Postcolonial Cities, Postcolonial Critiques

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The chapter discusses recent postcolonial writing on cities outside and inside Europe, both in relation to revisionary interpretations of "the colonial city" and on the concept (and reality) of the contemporary postcolonial city itself.[1]

Introduction

The organizers of the conference on which this collection is based acknowledged two basic postcolonial premises. They refer to "the powerful geographies of colonization" linking the development of urban centers in the West with the genesis of colonial space, connecting this to "the palpable presence of people from other cultures and continents in our midst." This, "for centuries, has been the normal case in the world that is *not* Europe." Revising this paper six months after the conference, following "terrorist" bombings in London, the earthquake in South Asia, riots in French cities, and the continuing war in Iraq, it is apparent that the "postcolonial presence" assumes daily a new significance, the subtext of this paper.

In accepting these two premises, however, my aim in this essay is to discuss recent postcolonial writing on cities both outside and inside Europe. I first briefly address recent writing on the topic of colonial cities by postcolonial authors indigenous to those cities. I then address recent scholarship on the postcolonial city, understood, as it is, in different ways, and the cross-over between notions of the postimperial, postcolonial, and global city. While all these categories are inter-related, the obvious distinction between them is the political and historical framework within which each is conceived and repre-

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sented. The central issue concerns the question of representation, especially the power of representation to affect both the understanding of the city as well as policies adopted towards it.

Most urbanists would probably agree that the most influential representation of the city in recent years has been that of the "world" or "global city." Yet while the criteria for identifying "world cities" are clearly stated (Beaverstock et al. 1999; Keil/Brenner 2006), they are not particularly useful for addressing issues of global or local security posed by religious or other ideologically driven groups, or for policies of education or language conceived in relation to specific cultural histories and contemporary political identities. While acknowledging that "world city" populations are racially and ethnically diverse and frequently characterized by social and spatial polarization, the "world city" model ignores the religio-cultural origins of the city's populations and the geopolitico-historical conditions explaining their presence. While the concept of "postcolonial" would, in many cases, be analytically more useful, this is not its most important use. However, it does serve to illustrate that any city's "reality" is inseparable from its representation.

Until the early l980s, "post colonial" simply meant "after the colonial" and referred to peoples, states, and societies that had experienced a formal decolonization process. Subsequently, "postcolonial" has come to mean "an attitude of critical engagement with colonialism's after effects and its constructions of knowledge" (Radcliffe 1997: 1331). Postcolonialism is "a critical politico-intellectual formation […] centrally concerned with the impact of colonialism and its contestation on the cultures of both colonizing and colonized peoples in the past, and the reproduction and transformation of colonial relations, representations and practices in the present" (Gregory 2000: 612).

Postcolonial criticism also assumes a knowledge of colonial histories in the contemporary world, not only of major European imperial powers but also of the USA, Russia, and Japan. By the early twentieth century, Europe held a grand total of 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths (Said 1993: 14). At the heart of much postcolonial critique is an assumption succinctly expressed in the title of Chakrabarty's book, *Provincializing Europe* (2000). In addressing the topic of postcolonial cities, therefore, both usages—a period following colonization and a critical conceptual position—need deploying.

Cities: Colonial and postcolonial

> Not only are the 'colonial city' and the 'imperial city' umbilically connected in terms of economic linkages as well as cultural hybridization, but their 'post-equivalents' cannot be disentangled one from the other and need to be analyzed within a single 'postcolonial' framework of intertwining histories and relations (Yeoh 2001: 457).

As Yeoh suggests, to write about the postcolonial city presupposes some minimum knowledge of its predecessor, the colonial city, including its historiography.[2] Though embracing, for geographers, "a variety of urban types and forms," it may nonetheless be generalized as "a distinct settlement form resulting from the domination of an indigenous civilization by colonial settlers" (Pacione 2001: 450–1), the focus here being on the colonial city established by Europeans mainly in the 19th and early 20th century in Asia and Africa.

