Bringing the Other closer to Home: The challenges of geography in the postcolony

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Colonial ideologies are typically studied from the perspective of the colonized. Postcolonial theories examine how the mind is colonized. We also need to draw attention to the manner in which the mind of the colonizer is trained to perpetuate an unequal distribution of power and resources. Geography is a course through which particular lenses for reading the world – such as a colonizer ideology - are instilled in youth. This paper examines the teaching of four prospective teachers who want to teach geography in order to disrupt the colonial legacy in U.S. students. Yet, the paper finds that the struggle to keep this imperial or colonial ideology from seeping into their teaching. While claiming that this is an intuitive manner of teaching in dominant paradigms, it also suggests spaces for disrupting this approach to teaching and thinking about the world.

Writers of the postcolony are largely attentive to questioning what it means to claim that the world is postcolonial or examining mechanisms for eradicating colonialism in the social, political, and personal structures of colonized persons and states. Defining the late 20th century as postcolonial presumes that colonial structures have been eradicated and that colonialism is an institution of the past (Appiah, 1991; McLeod, 2000). Many people, though, argue that the system continues through “globalisation” or “imperialism” in which a small number of states dominate the economic, political, and intellectual production of others – similar to colonialism without systematic local monitoring (Massey, 1994; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001; Tikly, 2004). The political and economic institutions may be different, but the organization of people and places in the world according to colonial ideologies continues. Specifically, Western democratic and capitalist values that marked colonialism define the dominant model of development and knowledge accessible throughout the world (Ake, 1979).

The standard for determining the presence of colonialism is often noted in the political and economic relationship between nations. Overlooked is the way colonialism engrains positions of superiority and inferiority in the identities of individuals, states, and corporations (Trinh 1989). Colonialism relied upon the colonizing of minds as well as maintaining institutions (Fanon, 1967; Spivak, 1990; wa Thiong’o, 1986). It survived(s) because it was(is) hegemonic – it depended not only on particular structures for organizing people and resources, but also on shaping the identities of people to give “consent” to these ruling structures (Foucault, 1980; Gramsci, 1992; Loomba, 1998). The colonizer provided the model of acceptable knowledge and ways of being. The colonized were a generic “other”, different until they adopted or assimilated into the dominant system (Loomba, 1998; Masolo, 1997; Vaughan, 1994). Trinh (1989) argues that this notion of Other translated into an inferiority identity in the colonized through its displacement and fragmentation into multiple selves. Because this mentality is difficult to redress, it aids in the preservation of an unequal postcolonial system. Typically, the lens for studying and theorizing the internalization of hegemonic colonialism is through the colonized. This may be partially because much postcolonial theory arises in the “West” (Ake, 1979; Appiah, 1991; Oyewumi, 1997). The Western presumption is that solutions to global inequality rest on changing the Other. But what of the colonizer? If the system is hegemonic, then we should presume that institutions
and ways of knowing in the West are marked by a deep-rooted internalisation of superiority (Johnson, 2003).

Schools are powerful institutions because they are authorities on knowledge. They are the seminal text through which students learn to see themselves and the world. Within schools, geography contains the formal curriculum wherein students learn the literacy tools they need to understand the world. Just as students learn to read books in literature classes, students are taught how to read the world in their geography classes. The world presented to students in U.S. geography classes presumes a postcolonial world and posits the importance of building relationships between nations. Critics argue that this geography provides an avenue for retaining colonial ideologies. Recent articles in this journal similarly document the colonial/imperial lenses of aid, development, and global citizenship that emerge in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. when the balance of power between nations in the postcolony is unexplored or unquestioned (Cook, 2008; Jefferess, 2008; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Even though evidence highlights the ideologies that emerge from schools, there is little attention to the ideologies that underlie school curricula. This paper examines four prospective teachers who think critically about geography and the world. They seek to disrupt the colonial narrative common in the discipline and provide students a different set of skills for reading the world. Using a post-colonial lens focused on the impact of colonialism on the colonizer, the paper evaluates ways the colonial mentality seeps into their pedagogy. Although the paper is focused on geography teachers, its analysis provides an important avenue for re-focusing our attention and looks for promising moments in disrupting dominant positions and ideologies in any curricular practice.

