

**‘Geography is pregnant’ and ‘Geography’s milk is flowing’: metaphors for a postcolonial discipline?**

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to mobilise the metaphors of pregnancy and lactation to address the imperatives arising from British academic geography’s postcolonial position. We embed our argument in our readings of extracts from two consciously postcolonial fictional texts. In the first part of the paper we consider geography as a discipline that is pregnant, but ‘in trouble’ to illustrate the discipline’s paradoxical struggle to be a global discipline whilst at the same time marginalising the voices and perspectives that make it global. In the second part of the paper we consider geography as a discipline whose ‘milk is flowing’ to suggest ways that the discipline can acknowledge its global interconnectedness to produce a mutually responsible academic agency.

**Key words: geography, metaphor, postcolonial, pregnancy, lactation.**

## **‘Geography is pregnant’ and ‘Geography’s milk is flowing’: metaphors for a postcolonial discipline?**

### **Introduction: fertile beginnings**

Recently there has been increasing interest in the potentials that a postcolonial perspective offers geography and its sub-disciplines (King, 2003; Nash, 2002; Radcliffe, 2005; Sharp and Briggs, 2006; Sylvester, 2006). There have also been some tentative attempts to develop a postcolonial critique of the discipline as a whole (Robinson, 2003; Sidaway, 2000) through ‘provincialising’ Europe (Abrahamsen, 2003; Chakrabarty, 2000)<sup>1</sup>. Postcolonial theory offers much to geography - an understanding of the complex historical layering that shapes global power relations, possible ways to overcome the divides between geographies undertaken in different parts of the world (a relational way of thinking regional geography), and a method that enables expression of those many voices on the margins of European academic spaces. Much of this writing provides urgent and continued reminders of the historical connections between different postcolonial spaces and their lasting legacies, arguing that the inhabitants of imperial centres are implicated in and therefore should take responsibility for the suffering that arises from the postcolonial condition. A number of authors have also suggested strategies that metropolitan academics could take, emphasising the need for geographers to ‘reach out’ and ‘build connections’ (McFarlane, 2006; Mercer et al, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> We recognise that many geographers who do not place their work within a ‘postcolonial’ genre do explore issues of relationship and responsibility for the discipline (Bonnett, 2003; Massey, 2004). For some writers ‘postcolonialism’ denies the continuing importance of colonisation and (neo)colonialism. However, as Hall (1996a) notes,

In this paper we contribute to this literature by unsettling the 'cosy' relationship that is developing between postcolonialism and geography. We do this in order to ensure that postcolonialism does not become yet another colonising discourse and practice directed from northern centres of global power, one which plays to the political rhetoric of inclusion within the academy while adding further layers of delusion and amnesia of the material and emotional legacies of exclusion within and beyond it (Dirlik, 2004; Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Young, 2000). We want to resist this mainstreaming impulse and reclaim the contested, liberatory and radical potential that postcolonialism has to offer. And we have chosen to do this through the mobilisation of metaphors.

Postcolonial approaches, often drawing on poststructural theory, attempt both to deconstruct the ways in which language reproduces binary power relations and to harness language as a route into imagining another world. In this paper we have therefore chosen to utilize a linguistic tool - metaphors - towards rethinking postcolonial geography. There is a large geographical literature that critiques the ways in which geography's 'founding' metaphors marginalise and exclude the experiences of many people around the globe (Cresswell, 1997; Rose, 1993), but the project of thinking through alternative metaphors is still largely to be undertaken (Beck et al, 2003; Madge et al, 2004). We therefore want to explore the possibilities offered by using some alternative metaphors in addressing the imperatives arising from geography's postcolonial status. The metaphors we have chosen are consciously feminist, are 'disconcertingly incongruous' (Miller, 2006, 63); they 'jar' against accepted ways of thinking, speaking and writing geography. We want to deploy the astonishment and the friction to create 'discrepant experiences' (Said, 1993, 35) that can

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postcolonialism does not begin with the end of colonialism, but instead interrogates the

spark the imagination, open up possibilities for dialogue and create fertile imaginings of geography's postcolonial potential.

In particular, we want to explore the potential offered by pregnancy and lactation as metaphors for a reconstructed geography - to see how this unexpected combination might render geography unrecognisable, how the boundaries of geography might be altered and transgressed if they were placed centre stage. This attempt to use a corporeal vocabulary, informed by feminist politics to embody geography is particularly influenced by postcolonial feminist interventions which read the seemingly natural processes of pregnancy and lactation not only for how they are culturally constituted but also how they are shaped by coagulations of power (Jolly, 1998, 2). We use these bodily experiences as metaphors for (re)producing geographies within the postcolonial context, because the richness of these metaphors offer us productive ways of thinking of 'connections', 'dynamic relationalities' and responsibilities (Environment and Planning D, 2004, 22, 1).

Our two metaphors, pregnancy and lactation are drawn respectively from two postcolonial fictional texts- Zee Edgell's (1982) *Beka Lamb* and Toni Morrison's (1987) *Beloved* to explore how the connections that mark postcolonial geographies might be best imagined as constitutive of contemporary British academic geography. We suggest that British geography is already a postcolonial discipline because of its historical linkages; these linkages and relationships are already in place. We use the metaphors to press British geographers to acknowledge the claims of the different constituents that go to make up the discipline and above all, to respond to these claims. We therefore hold that both metaphors offer great potential to 'mobilize the body in our speech in such a way that we are not

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validity of 'independence' as a historical cut-off point.

immediately led to the usual discussions about dualism and holism' (Latour, 2004, 206) but instead highlight connections. We think that this mobilisation will also help us to address the imperatives arising from geography's postcolonial relationships- relationships in which British academic geography is simultaneously both a part of, and apart from, other people and places.

The rest of the paper is structured into five parts. In the first part we place our arguments about postcolonialism in the context of literatures on metaphor, pregnancy and lactation. We then explain our methodology and the choice of metaphors. The third and fourth parts examine each of these texts and metaphors in turn. In the third section we consider British academic geography as a discipline that is pregnant but 'in trouble'. This metaphor offers us a route into reflecting critically about the relationality of British academic geography in a postcolonial world and its constitution in relation to popular global geographies. But the discipline is also 'in trouble' through its paradoxical struggle to be a global discipline, while at the same time consistently denying the voices and perspectives that make it global. We use an extract from Zee Edgell's (1982) novel, *Beka Lamb*, to explore these issues and to expose the ultimately destructive fragmentation that denial of relationality can bring. In the fourth section we consider British geography as a discipline whose 'milk is flowing' to suggest ways that the discipline can acknowledge its global interconnectedness to produce a responsible academic agency. Through an extract from Toni Morrison's (1987) *Beloved*, we highlight the ways in which 'speaking' geography in terms of intense body experiences such as pregnancy and lactation (Warren and Brewis, 2004), experiences which are commonly denied expression in the dominant symbolic order (Davidson, 2001, 285), creates spaces to reveal the postcoloniality of geography and to

explore the responsibilities that arises from that position. In the final section we theorise the wider generative potential of such corporeal metaphors in working with difference in a globalised world. But first we explore the potentials offered by metaphors for postcolonial analysis.