Important here, and bringing the second meaning of "postcolonial" into play, we need to recognize that both the concept of, and most of the literature on, the colonial city comes from Euro-American scholars (principally English and American, some French and Spanish), and is written in these languages. Not only is the colonial city apparently a colonial product, so also is its representation.

Ethnic origin, geographical location, or political position alone should not, of course, be treated as an essentialism giving indigenous inhabitants of the one-time colonial city a privileged insight into its characteristics.[3] It is rather that these mainly "non-indigenous" studies—which might be described as the first critical "postcolonial" accounts of colonial cities, produced in the three or four decades following independence—locate the topic, understandably perhaps, within a European or Euro-American frame. As Indonesian scholar Abidin Kusno has written about these various studies of colonial urbanism (e.g. King 1976; Rabinow 1989; Metcalf 1989; Wright 1991 etc.), "to what extent have studies centered on European imperialism themselves 'colonized' ways of thinking about colonial and postcolonial space?" (2000: 6).

Similar views can be found in *Urbanism: Imported or Exported: Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans* (2003), where the editors refer to "a sense of unease" among young researchers regarding the "content, methods and tone" of much recent literature on the formation of modern cities, particularly in "developing countries," a feeling that "it often did not adequately convey the complexity of power relations and flows. In particular, the local elements are under-represented […] and where they are present they are often dealt with as recipients of actions rather than as actors […] a significant part of the litera-

2 Cf. King (1985) and (1989).

3 While the location of an author is less important than the position from which she or he speaks—epistemologically, politically, culturally—it is statistically more likely that authors from (or with connections to) the one-time colonized society are not only fluent in the colonial as well as the national language, but possibly also in local and regional languages of the once colonized state. They may also have better knowledge of local sources. Given the contemporary movement of scholars between locations worldwide, *where* they work or write up their research is of less importance. Valid contributions can be made by anyone (cf. King 2003: 170).

ture on colonial urbanism has been written based on strictly metropolitan sources, rather than […] local archival material" (Nasr/Volait 2003: vii–xx).

In what follows, therefore, I refer to recent revisionist writing on the colonial city as exemplary of what might be called an indigenous "critical post-colonial" perspective. Themes include the agency of the indigenous population in producing the colonial city, the indigenous appropriation of the city, and the larger narrative within which the city is framed.

When was the colonial city?

The stereotypical representation of the colonial city is best expressed by Frantz Fanon:

> The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall apartheid in South Africa. Yet if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies. This approach to the colonial world, its order and its geographical layout will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be organized (1968: 37–38).

Fanon's words were written over forty five years ago (1961). Whether in relation to the original, supposedly "decolonized" post-colonial city, or, alternatively, in the supposedly post-imperial city—are they still applicable? We do not know, because, in one sense, the goal posts have been moved.

Irrespective of changing conditions, at what point in historical time does the "colonial city" morph into a different category? Is its subsequent identity (and representation) destined to be either "postcolonial" or to be transformed (if so, by whom?) into a "world" or "global city," as suggested, for example, in regard to one-time colonial cities in Asia by Dick and Rimmer (1998) or Skeldon (1997)? As Cooper and Stoler point out, peoples' histories are made up "of more than the fact that they were colonized" (1997: 18). For Goh (2005), Singapore remains a paradigmatic example of a city that occupies both identities and exploits them to its advantage. What is not considered here, however, fifty years after independence, are the persistent social and spatial maldistributions of resources (schools, jobs, transport, income) among the population in some postcolonial cities (King 2004). But are such inequities "postcolonial" through neglect, are they the result of oppressive, neocolonial regimes following independence, or has the nature and conditions of the debate changed, as in postcolonial, postapartheid South Africa (Murray/Shepherd 2006)?