Theoretical Groundings

Geography education is the study of space and place. Students acquire the skills to learn about people in place and translate this information into a meaningful understanding of places. While geography students study their home community and country, most K-12 geography courses spend significant time exploring those who live beyond these boundaries (Barton, 2008; Segall & Helfenbein, 2008). The study of home is ultimately a study of the self. It teaches students the scripts of their home or the sense of place - the commonly accepted description of that community or country. The teaching of home provides students with a sense of the familiar they can use to make sense of what they learn about an Other they cannot “touch” (Kent, 2002; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Willinsky, 1998). Although some students have travelled or will travel, few will have the opportunity to visit the nearly two hundred countries they are asked to memorize on a map. Even fewer will have an opportunity to spend time exploring the diversity within these countries. The geography courses students take are their way of visiting the Other and gathering the tools for when they encounter this Other outside school. The Other may live close or far, but geography serves the purpose of bringing the Other closer to home by allowing the Other to be studied through the familiarity of home. The role of the geography teacher is to develop questions or pass along ideologies for understanding this Other.

Geography in the U.S. and Western European countries has moved in and out of the school curriculum. It has been a consistent fixture in schools since the early 20th century, a height of colonialism (Kent, 2002). At that time, geography was a science that sought to “objectively” determine a relationship between peoples and the space they occupied (Hartshorne 1939; Semple, 1911). This science projected that the savagery of certain lands correlated with the savagery of the people who lived there. The deterministic intention of geography, specifically in the U.S. and England, coincided with the height of global imperialism and World War I. Geography provided a scientific rationale for colonialism by creating a hierarchy of people explained through
race, culture, ethnicity, and location. “Home” (the West) was a way of characterizing people’s positions of global power and linking the superior political and cultural characteristics. The Other was the world beyond these borders; the world that was (needed to be) colonized. Geography explained the weaknesses of these cultures that colonial/Western influences would remedy. Placing geography into the school curriculum at this time served the purpose of securing this colonial script in the minds of young people and preparing them for their role in maintaining the structure of inequality and othering (Fairgrieve, 1926; Kent, 2002). In England, the frameworks for colonialism were laid. In the U.S., the roots for a century of military and political invention were cast.

The discipline of geography has moved beyond this deterministic ideology. Deterministic geography was replaced with systematic, then humanist, and finally critical traditions that specifically examine the ways in which inequality is spatially organized (Johnston, 2004). Motivated by changing global structures and theoretical groundings, even positivist geographers shun the deterministic tradition. While geography looks back on itself, geography education has been less reflexive. The emergence of a postcolonial world suggests to some critics that geography education should evaluate its most recent origins in schools and adapt to changing world structures and relationships (Massey, 2002). They argue that it has not moved far (enough) from colonial purposes. First, geography education still privileges the nation-state over other levels of inquiry, specifically those boundaries drawn by colonists (Johnston, 2004; Mbembe, 2000). Even in a regional division of the world, the nation-state remains a primary unit of study and the level of comparison within the region. The boundaries of the nation fail to capture the complex ways people organize themselves politically, culturally, and economically. Second, geography splits the world into familiar and Other and employs divisive terminology (Willinsky, 1998). Many U.S. students take a course, Western Hemispheres, in which they study the Americas and Western Europe (a region not in the Western hemisphere) and a course, Eastern Hemispheres, in which they study the rest of the world. The first is close and familiar. It involves inquiry of individual countries that share characteristics with the U.S. This is opposed to the regional study of less familiar places far from the U.S. Students label countries as developing/developed/undeveloped, have/have-not, Western/non-Western depending upon similarity to the U.S. Third, geographic inquiry is stable and unifying (Gersmehl, 1992; Natoli, 1988; Zam & Howard, 2005). The study of nations or regions fails to recognize the complexity within and across places. It studies peoples as a whole and presumes that group characteristics can be assigned by and memorized. There is no attention to tension over meaning and identities and the dynamism of culture. Further, the characteristics that are studied arise from a Western way of seeing the world (Oyewumi, 1997).

Although disciplines have frameworks such as the one outlined above, teaching and learning are mediated by teachers and students. An evaluation of geography education must extend beyond the curriculum and examine its teaching. The literature on geography teaching in the U.S. is limited in number and breadth. What does exist presents a dismal portrait (Segall & Helfenbein, 2008). Teachers, it is reported, do not have adequate preparation in geography, lack basic geographic knowledge, and share some of the same misunderstandings as students in their classrooms (LeVasseur, 1999). Their pedagogical approach tends to rely on the textbook, be teacher-driven, and rely on memorizing disjointed information (Bednarz, Downs & Vender, 2003; Gandy & Kruger, 2004). But like the subject they teach, these studies fail to draw attention to the underlying ideologies and purposes these teachers embrace and the possibility for tensions in their teaching.