### **On metaphor, pregnancy, and lactation**

#### *The generative potential of metaphor*

The multiple disciplinary origins of postcolonial theorising - drawing on literary theory (Ashcroft et al., 1989), history, especially as subaltern studies (see Spivak, 1988), and, in the UK, cultural studies (see Morley and Chen, 1996) - has meant that postcolonial theorists have a range of historically and spatially sensitive linguistic and discursive tools for understanding material relations (although it may be a peculiarly western inference that language is opposed to materiality cf Jameson, 1986; Parry, 2004). Besides, much postcolonial theorising also occurs outside formal disciplinary structures, transcending and intercalating between these structures offering an imaginative, creative element, which is rooted in its position, but also then creating space and strategies to enable crucial global connections to be made apparent. For this 'space clearing' work, metaphor has been a central literary device.

Metaphors<sup>2</sup> are powerful rhetorical devices that provide a way of understanding one concept through the use of another concept that resonates with the first, has significant

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<sup>2</sup> Despite feminist critiques of metaphor as a masculinist concept and feminist preference for use of metonymy (see Bondi, 1997), we use metaphors because they do not refer directly 'to a changing of the designations of things by names or nouns; it mentions only the relationship between ideas' (Ricoeur, 2003, 65). Our use of pregnancy and lactation aims to highlight them in their verb form, to see the dormant potentiality of existence, to

parallels with it, but does not mimic it (Barnes and Gregory, 1997; Cloke et al, 2004, 360). The force of metaphor is what McCloskey describes, tellingly for this paper, its ‘pregnant quality’ (McCloskey, 1985, 77), the way a small phrase can store a huge number of far-reaching and often unintended revelations and implications through the mutual exchange between two seemingly entirely different discourses. This is done in order to make the world more knowable, allowing the relatively new to resonate with the conceptual framework of the relatively known. And in this transference metaphors become central to the construction of interpretations and ideas so that language or even thought can be understood as intrinsically metaphorical (McCloskey, 1985).

When deployed within an academic discipline, metaphors have a normative function. They structure schools of thought, help to determine research agendas and so alter the nature of geographic knowledge. Metaphors construct and depict disciplines while disciplines actively shape this understanding by recruiting particular metaphors to their disciplinary project. Metaphors therefore serve as ‘instruments of power’ (Chase, 2001, 184) - displacing, silencing and marginalizing the interests of groups of significant ‘others’ and through this silencing deciding whose concerns are represented within a discipline such as geography. Through the metaphors that are used (as well as those that are not) we decide both what *is* geography and who *does* geography.

Unpicking metaphors, their long and complicated histories, and the ways in which they have been used as tools in the construction and legitimation of power relations, then becomes an urgent task for those trying to understand why we do what we do in geography.

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see the latent capacity of action as actualized (Ricoeur, 2003, 48). Moreover, we also want to resist and reclaim the use of metaphor for our own particular subversive feminist intentions.

As such, many geographical sub-disciplines have attempted to deconstruct their central metaphors (see for instance, in economic geography, Cameron and Gibson-Graham, 2003; development geographies, Slater and Bell, 2002; Noxolo, 2004, 2006; and feminist geographies, Nash, 1996). Meta-concepts such as 'space', which are central to the whole geographical discipline, too have been critiqued within the deconstructive project that geographers have undertaken (Smith and Katz, 1993; Pratt, 1997).

However, if we accept Beck et al's (2003, 1) assertion that the 'social sciences need to construct new concepts to understand the world dynamics at the beginning of the 21st century', then just seeking to examine how our current metaphors discipline the discipline is not enough. We need to explore the potential of new metaphors for geography too. Developing new metaphors becomes an important way to open up the possibility of multiple genealogies in geography and of revisioning how, and who does geographical work. Their 'open-endedness or inexplicitness' (Boyd, 1979, 357) allows the expression (or at least intimation) of concepts that are not fully comprehended and for which a literal set of terms is not available. But metaphors also make that which is new or strange a little less intimidating by providing familiar concepts as bridges or steps. Thus, new disciplinary metaphors can provide 'hooks' into new ways of thinking, providing us with the ability to move beyond our current discursive limits, and enabling us to reshape our geographical projects.

Metaphors do not simply jumble up words or transfer meaning but they are defined in movement, through upsetting the classificatory tendencies and the order in existing use of language, taxonomies and logic (Ricoeur, 2003). According to Rorty (1989, 9), it is also a speculative discourse which 'says things like "try thinking of it this way" - or more specifically, "try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the



following new and possibly interesting questions." It does not pretend to have a better candidate for doing the same old things which we did when we spoke in the old way. Rather, it suggests that we might want to stop doing those things and do something else. But it does not argue for this suggestion on the basis of antecedent criteria common to the old and the new language games. For just insofar as the new language really is new, there will be no such criteria.'

So using metaphor is one way to make links between postcolonial perspectives and geography, links that are 'decisive' (Hall, 1996b, 269) in terms of being able to suggest and generate change, but not 'definitive' (Hall, 1996c, 441) in that they do not necessarily narrow down the range of 'discrepant' juxtapositions and comparisons that postcolonial perspectives could bring to geography. Drawing on metaphors from postcolonial literature can be particularly useful because as Peake and Kobayashi (2002, 57) suggest, in discussing the use of literature by black people as one facet of an anti-racist curriculum in geography teaching, this is a way of 'giving voices to the experience of racialized people' marginalised within academic geography. This is important, for the postcolonial is concerned with voice (see below). The emotional and connotational power of metaphors can then be deployed both to interrogate current academic practices but also to open up the possibilities of redressing current lacunae in our geographical imaginings by tracing relationships between formerly disconnected entities without subsuming those entities within our imaginings. In the next section we argue that pregnancy and lactation are two such metaphors that can be used to imagine geography anew.

*Pregnancy and lactation as fertile metaphors*

We chose these metaphors because pregnancy and lactation are world-wide experiences that offer the potential for transnational understanding. Being inside a pregnant body is one of the rare events that *all* humans experience - a condition of human existence globally. While lactation is a much more selective experience it too is common. Yet despite their prevalence and significance to the social, economic, political and psychological realities of many women's lives, they still remain remarkably invisible in dominant intellectual regimes.

Adopting new metaphors is always a risky strategy. Pregnancy and lactation are not blank sheets. They are sites of contestation between different forms of disciplining, caught between contradictory but interconnected discourses of production and reproduction, between science and nature, and as a result between medicalisation and naturalness, inherently unsettling these binaries. And these experiences are imbued with power relations so that certain discourses are privileged while others are subdued. For instance, pregnant and lactating bodies have been subjected to enormous amounts of surveillance, read as medicalised conduits or as precultural naturalised wombs (Book, 1999; Underhill-Sem, 2001). On the other hand, the possibility of biological interventions in pregnancy - eugenics, sex selective abortion, designer babies - are numerous. Similarly, breast-feeding too is positioned in a world of many images: of bonny 'bottle-fed' babies, scrawny breasts providing little nutrition in a world of heart-rending deprivation, sexualised breasts and (relatedly) privatised breast-feeding. Women who have struggled to wrest control over their pregnancies and their breast-feeding from the intense scrutiny and intervention of scientific professionals may therefore balk at using metaphors that can simply re-instate women within the power hierarchies of the biological professions.