The colonial city revisited: "Indigenous" postcolonial critiques

Different perspectives, interpretations, and representations of the colonial city result from the use of different sources, frameworks, and methods. Yeoh's study *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* is based on a detailed study of local archives. It is perhaps the first account challenging the notion of the colonial city as being simply a product of "dominant" (Western) "forces" and representing the city as the product of indigenous agency (1996: 9–14). Two other examples are worth citing because they address what is perhaps the most central feature said to characterize the colonial city, namely, the racial, social, and spatial divide between the indigenous city and European colonial settlement.

Hosagrahar's study of "old Delhi" between the 1850s and l950s examines transformations in the indigenous city during a century of colonial presence, this latter first represented by a "typical" colonial urban settlement of "civil station" and military cantonment and, from 1911, the new colonial capital of New Delhi. Eschewing binary classifications between colonial/indigenous, new/old, European/native, "modern"/"traditional," she investigates the spatial development of Delhi over a century using an array of different source materials, including contemporary interviews. "Beneath the apparent opposition," she writes, was a charged interconnection between the two spaces. The residents of Delhi responded to the new model of urban life by "disdaining and rejecting, mocking and mimicking, participating and conniving, and learning and accepting" from the colonial Western lifestyle. The new colonial settlement offered opportunities for some Indian residents to construct new identities, a way of identifying with the new by rejecting the old, and, on occasion, moving between the two spaces (2005). Chattopadhyay's *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny* (2005) brings yet another perspective to the "colonial city" and its supposedly defining attributes. She reads the city primarily as the cradle of Bengal nationalism, subverting its colonial representation as a space marked simplistically by the Manichaean division between the "European city" and the "black town." While such labels certainly exist in European maps and the Anglophone colonial literature, in Bengali accounts of the city she examines, Chattopadhyay finds no evidence of these or comparable terms.

What these studies show is the contested and ambiguous space of "the colonial city" represented in these recent accounts, postcolonial in both senses of the term (see also Glover, forthcoming). It was, and is, a space too complex and unpredictable for easy classification. While these latest studies might be based on previously unexamined indigenous language sources, or the interrogation of official colonial accounts, they also frame the "colonial city" within

a different narrative. Most commonly it is the discursive space of "modernity," or the role of the city's inhabitants in the emergence of a collective (and resistant) national, regional, or perhaps gendered identity. In Kusno's study of Jakarta, he states "(m)odern architecture and urbanism in the colonial and postcolonial world have generally been understood in relation to European domination." Instead, he "explores the theme from another perspective: as a colonial gift inherited by the postcolonial (society and) state" (Kusno 2000: cover). He takes the Western obsession with (oversimplified) "east-west" antagonisms and redirects his focus to political relations within the region. Regarding Indonesia, he foregrounds the persistence of colonial oppression in the supposedly "postcolonial" regimes themselves.

Postcolonial cities: Postcolonial criticism

Compared to colonial cities, postcolonial cities have received far less academic attention.[4] There are some obvious explanations.

As stated, postcolonialism is concerned with colonialism's after effects, including its constructions of knowledge. Depending on the author, its politico-intellectual formation can be informed by poststructuralist, feminist, psychoanalytic and other perspectives. It is also an intellectual position that has been criticized from different viewpoints. The most trenchant criticism suggests that it "re-orient(s) the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/postcolonial … (such that) Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance" (McClintock 1992; King 2004).

Resistance to representing "fully independent" states and cities as largely uninfluenced by their colonial past is one explanation why "postcolonial" does not figure as an analytical category. For other (and not just "Western") urbanists, the "world space" in which they operate, prior to the imagined "global" of the late 1980s, is the (obsolescent?) one of the "three worlds," conceived in 1953 (Wolff-Phillips 1987). Though the "third world city" concept was probably in circulation before Tinker's *Race and the Third World City* (l97l), representation of many postcolonial cities has been subsumed within this ideological framework. Here, postcolonial cities are viewed through the lens

