' in the reproduction of elite historiographies: both are
10 invested in a deconstruction of academia as an elite pursuit. Theoretically, then, just as the positionality
11 of western researchers is not fixed by masculinity (Chacko 2004; Sultana 2007) or whiteness (Jazeel
12 2007; Noxolo 2009), nor is it fixed by social class.

13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
The question remains of how this translates to geographical praxis on the ground. In the cases of gender and ethnicity, the theoretical work of fragmenting of histories is augmented by a quite obvious empirical potential for more equitable ethnographic exchanges. It is perhaps not so clear-cut when it comes to class; I am a white, British male; the way I am perceived by participants in the south may not be inflected by British working-class culture. But in light of thoroughgoing postcolonial critiques of 'disinterested interpretation' and moves towards 'abiding by' Others (Ismail 2005), the sense of unfairness that is part of growing up in the margins can also become a resource (Reay 1997). To illustrate what such a resource can bring to the ethics of ethnography, I close with a vignette that moves from the metropole to the periphery and in doing so indicates one way that the politics of social class intersect with the politics of 'Otherness' in such a way to open up ethnography to a more ethical geographical praxis.

During my postgraduate studies in literature at University College London, the DH Lawrence Seminar focused on *Women in Love*, a text in which when unwashed people speak, they do so in (Lawrence's stylised version of) a North Nottinghamshire dialect. It is a textual representation of the broad vowels and glottal stops that I grew up with, but had worked (mostly subconsciously) to suppress. On this day though the professor was onto me: "aren't you from the North, would you just

1
2
3 read this out so *we* can imagine how it sounds?”. With a regional accent, and no Oxbridge degree, I was
4
5 already marked out; I read aloud, from outside in. Later I read Janet Zandy: ‘oral language ... is a
6
7 giveaway class identity marker. A middle-class child goes from the language of home to the language of
8
9 school without disruption. She does not have to hesitate, relearn, or adapt because she does not need to
10
11 switch linguistic codes. Working-class children ... will not be able to move from the language of home
12
13 to the language of school without disruption ... [in this way] language can be a weapon to demolish
14
15 and oppress’ (1995, 5). I wasn’t demolished but, and though this may seem precious, I was othered.
16
17 Later still, during my PhD work in Karnataka, Southern India, I interviewed a group of young
18
19 development workers. While the first three interviewees (all male) were eager to answer my questions,
20
21 the fourth, as she stumbled over some English words, became visibly embarrassed. The men were
22
23 showing off, making their education count. It’s a small thing, but my immediate switching of the
24
25 interview into Kannada (a language I don’t understand) helped to reduce her discomfort; insisting that
26
27 all responses avoid English reduced the power imbalance between not only researcher-researched, but
28
29 also between the four participants.
30
31
32

33
34 It was nothing, or it was a small thing, and there is no doubt a danger of self-satisfaction in a
35
36 somewhat too-easy passage from elite institution to periphery, but it’s a chance worth taking. Perhaps
37
38 this is where shared pasts is a key, and perhaps controversial idea: might the British working classes
39
40 have a history more contingent with southern Others than with the elites whose part in imperialism was
41
42 always more than ‘going along with’? In response, we should certainly recall that ‘both white and dark-
43
44 skinned people of empire were seen as superior; or, alternatively, as inferior’ (Cannadine 2002, 124) –
45
46 that, to British Imperialists, East End dock workers, say, were little different to Indian peasants.
47
48 Ethnographic research with often underprivileged Others in the postcolonial south from here can
49
50 benefit from having first-hand knowledge of unfair historical legacies, albeit not to the same degree, but
51
52 something of the same quality, where paths are never quite as smooth and opportunities appear that bit
53
54 further in the distance. The privilege of a working class researcher working in the postcolonial south is
55
56 significant, and her experience cannot be likened to that of oppressed colonial subjects, but it can be
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 drawn on for its contingencies. To abide by Otherness, Ismail writes, is ‘not comprehension or
4 interpretation but involvement, getting one’s hands dirty, taking the risk of being interventionary’
5 (2005, xxix). Intervention in this sense is to show interest, to speak to, rather than *for* and moves on
6 from feminist notions of ‘being with’ (Probyn 2010) by recognising the inseparability of research praxis
7 and politics: ‘taking sides ... on ethical and political grounds’ (Ismail 2005, xxxix). It is here that
8 postcolonialism can enable the politics of class to intersect with the politics of ‘Otherness’ towards a
9 more ethical geographic praxis: in the business of talking about the unfairness of unequal opportunities,
10 of assigned societal positions and trajectories, to know what it is to be sometimes outside, a working
11 class background (finally) becomes an academic resource that may just make abiding by come that bit
12 more naturally. If something of this is true, then entering the South as a hyper self-reflexive, working-
13 class researcher can make for more ethical relations with Southern research participants.
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5 **References**
6
7

8 **Bell M, Butlin R A and Heffernan M** eds 1995 *Geography and Imperialism, 1820-1940* (Vol. 1)
9
10 Manchester University Press, Manchester
11

12
13 **Besio K** 2003 Steppin'in it: postcoloniality in northern Pakistan *Area* 35 1 24-33
14
15

16
17
18 **Cannadine D** 2002 *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* Oxford University Press, Oxford
19

20
21
22 **Cannadine D** 1999 *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* Columbia University Press, New York
23

24
25
26 **Chacko E** 2004 Positionality and praxis: fieldwork experiences in rural India *Singapore Journal of Tropical*
27
28 *Geography* 25 1 51-63
29