Both pregnancy and lactation also evoke and provoke a variety of emotions. They act forcefully as social regulatory ideals - the supposed route to physical and emotional fulfilment essential to be a 'real' woman - an ideal which can oppress and suppress those bodies that cannot or do not engage in these 'definitively' feminine activities. On the other hand, the social mores and moral panics that surround teenage pregnancy tell us about the kinds of bodies that should *not* become pregnant while the social outrage at breastfeeding in particular public spaces informs us about the restricted spaces available to lactating women (Longhurst, 2001a). Societal desire to regulate reproducing bodies has rarely been greater. Hence, pregnancy and lactation, like any other metaphors, will carry their own social, cultural and moral force, which must be acknowledged. And these forces (and hence pregnancy and lactation) will be experienced differently in different places and times (Underhill-Sem, 2001). The ability even to talk about them, much less to picture them, may be severely restricted in some places, whereas the commoditisation and fetishisation of pregnancy and lactation in other places may place a raft of unintended connotations on images of the pregnant or breast-feeding bodies.

These objections do not necessarily outlaw the use of pregnancy and lactation as metaphors - it only necessitates contextualising strategies. And we think it is politically expedient and intellectually enabling to *play* with them for a number of reasons. If Foucault (2004) is right in arguing that biopolitics is at the centre of Western modes of power, then understanding that power as exercised in and through our discipline requires that we take on board 'body talk', the many ways in which the body is engaged in accounts about the disciplinary work that it does (Latour, 2004). To this end, we believe that pregnancy and lactation can give birth to a range of interesting perspectives on the discipline. Inserting these

metaphors into the frame and genealogy of geography forces us to rethink geography's limit(ation)s and boundaries and the processes through which the discipline reproduces itself. Through their inherent generative potential, metaphors of pregnancy and lactation help us to address the question of 'what next?' (Dixon and Jones, 2004), while avoiding the 'logic of the corpse, interested in the broken, the static, the already passed', producing something 'livelier' (Thrift, 2004a, 83). These metaphors bring forth creative possibilities and unfinished agendas of and for geography, the voices of those not yet born, whose knowledge we do not yet know of, cannot currently conceptualise, but which will bring with them new concerns and critical interventions. These metaphors not only vivify our discipline but also introduce the spark of imagination into 'thinking more' at the conceptual level (Ricoeur, 2003, 358).

They also offer an opportunity to overturn both Plato and Nietzsche's use of spiritual pregnancy (in opposition to bodily pregnancy) as a metaphor for creativity and imagination, (Mullins 2002) by insisting on the intellectual and physical creativity of the full pregnant body. This feminist rethinking of pregnancy in more positive terms (Kristeva, 1986; Rich, 1976) has probably been taken furthest within geography by Robyn Longhurst (2001a). She argues that the pregnant body can function as a metaphor that challenges geography's disciplinary boundaries, emphasising its fluidity and challenging its exclusions. For her '[t]he pregnant body acts as a useful motif for geography's disciplinary body' (Longhurst, 2001b, 65), because the flows of fluid between the mother and child parallel the flow of ideas within and across the discipline. And highlighting the instability of both disciplinary bodies and pregnant bodies is a political act - forcing us to recognise these spaces 'as spaces of self and

other, embodied subjectivity, and politics' (Longhurst, 2001b, 65). It thus makes way for a politics that takes account of and makes space for the 'other'.

The lactating body has received much less attention than the pregnant body in geography, even in feminist theory (but see Bartlett and Giles, 2004). However, inherently spatial questions around the public breast (Parks, 2004), about questions of relationality and ethics that breast-feeding evoke (Shaw, 2003), the detailing of breast-feeding practices that queer the heteronormative narrative of breast-feeding (Giles, 2004), as well as the dyadic relation between mother and child which this norm presupposes, are increasingly gaining attention. Postcolonial theorists have also explored the role of lactation in the European colonial imaginary, its enormous symbolic force, not as a metaphor, but as a potent factor in the transmission of racial and national heritage (Stoler, 1995). Breastmilk itself is coming under scrutiny as a material and representational field in its own right. As Angiers (1999, 147) suggests 'Human milk... is so rich, so pregnant with meaning and attribute, that like a bubbling solution in a mad scientist's beaker, it practically crackles to life - and beyond'. So lactating breasts may be read as 'fertile grounds of wisdom, active organs producing food for the mind as well as the body' (Bartlett, 2000, 183). Importantly, this literature is also beginning to outline new practices emerging around breastfeeding where it is becoming a part of 'a postcolonial and postmodern enterprise, which carefully negotiates competing cultures, institutions, epistemologies and discursive regimes' (Bartlett and Giles, 2004, 271). But there is significantly less work about how lactation can function as a metaphor.

To summarise: being inside a pregnant body is one of the few subjective positions that we have all occupied but we focus here not on this experientiality, but on pregnancy and lactation as metaphors for geography. In doing so we are however conscious of the

significant disconnections that readers may feel in the use of these particular metaphors- those who cannot or do not want to give birth, those whose pregnancies and lactation have been marked by loss, or those for whom these are simply irrelevances (see Madge et al, 2004 for a detailed discussion). By thinking pregnancy and lactation both through our adult bodies, and through the subjectivities of those yet unborn we hope to alter the scope of these disconnections. Besides, thinking these processes metaphorically enables us to locate these metaphors in what Ricoeur (2003, 354) calls their 'ontological vehemence' which 'cuts meaning from its initial anchor, frees it as the form of a movement and transposes it to a new field to which the meaning can give form by means of its own figurative property'. Metaphors of pregnancy and lactation may not work universally but they will be effective sometimes and in some places to unsettle existing ways of thinking and writing geography. We therefore offer only contingent readings of each metaphor that recognizes its own limits but we insist, too, that they also have the potential to push beyond the limits of existing geographical language. Thus using these metaphors is for us an inclusionary not exclusionary process, which is explored below in the light of our methodology.

### **Pregnancy and lactation as metaphors in place**

There is a large literature on the intersections between literature and geographical knowledge (Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Kneale, 2003; Sharp, 2000). Geographers from humanistic, radical and regional perspectives have all deployed literature in a realist manner - as evocative and accurate depictions of place- used to add flavour and depth to geographical descriptions of landscape (Darby, 1948; Pocock, 1988). While the literary text may indeed provide 'thick description', Brosseau (1994) rightly points out that the novel is more than just

a resource from which to excavate geographical facts or richly subjective accounts of place. Sharp (2000) develops a more nuanced vision of the relationship between geography and literature in attempting to offer an engagement with literary fiction which analyses the content and form of the text, but also leaves room for its distinctive voice, embedded in complex power relations involved in critical reading, writing context and reception. It is this distinctive voice that we are particularly interested in because postcolonial theory is crucially concerned with voice, with the ability to write/speak back (Ashcroft et al, 1989), because its object is not only the decentring of the West but crucially a re-balancing of the West with the rest of the world (Hall, 1992). It deconstructs that enlightenment subjectivity that defined the colonial and 'othered' rest of the world in relation to it, but crucially it also seeks to re-constitute subject positions from which people around the world can find voice to speak about themselves. Politically, it is a work of reclamation rather than just renunciation, of respect and reconstruction rather than just deconstruction and anti-racism or anti-sexism (see Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 120).