4 Googling "postcolonial city/cities, postkoloniale stadt/staedte, ville/villes postcoloniale," brings up numerous references, mostly book titles. Themes addressed include representation in the arts, sites of tension and citizenship, their role in "Westernization" and in flows of capital, migration, and terrorism, their shaping by imperial legacies and tradition, questions of subjectivity, multiculturalism, hybridity, nationalism, modernity, globalization, etc. Specifically mentioned cities include Bombay/Mumbai, Cairo, Calcutta, Chandigarh, Dakar, Delhi, Jaipur, Jakarta, Lagos, London, Melbourne, Rabat, San Francisco, Sao Paulo, Tunis. Apart from one article on Bombay/Mumbai, I found no reference to religion.

of "third world problems": air pollution, megacity size, traffic management, "slums," and water scarcity. Questions about religious or cultural identity and subject formation do not figure here. What Venn (2006) refers to as "the neglected interface between urban studies and development studies" (cf. also Robinson 2005), means that cities in different continents are not only represented through different theoretical and methodological frameworks, but also that their interconnections are ignored. While a postcolonial perspective does make this connection, it is clear that "world," "global," "colonial/postcolonial," and "first/third world" cities are all labels invented in the West.

Postcolonial cities

How is the postcolonial city recognized? This depends on how the term is understood. Cities are not necessarily postcolonial in the same way.

Yeoh suggests that "for some, postcolonialism is something fairly tangible" (2001: 456). In one interpretation of this "tangibility," Bishop et al., referring to Singapore, argue, "*post* (after) doesn't necessarily indicate either that the colonizers have gone away […] or that the conditions of postcolonialism have necessarily changed much from those of colonialism, despite appearances" (2003: 14). Here, postcolonialism is seen as the failure of decolonization.

Elsewhere I have referred to "actually existing postcolonialism" (King 2003), particularly as manifested in the spatial environments of one-time colonial urban landscapes used to help institutionalize (and also symbolize) social relations of exclusion, segregation, and privilege based on race, class, and power, and which, fifty years after independence, continue to do so, albeit in modified form.

Yeoh (2001) provides an extensive review of literature on the geography of postcolonial cities, focusing on themes of identity, heritage, and encounters. Depending on our viewpoint, these may (or may not) be seen as belonging to a more positive interpretation of "postcolonialism," one adopting a non-Western "occidentalist" perspective, and viewing the one-time colonial city as "a gift" (Kusno 2000).

The postcolonial city is "an important site where claims of identity different from the colonial past are expressed and indexed, and, in some cases, keenly contested" (Yeoh 2001: 458). This is seen especially in regard to matters of space, architecture, and urban design, the public signs of which are often fiercely contested political and social positions. Many studies detail the various ways in which postcolonial states and cities have both engaged with and simultaneously distanced themselves from their colonial past, aiming to construct new citizen identities with a consciousness of national culture. States

have built new capitals or capitol complexes (Perera 1998; Vale 1992); toponymic reinscription aims to reclaim the cultural space of city streets (King 1976; King 2004; Yeoh 1996); modernist design attempts to create new images for the nation (Kusno 2000; Holston 1989). Constructing "the world's tallest building" has become an essentially competitive strategy for postcolonial nations to make claims on others' definitions of modernity, or establish them as "global players" (King 2004). A recent contender, a 710 meter skyscraper planned for Noida, near Delhi, according to the architect, aims "to show the world what India can do" (Guardian, 29 March 2005). Such projects are thought to provide a nation's leaders, and perhaps its people, with a new, more positive identity.

An increasing number of authorities have argued for the preservation of the architecture, urban design, and planning of one-time colonial cities, including UNESCO's International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). Unprecedented rural migration and what are seen as overdependence on state-led development projects imposing Western urban models are behind attempts to prevent "the disappearance of the Asian city," including its colonial history (Logan 2002; Lari/Lari 2001). In this perspective, fifty years after independence, the symbolic significance of colonial buildings has lost its old political meaning. New generations see colonial urban design as generating tourist revenue rather than prompting memories of colonial oppression.