Data Production and Analysis
This paper comes from a qualitative study designed to understand how prospective teachers thought about the purposes of teaching geography and how this translated into classroom practice. The project involved four prospective teachers (called interns hereafter) who taught geography in Michigan (in the Midwestern United States). The interns taught at four different schools. Interns were selected as subjects of study because they are in a middle ground – still carrying their recent experiences as students of geography with them in the formation of a practice. These particular interns were selected because they talked about teaching geography for social change.

Each intern participated in an initial interview, at least one observation of classroom teaching, and a follow-up/exit interview. The purpose of the first interview was to understand the foci, purposes, and intentions that guided interns’ geography teaching and their origins. The follow-up interview was held at the end of the internship and offered interns an opportunity to reflect on their ideas and practices. They were able to evaluate the tensions they worked through in choosing content and pedagogy during their internship. The observations offered each participant an opportunity to showcase their ideologies in practice. They invited me into their classroom when they felt they were engaging students in activities that highlighted the core principles of their geography teaching. The observation was followed by a dialogue about our mutual observations (from different vantage points) and sense of what was being taught.

To analyse the data, I examined each intern as a case and looked for patterns across interns (Stake, 2005). Drawing upon a series of analytical memos written during data collection (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), I developed maps where I placed descriptors of places, descriptions of teaching of place and geography, descriptors of teaching location, personal experience as a geography student and experience teaching geography (Tufte, 1990, 1997). I drew boundaries around and between the various elements in ways that moved pieces together and apart. Different line weights and colors indicated borders that were permeated, tensions, and connections. From these maps, I developed landscape representations to reflect their understanding and intentions of geography teaching.

A Purpose of Change and a Pedagogy of Reification

The interns shared a belief of a postcolonial world, but generally agreed with theorists that the world remained colonized and unequal because of imperialist economic and political systems that made democracy and capitalism (like that in the U.S.) the standard toward which others should strive. They were particularly concerned about this global inequality in an era of increased global interaction. While people have been interacting globally since the beginning of time, they noted that their students were part of a new generation in which individuals had access to people and places far beyond their borders. Previously, interaction was limited to politicians, mercantilists, and those with money to travel. But recent technologies allow most U.S. students to “travel” everyday via internet, media, and telecommunications. Unfortunately, they noted in their students a sense of entitlement they believed was partially due to their lack of exposure to the world around them. They talked about an Other they did not know. With this as a framework, these interns wanted to be different. They wanted to bring this Other closer to home and enable their students to know others in the world. They believed this understanding would go a long way in undermining their sense of judgment and superiority. The interns distinguished their worldview from that of their students, believing they held the key to disrupting their students’ role in perpetuating global imperialism. But for three of the interns, the challenges of teaching brought to light the difficulty of removing the Western worldview. The implementation of their ideas reified the Self/Other division and continued to privilege the U.S.-centred way of understanding the world. These stories are analysed in this section.
**Wendy: The Limitations of the US as a Lens for Comparison**

Wendy believed that her suburban middle school students encountered distant people and places everyday. While a number of her wealthy students traveled internationally during vacations, Wendy noted the cultural representations (such as the red flags for HIV/AIDS at The Gap, Rwandan coffee at Starbucks or references to Djibouti in a Coke commercial) in popular media which affected students’ global understanding of distant people in students’ daily lives. As a geography teacher, Wendy wanted her students to have a better understanding of the people and cultures in the media and their textbooks. She believed that all people lived equally in this world and wanted her students to be attentive to how they thought about people in other places. The constant presence of the Other in our lives (like through cultural icons) but a lack of understanding about this Other was the impetus for the Wendy’s teaching.

Wendy recognized that her mission was challenged by divides between people caused by misunderstandings and generalisations. Her teaching was attentive to difference and how difference translated into values around people and places. She tried to teach across this difference. Drawing on Dr. Seuss’s *The Sneetches and other stories*, Wendy wanted her students to appreciate difference.

They need to learn about places outside of the U.S. and outside of what they hear on a day to day basis. They need to learn about the different cultures around the world because without this class, most of the kids seem to think the suburbanite, American way of life is what everyone lives. And they don’t value what they have here or have that desire to help others or understand differences around the world...Just to understand that people’s differences don’t make them bad, doesn’t make a negative thing, but to tolerate and understand...you can even look and relate it to politics or any type of belief. Everyone is always going to have a different belief, a different culture they came from, different backgrounds and they have to learn to tolerate other people’s differences (Wendy, 15 February 2007).