Reading as practice is not neutral. Its history and status as a form of 'cultural capital' means that keeping 'reading' of postcolonial literary texts open requires a consciously dialogic approach which emphasizes the relationship between the text(s) and a community of readers. In taking this approach we are reading into the texts the specific context in which the historical relations of power, from the body to the global political economy, are synchronously linked and laid bare. We are using fiction as a site of discourse that allows for the idea that meanings of a text may be multiple and contradictory, but also that reading a text can become 'a way of doing cultural history...or an exploration of imaginary or imagined geographies' (Johnson et al, 2004, 199). We read the texts discursively for the

imagined geographies they can provoke, to labour towards a postcolonial geography undulating with metaphorical visions.

Our metaphors are drawn from two extracts from postcolonial literature, Zee Edgell's (1982) novel, *Beka Lamb* and Toni Morrison's (1987) *Beloved*. The texts are both set in the Americas (Central and North America), historical and both were published in the 1980s. But they are deployed here not for their representativeness or for their token, homogeneous, essentialised subalternity, but because we think they help us to explore geography's postcolonial potential. In selecting these texts we are less concerned with their form and content than in their distinctive voice, a voice that has been shaped by particular social, economic and racialised power relations and circumstances, a voice which is commonly marginalised in geographical writing. These extracts are used as exemplars of the embodied experiences of the (post)colonial public who have been so long excluded, but so long a silent presence in geographical enquiry. According to Sharp and Briggs (2006, 8), such accounts are 'meaningful because of their reliance on the details of the reality which they seek to articulate for their audiences...the novelist's imagination does offer the possibility of a more engaged analysis for development studies'. Novels can infuse a keener sense of local texture from close range and emphasise the complexity of humanity but the politics they record can be messy, often nasty and the experiences they articulate can convey the relentless experiences of lives in conflict and pain (Sylvester, 2006, 66, 70, 75). They are also texts that deal with women, and pregnancy, and power and through their profoundly emotional and embodied expressions, they demand attention and make an (albeit limited) entry point for the postcolonial female subject. This entry is, of course, through our translation, thus asserting a degree of authorial authority (cf Bondi, 1997) which has the potential to undermine the



postcolonial project. However, we contend that the limitations of collusion aside, we can still deploy the texts for neither text suggests ‘naturalness’ or universality of pregnancy; rather, they place the pregnant body within a social and economic order. .

More specifically though, this article argues that postcolonial relationships are always already present and constitutive of British academic geography. Therefore we have selected texts that have been marketed and read internationally, but hold different positions in relation to British academic work. *Beka Lamb* is an influential novel with an established place both in Central American literature and the Caribbean literary canon (Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, 1990, 23; Donnell and Lawson Welch, 1996, 365) - a number of academic studies have been published on it internationally (see McKoy, 1999). However, despite its rich and multi-layered portrait of the social context of pre-independence Belize for young women in particular, use of the novel within some academic disciplines is only just beginning (see for example Macpherson, 2003). In contrast, *Beloved*, set in North America around the time of the abolition of slavery, has become a global academic industry, with thousands of commentaries in a range of disciplines including British academic geography, analysing its use of narrative, its ghostly motifs and its range of themes, including maternity and memory (see Frampton, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Moreover, Morrison herself is an important postcolonial theorist, making influential academic contributions about North America’s postcoloniality and the ways in which its mainstream literary canon should be read through race (Morrison, 1993; Gilroy, 1993a). Leaving aside the question of international publishing practices that underpin sales disparities between writers from different parts of the world (see Canagarajah, 2002 and Heiss, 2003), we deploy these two texts as examples of the ways in which postcolonial literary texts are *already in different degrees of dialogue with disciplines*.

Moreover, each text places pregnancy and lactation within social and economic contexts that have something to say to British academic geography as a postcolonial discipline: *Beka Lamb* places pregnancy in the context of the colonial educational institutions through which geographical theories about the tropics, about development and about global power relations were both developed and disseminated; whilst *Beloved* places lactation in the context of slavery, understood in a wide range of postcolonial literature as a horror at the heart of modern global institutions including academic ones (Plasa and Ring, 1994). Our reading of pregnancy and lactation as metaphors has its specific context within these texts, and in (re)reading the novels we align ourselves with a growing acknowledgement within the discipline of these critical voices and their distinctive contributions. In the next section we explore these contributions through the metaphor ‘geography is pregnant’.

### **‘Geography is pregnant and in trouble’: acknowledging postcolonial publics**

British academic geographers have recently expressed some troubling concerns around the failure to impact on public policy (Martin, 2001), the wall of incomprehension between tertiary and secondary/primary geographical education (Bonnett, 2003), the discipline’s relative lack of engagement with places outside Europe and North America (Environment and Planning D 2003, 21, 2), and the continued hegemony of theory developed in British and American geography departments (Raghuram and Madge, 2006; Robinson, 2003). These concerns have been particularly important for development geographers, whose engagement with these ‘distant places’ has led to feelings of marginalisation within the discipline, resulting in some to call for an increase in Area Studies, and in international collaboration (Bebbington, 2003; Healey et al, 2000; Potter, 2001).

Without proclaiming an interest in postcolonial theory, Bonnett (2003, 56) has gone furthest towards linking this lack of engagement with a withdrawal behind national borders, *in the context of geography's colonial past*, when he states that: 'academic geography, far from having 'dealt with' or 'moved on from' its imperial past has merely avoided it...' Whilst recognising its own colonial foundations, and becoming increasingly reflexive in speaking for or about 'the other' in a postcolonial world, British academic geography takes an elitist form that equates a pre-occupation with the global with unreflexive colonial bigotry. Ultimately, Bonnett argues that: 'geography is founded upon and inextricably tied to the 'global claim'. Moreover... this claim cannot be escaped without severing academic geographers from... their own responsibility to create and disseminate critical and non-parochial traditions of world knowledge' (Bonnett, 2003, 61).

In using the metaphor of pregnancy as it is situated within *Beka Lamb*, we want to argue that it is precisely the postcoloniality of British academic geography that both defines it through its global relationships and also involves a denial of them. In the novel, Toycie, a young student at a distinguished Christian academy in an unspecified country's last few years of formal imperialism, finds that she is pregnant. In this extract, her friend's father (Bill Lamb) argues her case for remaining in the academy whilst the girl and her mother, Miss Eila, watch in anguished and impotent silence. However Sister Virgil, the principal of the academic institution, is implacable:

'...In cases like this, we believe it is entirely up to the modesty of the girl to prevent these happenings. Our girls are warned of this likelihood, and the possible consequences. Not all girls who get into trouble here are of Toycie's calibre. Believe me I hesitated, waited,

praying we might be mistaken. One day, these things might change, but right now these are the rules, and I am *truly* sorry.’

The silence in the room had a frightening quality and Bill Lamb, taking his hat off the table, said,

‘Well, Sister, Miss Eila and I will leave you now with Toycie, as I can see, as you say, there is nothing you can do... But because of Miss Eila here, and because of Toycie, I feel I must tell you this: you have been principal of this academy for two years so maybe you don’t yet realize the financial strain people are under in this country. Families without resources have no strings to pull when their children get in trouble... You say things will change, Sister. It’ll be too late for Toycie here, and others like her, but the woman brave enough to make that change should be crowned Queen of the Bay at Battlefield Park<sup>3</sup>!