Yet few such reports represent buildings and spaces not just as aesthetic but also as cultural, social, and political phenomena. The elite Dutch colonial suburb of Menteng, outside Jakarta, with its Art Deco houses and spacious tree-lined boulevards, continues, as in colonial days, to house the rich and powerful elite (including ex-President Suharto). In Korea's capital, Seoul, the neo-baroque Japanese Government-General headquarters building, constructed in 1926 from the designs of a German architect, and, after 1945, used as the City Hall and subsequently the National Museum of Contemporary Art, was ceremoniously demolished in 1995—significantly, on the 50th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan. It restored the appearance of Korea's Gyeongbok Palace, "the most important symbol of (our) national history," and the seat of the 500-year-old Korean Choseun Dynasty (Kal 2003).

Cities: Postcolonial or postimperial?

So far I have assumed that "postcolonial" refers only to those cities in formerly colonized societies and "postimperial" to those one-time imperial capitals such as Paris, Lisbon, or London. However, the distinction between postcolonial and postimperial can be ambivalent. Labeling London as (technically) postimperial foregrounds its earlier imperial role. Yet for postcolonial

migrants from South Asia, London may also (like them) be postcolonial. And as the one-time metropole has been powerfully influenced by postcolonial forces, "postcolonial" is now used to describe it, particularly in regard to its ethnic and racial composition. Whether we live in a postcolonial world, or more accurately, in *The Colonial Present* (Gregory 2003), colonial and postcolonial histories of migration and memory not only distinguish the population, politics, and public culture of one postcolonial city from another, but also from other "world" or "global cities" such as Frankfurt or Zurich.[5]

For example, over half of the almost 30 percent foreign-born population of New York are from the Caribbean and Central America, with significant proportions from Europe, South America, and South and Southeast Asia (Salvo/Lord 1997). Any explanation for the presence of, for example, English-speaking migrants from the Caribbean, or South and Southeast Asia[6] must recognize colonial and postcolonial histories. This is equally so with the Spanish-speaking migrants from the Caribbean and Central and South America. In London, of the roughly 25 per cent of 'foreign born' population, the large majority are principally from postcolonial countries, particularly South/Southeast Asia, Ireland, East, West and South Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Australia, as well as from continental Europe (Merriman 1993; Benedictus 2005). In Paris, the more than 15 percent of foreign-born residents are primarily from postcolonial North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), Armenia, or Mauritius (Ambroise-Rendu 1993).

These distinctively postcolonial migrations clearly have major influences on the economy, society, culture, politics, spatial environments, and, in some cases, security, of the city. They bring to the so-called "global city" a variety of vibrant but also very specific post-colonial cosmopolitanisms. Powerful postcolonial minorities bring their influence to bear on government policies, both domestic (immigration, employment, educational, press freedom or welfare) or foreign (international disputes, disaster relief, and the conduct of war).[7] Multiple temporalities coexist in urban space, as do multiple spatiali-

5 How postcolonialism impacts these and other European cities is still to be explored.

6 South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) accounts for some fifty percent of cab-drivers in New York City, and (Anglophone) Indians are prominently represented in the information technology and medical professions in the USA.

7 Media coverage of the four July 7 suicide bombers in London focused almost exclusively on their British citizenship and "Islamist fundamentalist" identity. Yet the specific motivation of the bombings, widely believed by a majority of the public (though not, Prime Minister Tony Blair) to be Blair's complicity in the US-lead attack on Iraq, was also seen as a response to the decades-long history of British and US colonial oppression in the Middle East, including Britain's colonial role in early twentieth century Iraq (cf. Gregory 2003). The shift in media sentiment towards Pakistani-born residents in the UK in the three months between the July bombings and early October, when Pakistan and Indian

ties, extending the real and the virtual space of the city and its inhabitants to other urban and rural locations around the world (Venn 2006).