Like the Sneetches who used the presence or absence of a star on the chest to separate and rank members of their community, Wendy worried that the frameworks students brought to the classroom encouraged them to judge when they looked at others in the world. She observed that patterns of similarity and difference, superiority and inferiority were already part of her students’ vocabulary. Many things – divisions in the geography curriculum, the media, textbooks – helped to construct this framework. Wendy struggled to challenge both their sense of the familiar and what it meant to see difference. She wanted her students to see that not everyone had the same resources or spoke the same languages and that differences students might encounter between people were not negative.

In order to overcome difference, Wendy had her students look for similarities. She did this by having them compare unfamiliar places to something familiar — the U.S. Figure 1 captures her desire to have students see the world and the lens she provided them for this comparison. She began by reminding her students of the core democratic, economic, and cultural values that made the U.S. great. With this common framework, her students could understand others by examining the ways they were similar or different to this frame. She hoped that the comparative reference could serve as a way to help students understand and make sense of the similarities and differences they identified in the places they studied.

*Figure 1. Map of Wendy’s view of the world*
Although the intentions of transcending difference that shaped her teaching are admirable, the comparison method runs the risk of reinforcing the Self and Other divide and elevating the values and knowledge from the U.S. Wendy’s lesson on the Congo-Kinshasa serves as an example of how comparison normalizes the U.S. and others Congo-Kinshasa. She asked students to read a short article about nationalist support for President Mobutu Sese Seke and identify practices that were similar to U.S. shows of nationalism. Some items were explicitly stated and others required deduction.

I figure it connected the United States to another part of the world so they could compare the country of Zaire to the United States and it really only sums it up at the end there as we talk about patriotism and the different ways that Americans show it. They’re supposed to see the similarities and not think that it’s such a far off place (Wendy, 20 March 2007).

In evaluating the lesson, she was impressed that many students had used a common experience – the celebration of independence - to brainstorm beyond their reading. She wanted students to work from their personal experience with patriotism in the U.S. to consider what an independence celebration might entail in another country. Drawing on their experience at parades, the students were able to consider symbols such as flags, anthems, adornment in national colors, and the Pledge of Allegiance as examples and symbols that generally construct a show of patriotism in any country. These symbols were readily available in their daily life and now imagined as similarly utilized in Congo. Whereas Congo likely seemed far away at the beginning of the lesson, Wendy made it more familiar and less distant by using experiences in the U.S. to understand the experiences of people in the Congo. She acknowledged that there were differences, but those differences did not make Congo inferior or exotic.

Comparisons, a common approach to the study of places in geography, allows for increased understanding in some arenas. But the costs can be high. The presence of a centre for comparison falls back into a colonial ideology of privileging one way of seeing the world and posing questions about how well others reach or assimilate into that standard. This becomes particularly troublesome in a class like this where the centre of comparison is always the U.S. The U.S. is reinforced as the standard against which to measure other countries. It further limits what students can know about these other places since comparisons rely on a one-to-one comparison. In the example above, students did not have an opportunity to appreciate the intensity of a nationalist
parade and reduced it simply to a display of symbols. They did not consider the possibility that the same symbol may convey something different in a different context or that there are items they did not recognize as symbols because of their narrow lens. Wendy recognized the value attached to assumptions of difference and wanted to remove these. But, like the sense of colonial acceptance in the colonized, her sense of U.S. greatness is so strong it prevents her from seeing her “hidden” ideologies. Focusing on freedom from difference, she fails to see the ways in which she normalizes the U.S. and reifies the imperial order of cultural and political values. By disrupting the theme of “different = bad,” she may be replacing it with another that says “U.S. = good”. In this way, I was not convinced that her efforts to use the U.S. as the vantage point through which students viewed others in the world had her intended effects.

**Rene: A Narrow Past, a Global Future**

Rene framed her teaching around a desire to help students in an insular U.S. context see themselves as global citizens concerned about how they understood and connected with others in the world. Drawing on her own experiences growing up in an insular but wealthy suburb, Rene saw the potential of geography to either reinforce imperial ideologies or to confront and teach against them (Willinsky, 1998). She chose the latter. Rene asked to teach in the inner ring suburb where her white skin was a contrast to the predominantly African American students in her classroom but matched that of most of her school colleagues. Rene believed that many of her students, because of their income level, had little opportunity to travel to or explore the world beyond their city. Her message of global citizenship was even more important in this context. She wanted to make her students less judgmental and more curious about the people they might only “meet” through video, phone, and internet.