Sister Virgil’s blue eyes reflected the glint of the window panes sparkling in the room. Swinging her cross like a pendulum, she said,

‘We women must learn to control our emotions, Mr Lamb. There are times we must stand up and say ‘enough’ whatever our feelings. The rate of illegitimacy is quite high and has been high for a long time. The women will have to decide for a change in their lives, otherwise they will remain vulnerable. Under prevailing conditions, I cannot see much hope for the long-term development of this country. This, Mr Lamb, is in large part, what we try to teach in this academy.’

Toycie fell forward onto the floor...

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<sup>3</sup> If Sister Virgil is ‘brave enough to make the change’ and accept pregnant girls like Toycie into her institution, then she should be crowned ‘Queen of the Bay at Battlefield Park’ for challenging modalities of power based on class, gender and colonial relations that construct pregnancy as problematic. In Belize City this park was a site of labour

(Edgell, 1982, 119-120)

Evelyn O’Callaghan (1993) has revealed the unbearable postcolonial tension between the need to conform to the demands of colonial educators and gatekeepers who will only accept rational, pure, integrated and domesticated colonial subjects, and the day-to-day realities of double standards in terms of gender, cultural ambivalence in morality, and an emotional intensity driven by poverty and inequality, that leads to a sensation of disintegration of the subject, and ultimately to death (O’Callaghan, 1993, 36-42). The vulnerability of Toycie’s pregnant body, her poverty and her youth, set against the impenetrable surfaces of Sister Virgil’s blue eyes, her cross, and her rationality, brings out the terrible emotional and material impact of this tension. However, Toycie’s pregnant body, still wearing her uniform, bears graphic witness to the continued involvement of this young woman in the society around her – more than that, it bears witness to the impossibility of complete separation between the academic and popular, no matter how much the academy seeks to patrol that border. Toycie is excluded from the academy in a disciplinary procedure that seeks to define not only the purity of the academy but also the profligacy of the surrounding society. The academy sees itself as teaching development, even civilisation, to the chosen few, rescuing them from the ‘underdeveloped’, ‘hopeless’ society surrounding them. Ultimately, the separation is between colonial centre and periphery, between dominator and dominated. However, Mr Lamb’s comments about ‘pulling strings’ show that such a division is by no means inalienable, relying more on money and social class than on principles. In the short term Toycie pays a harsh price in this disciplinary game, losing first

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activism through the first part of the twentieth century and became an important place in challenging the colonial regime.

her sanity, then her life. But ultimately both Mr Lamb and Sister Virgil know that it is the academy that will have to change.

We chose this piece because it works at both an experiential and a metaphorical level. On an experiential level, it dramatises a clash between the academy as institution and a pregnant body, which is discursively linked here to immodesty, rule-breaking, poverty, lack of control, irrationality, illegitimacy, vulnerability and ultimately underdevelopment. For many women around the world, both before and after formal national independence, pregnancy outside socially regulated mores foreclosed the possibility of education, of career aspirations, and of respectability - a pregnant body is, in this reading, 'in trouble'<sup>4</sup>. Defined, like the whole country in which the scene takes place, in terms of hopelessness, the pregnant body is ejected from the academy. But what is discursively constructed as 'trouble' is the pregnant body that becomes pregnant before it is 'schooled'. Toycie may reproduce in the future but only when she has changed, learned to control her emotions, been disciplined.

In British academic geography, as in Sister Virgil's academy, women have a place. The discipline has moved over to accommodate women (the Royal Geographical Society accepted female members in 1913), and less commonly people of colour (Potter, 2001; Pulido, 2002), but on what terms? They have to be schooled, to 'follow the rules', to 'change', or they will 'remain vulnerable'. The investment that academic geography has in reason, control and rationality means that the seepages, the filtrations and the flows across disciplinary

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<sup>4</sup> In this section we have 'played' with the notion of being 'in trouble'. We deliberately move between 'trouble' as socially constructed disciplinary tool, and a realist version of trouble as something to be avoided. We also cast different protagonists into the position of being 'in trouble', highlighting the contingency and the ambivalence of the metaphor of pregnancy as trouble.

boundaries too must be controlled and rationalised. The filters change as do the vectors of inclusion but the *terms* of inclusion are already set. The ‘infiltrators’ must follow the rules.

Moreover, like Sister Virgil, many academics believe that ‘one day these things might change but right now these are the rules’. Thus, despite long discussions about the need to alter British geography’s relations with geographies in other places, we seem to be unable to make the wholesale changes required towards this. And we are *truly* sorry but the terms of inclusion into British geographic debates cannot really be changed. Only people whose ability to be calibrated on ‘our’ scale can be let in. The possibilities for change, the agency lies elsewhere - in the bodies who have traditionally been marginalised, because right now, it is they who will have to change to fit the rules.

In this experiential reading, Sister Virgil may be considered to stand in for geography but, in a much more daring metaphorical reading, what if we read Toycie as British academic geography? Then, we start to think about geography as *itself* pregnant, pregnant with its postcolonial publics. As Bonnett (2003) argues, what British academic geography means should not be regarded simply as a private academic matter but as ‘a form and result of public knowledge’ (Bonnett, 2003, 58). If this is true for public knowledge developed in and through imperialism in the metropole, it is also true for public knowledge developed in and through imperialism in the colonies, whether this knowledge ‘writes back’ to the metropole in geographic or in literary forms. The everyday spatiality of this postcolonial public, recognised in social science and geographical theory as produced partly through geographical practice (Gregory, 2005, 184), is indeed complex, transnational, fundamentally postmodern (Gilroy, 1993a). It is decentred and fragmented in terms of home/belonging, it is defined by flows of ideas, knowledge, people, it is characterised by ruptures and lacunae, but most

importantly for the discipline, it is thoroughly multivocal. This multivocality is only very slowly being acknowledged as historically rooted, in that first world academic disciplines have been profoundly shaped by the knowledges and discoveries of the people they helped to colonise and enslave (Bell et al, 1995, 4; Bonnett, 2003, 57; Gregory, 1994). The reality for British geography is that it is a postcolonial discipline that is pregnant with the claims of a global postcolonial public that have a range of stories to tell, a range of historical and contemporary geographical perspectives with ‘a multiplicity of trajectories’ (see Massey, 2001, 16).

What the metaphor ‘Geography is pregnant but in trouble’ highlights, grounded in the story of Toychie, is the tragic consequence of British academic geography’s attempts to deny this pregnancy, these silent presences that make it what it is. As Bonnett (2003, 59-60) has argued, academic geography polices the borders between the academic and the popular, borrowing heavily from Euro-American social science and inventing technical knowledges, in order to find a place that does not rely on these connections. However, ultimately the discipline only loses its distinctiveness and its identity in so doing. British geography attempts to theorise a globalised world of flows and multiple perspectives, whilst denying the multivocal, decentralised, postcolonial discipline that is inside its own belly.

In the next section we explore this multivocality further. We explore the links and relationships involved in geography’s pregnancy and we do so through a metaphor about lactation. We use the metaphor ‘geography’s milk is flowing’ to suggest ways that the discipline can acknowledge its global interconnectedness to produce a mutually responsible academic agency. In this reading the body of the discipline is a leaking vessel, with insecure



boundaries, but this body is fully equipped to engage responsibly with the relational legacy of its colonial past, and (re)produce a distinctively postcolonial academic identity.