30
31
32 **Chakrabarty D** 2009 *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* Princeton
33
34 University Press, Princeton
35

36
37 **Cloke P, Cook I, Crang P, Goodwin M, Painter J and Philo C** eds 2004 *Practising Human Geography*
38
39 Sage, London
40

41
42
43 **Dirlik A** 1994 The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism *Critical*
44
45 *Inquiry* 20 328-328
46
47

48
49 **Driver F** 2001 *Geography militant: cultures of exploration and empire* Blackwell, Oxford
50
51

52
53
54 **England K** 1994 Getting personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research *The Professional*
55
56 *Geographer* 46 1 80-89
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5 **Godlewska A and Smith N** 1994 *Geography and Empire* Blackwell, Oxford
6
7

8
9 **Haraway D** 1988 Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial
10 perspective *Feminist Studies* 14 3 575-599
11
12

13
14
15 **hooks b** 1989 *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black* South End Press, New York
16
17

18
19
20 **Hudson B** 1977 The new geography and the new imperialism: 1870–1918 *Antipode* 9 2 12-19
21
22

23
24 **Ismail Q** 2005 *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place, and Postcoloniality* University of Minnesota Press,
25 Minneapolis
26
27

28
29
30 **Jazeel T** 2007 Awkward Geographies: spatializing academic responsibility, encountering Sri Lanka
31 *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 28 3 287-299
32
33

34
35
36
37 **Katz C** 1992 All the world is staged: intellectuals and the projects of ethnography *Environment and*
38 *Planning*
39 *D: Society and Space* 10 5 495-510
40
41
42
43
44

45
46 **Livingstone D** 1993 *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* Blackwell,
47 Oxford
48
49

50
51
52 **Loomba A** 2007 *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* Routledge, London
53
54

55
56
57 **Madge C** 1993 Boundary disputes: comments on Sidaway (1992) *Area* 25 3 294-299
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5 **McClintock A** 2013 *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* Routledge, London
6
7

8
9 **McDowell L** 1992 Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography
10
11 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17 4 399-416
12
13

14
15 **McEwan C** 2003 Material geographies and postcolonialism *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24 3
16
17 340-355
18
19

20
21
22 **Nagar R and Ali F** 2003 Collaboration across borders: moving beyond positionality *Singapore Journal of*
23
24 *Tropical Geography* 24 3 356-372
25
26

27
28
29 **Noxolo P** 2009 "My Paper, My Paper": Reflections on the embodied production of postcolonial
30
31 geographical responsibility in academic writing *Geoforum* 40 1 55-65
32
33

34
35 **Parry B** 1987 Problems in current theories of colonial discourse *Oxford Literary Review* 9 1 27-58
36
37

38
39
40 **Potter R** 1993 Little England and little geography: reflections on Third World teaching and
41
42 research *Area* 25 3 291-294
43
44

45
46 **Pratt M L** 1992 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* Routledge, London
47
48

49
50
51 **Probyn E** 2010 Introduction: researching intimate spaces *Emotion, Space and Society* 3 1 1-3
52
53

54
55 **Raghuram P and Madge C** 2006 Towards a method for postcolonial development geography?
56
57 Possibilities and challenges *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 27 3 270-288
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5 **Reay D** 1997 The double-bind of the “working class” feminist academic: The success of failure or the
6 failure of success in **Mahony P** and **Zmroczek C** eds *Class Matters: ‘Working Class’ Women’s Perspectives*
7 *on Social Class* Taylor & Francis, London 19-30
8
9

10
11
12
13 **Robinson J** 1994 White women researching/representing ‘Others’: from antiapartheid to
14 postcolonialism? in **Blunt A** and **Rose G** eds *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*
15 Guilford Press, New York 197-226
16
17
18

19
20
21
22 **Robinson J** 2003 Political geography in a postcolonial context *Political Geography* 22 6 647-651
23
24

25
26
27 **Rose G** 1997 Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics *Progress in Human*
28 *Geography* 21 2 305-320
29
30

31
32
33 **Roth R** 2001 A self-reflective exploration into development research in *Placing Autobiography in*
34 *Geography* Syracuse University Press, Syracuse
35
36
37

38
39
40 **Sidaway J** 1992 In other worlds: on the politics of research by ‘First World’ geographers in the ‘Third
41 World’ *Area* 24 4 403-408
42
43
44

45
46 **Sidaway J** 2000 Postcolonial geographies: an exploratory essay *Progress in Human Geography* 24 4 591-
47 612
48
49

50
51
52
53 **Skelton T** 2001 Cross-cultural research: issues of power, positionality and ‘race’ in **Limb M** and
54 **Dwyer C** eds *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates* Arnold, London 87-100
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 **Spivak G** 1988 Can the Subaltern speak? in Nelson C and Grossberg L eds *Marxism and The*
4
5 *Interpretation of Culture* University of Illinois Press, Chicago 271-316
6
7

8
9 **Spivak G** 1993 *Outside in the Teaching Machine* Routledge, London
10
11

12
13 **Spivak G** 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Harvard
14
15 University Press, Cambridge, Ma
16
17

18
19
20 **Sylvester C** 1999 Development studies and postcolonial studies: disparate tales of the 'Third
21
22 World' *Third World Quarterly* 20 4 703-721
23
24

25
26
27 **Sultana F** 2007 Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in
28
29 international research *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6 3 374-385
30
31

32
33 **Visweswaran K** 1994 *Fictions of feminist ethnography* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
34
35

36 **Zandy J** 1995 *Liberating Memory: Our Work and our Working-Class Consciousness* Rutgers University Press,
37
38 New Brunswick
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60