The growing outsourcing of employment from North America and the UK to the large Anglophone labor market in Indian cities (especially call centers), generating employment and a boom in office building, cannot be understood without a postcolonial frame (King 2004). In Paris, as the riots of November 2005 have exposed, most postcolonial minorities are in the *banlieues*, which, already "in the 1990s, have become a byword for socially disadvantaged peripheral areas of French cities" (Hargreaves/McKinney 1997: 12). Structurally equivalent to British and American inner city areas, and seen as ghettoes, the *banlieues* provide a space to develop "a separatist cultural agenda marked by graffiti, music, dancing, and dress codes" with which the *banlieusards* (suburb-dwellers) reterritorialize the "anonymous housing projects" (ibid). In Britain, the inner suburban landscapes of postcolonial London are regenerated and transformed by South Asians, who, "though united by belief, are nonetheless divided along national, ethnic and sectarian lines" (Nasser 2003: 9). In Britain's "second city" of Birmingham, the largest group of 80,000 South Asian Muslims is from Pakistan, comprising 7 percent of the city's population (ibid. 2003:9). Leicester, with 28 percent of its 280,000 population from South Asia, is said to be "the largest Indian city in Europe." Though Vietnamese scholar Panivong Norindr writes, "policies of colonial urbanism help to explain race and class divisions in Western metrocenters of today" (1996: 114), we need to recognize that individual urban authorities have their own distinctive policies regarding housing, planning, and education. In multicultural societies, members of particular communities (like the British overseas) frequently stay together, with their own shops, social centers, and places of worship.

Long after the formal end of empire, postcolonial memories continue to affect the use of space. Jacobs (1996) shows how the continuity of discourses over historic sites in the City of London, remembered as "the economic center of the Empire," have influenced decisions about urban design. Yet consciousness of the postcolonial multicultural is also powerfully celebratory. It signifies a changing, vibrant future, a new kind of intellectual milieu created by unique ethnicities, hybridities, and diasporas. New and distinctive cultures develop in geographically and culturally specific "postcolonial cities." Whether in the one-time metropole or the one-time colony, postcolonialism creates

Kashmir were struck by the most disastrous earthquake in their history, with tens of thousands of victims, was palpable. With over 700,000 residents of Pakistani birth/ descent in Britain, mostly from the Kashmir region, and many British nationals, the mood of the tabloid media shifted from suspended suspicion to one of sympathy and shared loss, followed by a major fund-raising campaign for survivors.

conditions for both the split, as well as the suture between "traditional" and "modern" identities.

Attributes that distinguish postcolonial populations—a language in common with the host society, a shared, if contested, history, some familiarity with the culture, norms, and social practices of the metropolitan society, the presence of long-established communities, are features among others which distinguish postcolonial communities and migrants from those of non-postcolonial origin. In this way, "multicultural" Berlin differs from multicultural London or Vancouver.

I have not addressed here the more metaphorical uses of the terms, yet clearly colonial/postcolonial are also relevant in describing the processes of urbanism in contemporary Europe. Today, newly colonized populations in cities—migrant labor, legal as well as legal, arrives from all over the world, including Eastern Europe, filling the lowest paid slots in an ever increasingly globalized economy. Labor is colonized by capital.

Sidaway (2000) and Domosh (2004) show how the postcolonial paradigm has now expanded to cover many historical and geographical instances. Though not sufficient in themselves, postcolonial histories, sociologies, and geographies are nonetheless key to understanding a plethora of issues, and not only in the multicultural, postcolonial/postimperial global cities of Melbourne or Toronto. "Postcolonial vision" results from postcolonial migration and globalization (Hopkins 2002). It is a comparative, cross-cultural, and cross-temporal perspective. Despite its ambiguity, the paradigm provides one among many ways of reading the contemporary city.

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