### **‘Geography’s milk is flowing’: relationality and responsible geographies**

As a route into writing postcolonial multivocality back into academic geography, in this section we re-imagine responsibility through the metaphor ‘geography’s milk is flowing’. Specifically, we employ the metaphor of lactation, as it is used in *Beloved*. In using this metaphor we make a contribution to emerging discussions around breast-feeding in feminist theory (see especially, Bartlett and Giles, 2004). Here, the everyday task of breastfeeding is seen to ‘involve concrete affective relations between two distinct though connected beings’ (Shaw, 2004, 60), beings who are materially connected in a position of self-preservation. Breastfeeding therefore has the potential to be a highly evocative metaphor for relationships across difference, particularly insofar as it can recognise the agency of both the mother and the child. As Angiers (1999, 147) states: ‘The suckling of the baby is crucial to the productivity of the mammary gland. The mammary gland will not continue making milk unless the mechanical sensation of suckling tells it that lactogenesis is necessary.’ Indeed, the idea that ‘babies have the ability to think, feel and ultimately modify the world they live in’ (Wayland, 2004, 279) is often ignored, although clearly babies can refuse the breast, can demand and act in ways that force a negotiation by the mother. Pregnancy is intimately linked to lactation in this general sense: the placenta and the mammary glands have much in common. According to Angiers (1999, 147) ‘They are specialists and they are temporary workers. They are designed to nourish a baby. No other organs are so fleeting, so single-minded, as the placenta-mammary dyad.’ For Irigaray, the placenta marks ‘a sort of

negotiation between the mother's self and the other that is the embryo.... On the contrary, there has to be recognition of the other, of the non-self, by the mother, and therefore an initial reaction from her, in order for placental factors to be produced. The difference between the 'self' and the other is, so to speak, continuously negotiated' (Irigaray, 1993, 41). This is an agentic negotiation that runs through flowing milk too. Indeed, breastfeeding may be seen as a point where the bodies of the mother and child, which are separated during childbirth, 'merge again, and repeatedly, for what may be many years' (Giles, 2004, 303). However, the colonial legacy surrounding the 'mother country' and the 'savage as child' is particularly weighty (Noxolo, 2006): 'giving milk' is too easily read as infantilization, and 'taking milk' as exploitation. And what if postcolonial geographers outside the UK neither demand nor desire the 'milk' that British academic geography has to give? The specific terms of mutuality cannot be directed, they must be negotiated and re-negotiated continually, the politics of these relationalities recognised. The materialities through which relationalities are formed and in which they are embedded too cannot be ignored. The concern of this article is that British academic geography needs to develop a more responsible attitude to participate in a more equitable negotiation process – we are not yet ready for breastfeeding.

In this section we therefore employ the metaphor of lactation, rather than breastfeeding, to re-imagine academic responsibility as a responsibility towards the self, where the self is seen as constituted in and through its relationships. In an interview with Paul Gilroy (1993a), Morrison says that she based her novel *Beloved* on the famous true story of Margaret Garner, an African-American slave who escaped with her children, then killed them rather than let the slave-catchers take them back into slavery, saying only: 'They will not live as I have done' (cited in Gilroy, 1993a, 177). Morrison says of the incident:

‘questions about community and individuality were inherent in that incident as I imagined it. When you are the community, when you are your children, when that is your individuality, there is no division... It was for me this classic example of a person determined to be responsible’ (Morrison, in Gilroy, 1993a, 177). The novel can be read as an extended meditation on the ineffable horror of human suffering (see Gilroy, 1993b, 218-223), but crucially it is primarily a creative and fearless study of the absolute necessity of responsibility in the constitution of human identity. Lactation therefore works in the novel as a graphic expression of this fluid-bordered self that is constituted through responsibility, and it is this vision of the lactating body that we use here as a metaphor for British academic geography.

In the novel, Sethe is an African-American woman in the period just after the abolition of slavery, who has experienced pregnancy and motherhood under slavery, in conditions of almost unimaginable, almost literally sublime (Spivak, 1992), hardship. In the following extract she talks with Paul D, who was also enslaved, about a time when she was pregnant (with a child called Denver), but was also lactating for another child (the eponymous Beloved). Planning to escape with her whole family, she had sent Beloved ahead of her to safety, and was planning to follow the child once she had found her husband:

‘I had milk,’ she said. ‘I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl. I hadn’t stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Buglar.’

Now she rolled the dough out with a wooden pin. ‘Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he’d see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away

when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it.'

'Men don't know nothing much,' said Paul D, tucking his pouch back into his vest pocket, 'but they do know a suckling can't be away from its mother for long.'

'Then they know what it's like to send your children off when your breasts are full.'

'We was talking about a tree, Sethe.'

'After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.'

'They used cowhide on you?'

'And they took my milk.'

'They beat you and you was pregnant?'

'And they took my milk!'

(Morrison, 1987, 16-17)

In the extract, Sethe describes an experience that, as someone who has been enslaved, Paul D can relate to. However, she describes an experience that as a man, Paul D cannot experience. The text subtly plays out this identity and difference – Paul D (probably unlike the reader) immediately understands the meaning of the phrase 'open up my back' (and clarifies it for the reader), but the final four lines show the gap in understanding as Paul D

cannot get his mind off the beating of her as a pregnant woman, whilst Sethe tries to make him understand the equal importance, the comparable violation, of the taking of her milk, the treasure that her body was producing for her child. The tree on Sethe's back is a material witness to the cowhide's cut, and Paul D can see the lack of respect for pregnancy to which it bears witness, but Sethe tries to make him see that it also, crucially, witnesses to the stolen milk, to the fact that her pregnant body was also a lactating body, to the relationship through which that lactating body was produced – most hurtful to her is their exploitation of her body's responsible agency in relation to her child.

Again this extract can be interpreted on two levels, the experiential and the metaphorical, and both are relevant to British academic geography. On an experiential level, one of the most important contributions of this piece is the emotion that breathes through it – literary writing is able to speak of emotion in ways that academic writing can often find impossible. Recently geographers have tried to understand emotional geographies (see Bennett, 2004; McCormack, 2003; Sylvester, 2006), arguing that the materiality of suffering, and therefore the necessity for change, cannot be fully understood without deploying emotional language in our academic work. This extract offers an imaginative way in to the emotional intensity and materiality of the experience of enslaved people, alerting us by its visceral power to the fact that academics still have not adequately developed a language to either 'listen to or speak for' the subjectivity of others (Spivak, 1988, 295). By extension from Spivak's (1992) work on language and the 'politics of translation', it can be said that geography has developed a way of writing a particular script around the body, which makes the pain of physical exploitation not only inexpressible, but also unknowable. What we are left with is a 'muting' of subjects created in and through physical exploitation – researchers cannot

‘listen to’ the pain of the exploited body nor can bodily pain be produced as academic knowledge (except using ‘silent’ statistical tools like morbidity rates).

Under colonialism, by highlighting and constructing physical difference, geographers have been instrumental in ‘naturalising’ the physical exploitation of black rather than white bodies in tropical climates, as well as the physical exploitation of working class rather than upper class bodies in the metropolis (Bell et al, 1995; Livingstone, 1994; McClintock, 1995). In particular, under slavery, the black female body was heavy with racial and sexual exploitation, a site of multiple and intense forms of material exploitation - labour, rape, reproduction. Black feminist geographers have contributed to a trenchant interdisciplinary critique of the underpinning abuses of the black female body as a representational site (McKittrick, 2006; see also hooks, 1992). Geographers more generally have recently tried to understand bodies as material, including emotional and performative geographies, as a way of breaking down the privileging of text over body (Davidson et al, 2005; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000).

In this context of geographical work on the materiality of bodily experience, Morrison’s work throws out a distinctly geographical challenge in the shape of the tree on Sethe’s back: how can geographers respond to the material space of the dead scar tissue that ‘grows there still’? In other words, it is the responsibility of geographers to find a way both to locate the specific materiality of the scarred, exhausted, raped and murdered body of the enslaved person and to map that same materiality of pain and suffering still growing on the bodies of human beings on a global scale today.

At a metaphorical level, it is the materiality of lactation as it is used in this extract from *Beloved* that makes the image ‘geography’s milk is flowing’ so evocative. Made all the more

poignant by the fact that she is separated from her child, by the fact that her enslaved status allows other people to take her milk from her, by the sight and smell of the milk itself, a large part of the power of the image is that Sethe's milk flows – there is nothing she can do about it. Her body has its own agency, and it is an agency based on relationship. What Morrison describes in this image of lactation is an interconnected materiality that 'challenges the invisibility of intercorporeal existence and identity [confirming]...that one's identity is formed and immersed in the lived bodies of others' identities' (Shaw, 2004, 287). The relationship between self and other does not have to be established - in fact it cannot be denied. It is in place. Beyond this, however, what makes Sethe responsible rather than tragic is her determination to resist disintegration. She harnesses her will to her body and refuses to let them be torn asunder. The boys stealing her milk is a powerful image of the huge constraint that she has to overcome to keep body and will together – a transatlantic slave system that seeks to possess everything that she has or will ever produce. Utterly single-minded, *all she knows* is that the milk will be there, with her child, and she will be there with it<sup>5</sup>.

This is a powerful metaphor for the responsibility and relationality of British academic geography. The question of responsibility and relationality between places, and between place and space, have always been central for geographers - they are part of the discipline's redefinition of itself, and are also key questions for postcolonial theory. For instance, development geographers have spelt out some of the theoretical bases for

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<sup>5</sup> Later in the novel (Morrison, 1987, 152), this powerful image is mirrored by another, as Denver sucks her mother's milk through the blood of her sister – it has soaked onto Sethe's breast as she killed her own baby to escape the slave catchers. The interconnected subjectivity that is the essence of responsibility is once again delineated in this potent image.

responding to ‘the claims of distant strangers’ (Corbridge, 1993) and arguing that responsibility for global poverty is spread far beyond the people who feel its weight (see Echanove, 2005). Doreen Massey (2004) makes this responsibility clear when she suggests that global cities like London need to take responsibility for the exploitation that now brings, and historically has brought them, the resources to establish and maintain their status. She therefore argues for the need to recognise ‘how those small and highly differentiated bits of all of us which position us as ‘Londoners’ give rise to responsibility towards the wider relations on which we depend’ (Massey, 2004, 17).

This relationality extends to academic practices too, requiring us as academics to take active steps to recognise the relationships between British academic geography and its postcolonial publics. Jenny Robinson (2003) helpfully outlines some of these steps when she argues for the need to acknowledge the locatedness of our theories, to demarginalise development geography, to engage with regional scholarship, and to transform the conditions of production and circulation of knowledge to remove the barriers to international publishing that now lie before many scholars in other countries. Similarly, Derek Gregory (2005, 186-8) suggests a range of ‘counter geographies’ that can work to emphasise postcolonial connection, counteracting colonial and neo-colonial distancing strategies: contextual geographies that reveal the material realities of other people’s lives; contrapuntal geographies that highlight global connections and relationships; cosmopolitan geographies that emphasise commonalities; and collaborative geographies in which partnerships are formed between academics in different countries.

These important strategies might all be characterised broadly as *locating* British academic geography – undermining the colonial dynamic that takes its authority by speaking



‘from nowhere’ (Duncan, 1996, 2) in order to play a more equitable role in the world, acknowledging interdependence. Location however, is not necessarily a sufficient basis for responsibility - as Alistair Bonnett (2003, 59) suggests, location is just as likely to be a prelude to isolationism and elitism, ‘a turn away from the international and global and towards “the West”... as the natural province of British geography.’ The metaphor of lactation, as set out in *Beloved*, allows us not only to locate the discipline but to *re-locate* it, by embodying it in a form whose boundaries are fluid, a form that is defined by relationality. The discipline therefore has no ‘natural province’ that is bounded and separate from elsewhere. It is defined by its relationships, not by its boundaries. In our concluding section we will set out a range of tactics suggested by postcolonial literary theorists to work with these fluid boundaries between self and other.

Doreen Massey says with regard to relationships between places: ‘We are responsible to areas beyond the bounds of place not because of what we have done, but because of what we are’ (Massey, 2004, 16). It is this form of relational responsibility that using the metaphor of ‘flowing milk’ can envisage, an attempt to get past the sometimes ineffective (though entirely just) argument that British geography is responsible to its global constituency because of the many injustices that Britain has meted out. Instead, following Sethe, we move towards a position that we harness our will to our bodies – we take responsibility precisely because those relationships constitute what British geography is. We also suggest the many other relationalities - such as those between mother and child and teacher and student - that forms as well as interrupts postcolonial responsibilities of Geography. It suggests the multiple forms of power (gender, generational, postcolonial) and the multitude of subjectivities through which these responsibilities are formed, shaped and

enacted through. And these responsibilities are in place – to deny them leads to disintegration. And, as we saw in the previous section in relation to Toychie, disintegration brings a tragic loss of identity.

### **Conclusion: going with the flow**

In this paper we have experimented with the metaphors of pregnancy and lactation to unsettle the geographical imagination in order to contribute to debates about British academic geography's postcolonial position in a very materially grounded manner. Our argument has been two-fold. First, the postcolonial relationship is already in place: the postcolonial is constitutive of British geography and has made it what it is today. This point was highlighted through an extract from Zee Edgell's (1982) novel, *Beka Lamb*, which exposed the ultimately destructive fragmentation that denial of this relationality can bring. Second, we have argued that this postcolonial relationship constitutes British geography so therefore acknowledgement of it is a responsibility that geography owes to itself. Through an extract from Toni Morrison's (1987) *Beloved*, we use the metaphor of lactation as a way of insisting on the responsibility that this relationality in place engenders. In making these arguments we have attempted to unsettle the growing literature on geography which seek to locate postcoloniality 'elsewhere'. In the conclusion we suggest some strategies towards this re-location.

By using the metaphors 'geography is pregnant' and 'geography's milk is flowing', we have made a double move. Along with writers like Bonnett (2003), Robinson (2003) and Gregory (2005), we have 'located' British academic geography as a body. That is to say, we have specified that the discipline takes a particular form in its particular place, and cannot

write as if from the centre, or from nowhere. But we have also re-located geography as what might be termed a ‘heterotopic’ body, that is to say, a body whose boundaries are fluid, which is situated in one place and yet fundamentally only takes place through its relationships with other places. Re-located in this way, we emphasise the connections between British academic geography and the rest of the world, its multivocality, engendering a responsibility to the world that flows directly from what the discipline *is*, rather than what it might like to be.

However, there is another sense in which British academic geography is heterotopic. Michel Foucault (1984) develops the notion of the ‘heterotopia’ as a space that functions like the space we see inside a mirror, i.e. as a space that makes intersubjective positions more ‘real’ (by displaying the connections between the person looking into the mirror and the space and places around them), but simultaneously as a space that makes everybody’s positions more ‘unreal’ by re-constructing them within a virtual back-to-front world. Similarly, as we re-locate the discipline in terms of relationality, it is important to recognise this dual capacity of geography – the discipline increasingly theorises the world in terms of flows and connections, but can also falsify relationships if we are unable to recognise absolute difference, incommensurability. Geographical work is therefore forced to acknowledge abruptness and separation as well as connections and flows suggesting that there are limits too in thinking relationally. Relationality must at all times be interrogated, not uncritically assumed.

By this token, British academic geography is a discipline that is both a part of and apart from its global and popular counterparts. Hence, although there is no simple and intellectually unproblematic way of distinguishing different geographical traditions, there are still spaces

and forms of geographical knowledge in different parts of the world that are not entirely determined through their relations with each other (Mufti, 2005). Geography as a postcolonial discipline has always therefore to recognise the mutual constitution of different geographical theories/knowledges and the importance of each for the other's formations, alongside theories/knowledges that are not entirely constituted through this relation. Being a part of, but still being apart from, therefore entails responsibilities to both take account of, but also be accountable to, both the connections and the disconnections, these different spaces and their distinctive world picturing.

We end then with three tactics from postcolonial literary theorists for working with this problematised relationality: reading as a writer (Morrison, 1993); reading as translation (Spivak, 1992); and 'going a piece of the way' with a text (Boyce Davies, 1994). All are about uncovering and transcending the silencing of multivocality that happens within mainstream texts. But each can be redeployed by postcolonial geographers to throw out a range of challenges to our perspectives; research, teaching and administration; relationships with colleagues, students and research assistants; and our national/transnational work within the university, in 'the field', and at conferences.

Morrison's (1993) narrative of the way she learned to read the racialisation of dominant US literary texts is instructive. She notices that even when there are black characters in these texts their presences: 'could never be about anything other than the "normal", unracialized, illusory white world that provided the fictional backdrop' (Morrison, 1993, 16). It seems that there is little to go on. It is only when she begins to read, not as a reader, but as a writer that she realises that the racialisation of these texts is not in the scarcity of the black characters but in the purposes which these characters serve within the texts:

‘I began to rely on my knowledge of how books get written, how language arrives; my sense of how and why writers abandon or take on certain aspects of their project. I began to rely on my understanding of what the linguistic struggle requires of writers and what they make of the surprise that is the inevitable concomitant of the act of creation. What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence’ (Morrison, 1993, 17).

This article, along with Morrison’s tactic of reading as a writer, suggests a need to remain open to the possibilities (and problems) posed by the bodies that we do not yet see or recognise within the discipline and its physical and textual landscapes. How might recognition of such bodies uncover the multiplicity of postcolonial relationships, the different meanings of those relationships in different places and spaces and how such relationships are all imbued with multiple modalities of power? And what metaphors might these bodies call forth? And might those metaphors offer one way to broaden out from medicalisation in the mapping of material corporeal suffering and pain towards challenging the structures that produce such injustices?

Spivak (1992) speaks of ‘reading as translation’, in which she suggests that the postcolonial writer needs to take a stance which is: ‘precisely not a surrender but a friendly learning by taking a distance’ (Spivak, 1992, 196). This involves reading the mainstream text with a recognition that, though it may be aimed at a white male readership, there are some aspects that the writer may only hint at as marginal to the text, but that are central to the preoccupations of those who do not read from a mainstream position. The postcolonial reader has to read with an attitude which is open to these opportunities for gleaning. Spivak

also, however, notes the limits of literacy, the points at which the marginal reader may choose not to read on, because she is so completely excluded from the text. At these points the postcolonial reader ‘snuffles off, disgruntled’ (Spivak, 1992, 197), and supplements her reading with more inclusive texts.

Spivak’s tactic of reading as translation suggests a need to interrogate our research relationships for their multivocality. How can moneyed institutions and individuals in the west create a heightened demand for a wider range of publications from a wider range of international writers? How can our writing be aimed at or re-constructed for a broader range of audiences, and how can we listen for the range of responses that they might make? How can we glean from any localised research that we carry out a map of international flows and ruptures that ripples out from it? And how can we recognise what interrupts, constrains and stops those flows to make apparent how political and economic structures and practices of neo-liberal economies might be changed to promote more equalised international relations?

Finally, Boyce Davies (1994), in an article which is concerned with the relation between black writers and mainstream academic theories, advocates reading dominant texts from a position of ‘critical relationality’, ‘going a piece of the way with them’ (Boyce Davies, 1994, 46). This is based on the practice, which she locates within African-based habits of hospitality, of accompanying a friend or visitor on part of their journey home. She does not advocate ‘going all the way home’ with mainstream texts, because this: ‘inevitably places me in the ‘homes’ of people where I, as a Black woman, will have to function either as maid or exotic, silenced courtesan, definitely not as a theoretical equal’ (Boyce Davies, 1994, 46). However, by going part of the way one has the opportunity to engage in conversation, to

interrogate the texts and critique that which is exclusionary as well as benefiting from that which could be inclusive.

Boyce Davies's tactic of 'critical relationality' suggests a need to interrogate our pedagogic relationships for their inclusivity. How can we develop more inclusive curricula in our teaching, engaging more closely with the experiences of international students for example? What broader types of collaborative work can be carried out with overseas institutions to develop shared or complementary curricula on global issues? How can we engage critically with international students and colleagues without imposing a 'view from the centre'? What can national and international funding bodies and Higher Educational institutions do to encourage and support such critical, sustained engagement? And at what point do we turn around and go home, recognising the abruptions that limit relationality and shake up responsibility?

In using metaphors of pregnancy and lactation we are labouring towards a responsibility in which the global injustices upon which British academic geography is founded and maintained are not seen as an individualistic paternalist ethics but one that results from the contributions of millions of people and numerous institutions to the intellectual and institutional structures that make the discipline what it is<sup>6</sup>. It is a responsibility that brings into question the normalcy of historical and contemporary unjust geopolitical conditions that underpin academic imperialism (Ake, 1979). It is a responsibility that is cognisant of its debts but also looks forwards for results, for steps that will change the processes that result in the production of unjust global structures (cf Young, 2003). And finally it is a shared responsibility, involving all individuals, those who suffer injustices and

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<sup>6</sup> See Young 2003 for a more extended discussion of such a responsibility.

those who benefit from them, having agency to recognise that we are all connected to structural processes that produce injustice. However, we are not all equally positioned in these efforts and our responsibilities are therefore not equal, not even equivalent. Meeting these responsibilities will not be easy but ultimately it could give birth to and nurture a more genuinely postcolonial geographical discipline.

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