Rene’s insular upbringing was disrupted by experiences in the world. During college, Rene took a course entitled Urban Geography which challenged her understanding of geography, but more importantly taught her about the complexity of inequality. Rather than Detroit being a city that is 98% African American with a 70% employment rate, having people from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish backgrounds, Detroit became a far more complicated entity. The inequality and deprivation she had long attached to the city became complicated by a history of economic, political, and social structures between Detroit, its suburbs, and the state. She also learned to think about what these characteristics meant in terms of understanding the lives of the people who lived there. Rene was also challenged by a recent telephone conversation. Critical of her inability to travel, she acknowledged the value of interactions like the one she had when a computer servicing call connected her with a technician in India. During intermissions to restart the computer, Rene and the technician had opportunities to share and compare cultural values. Through this telephone call and subsequent calls and emails, Rene felt she had a strong understanding of this young man and his life in India. Stepping back and asking questions for understanding rather than presenting judgment, Rene was able to gather a sense of his context that she thought equivalent in richness to her understanding of the context in which she taught. The search for understanding the unfamiliar strongly informed her geographic pedagogy.

Rene’s intentions to secure a global civic identity in her students spoke to acceptance of a post-colonial ideology. Rene wanted to break her students of their U.S.-centric worldview, one that presumed the superior position of the U.S. Instead, her global citizens would see themselves on par with their peers in the world. She stated, “The world doesn’t revolve around you, there’s other things going on in the world that you impact and that will impact you at some point in time as well” (Rene, 15 February 2007). She wanted her students to see themselves deeply invested in the issues of
their local and global communities which meant they needed to understand issues and people in a complex manner. Figure 2 below captures Rene’s intentions. In order to prevent her students from making judgments of people through a limited lens based only on the assumptions they held of that place, Rene wanted her students to pose questions about different places and people in the world and challenge their initial assumptions.

Figure 2. Map of Rene’s teaching purposes

Rene assumed that much of the information her students had of places came from limited information. This required her, as a teacher, to counter some assumptions by offering rich details and a lens of inquiry. She knew that students needed to understand political and economic structures, but she also valued the cultural aspects that captured how people lived in and through global inequality.

I want to teach kids about other places in the world and I want to teach kids about different cultures and how different people do things and all these different big ideas to help them become more well-rounded and to have them have appreciation for other people... there’s a social agenda involved, I just think there’s a lot of ignorance. I want the kids to always question things, but at least question other explanations for things that go on or why does this even occur the way that it does? Why do these two groups of people interact with one another? Some of them do have this us vs. them mentality. Their culture’s the right way and part of it is that they have never really experienced anything else and don’t really know, don’t have ideas to compare it to (Rene, 15 February 2007).

Rene drew attention to culture, but not in the cultural universalist tradition of geography education. Identifying Syrians as Muslim did not convey an understanding of how someone lived or what they believed. She wanted the students to see interconnected cultures. India did not exist in isolation from Syria or Michigan. There were clashes and interactions. Rene felt that once students had a greater understanding of places on the map, they would ask different, less judgmental questions about people, places, and relationships. Rather than a lens of right and wrong, Rene wanted students to see the complexity of these clashes and interactions. Further, by seeing the connections between and across places, Rene believed students would see the intersection of
different political and economic patterns and experiences and the impact this had on people and places and think differently about the way they interacted with others in the world.

Rene struggled to implement her beliefs. She was stymied by the lack of a model. Rene invited me to view a lesson that demonstrated her difficulties. The lesson engaged students in traditional mapping activities (Gregg, 1997; LeVasseur, 1999). Students labeled cities, rivers, and mountains of India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. They then planned a trip from Colombo, Sri Lanka to Kabul, Afghanistan for which they articulated the best route and kinds of language skills and clothing they would need. The lesson appeared to counter her intentions.

I don’t think that it necessarily corresponds to our first conversation. I think this stuff is kind of important but labeling 30 places on the map…that’s not me. I would rather have them do fewer things and actually have them understand and be able to do something with them. My focus is more on the people. I am very much interested in how cultures are different, how people are different. So I think that if I was doing this, I would focus more on the language perhaps or religions or even having maybe a personal story who lives in a couple different cities to show snapshots of people and have a discussion (Rene, 19 March 2007).

Even though Rene had a vision for what geography teaching should be, she seemed better able to show the teaching she didn’t like than to model that she preferred. No one had helped her think about how to disrupt the experience her students were having with geography. Without the tools to teach differently, Rene fell back upon a familiar way of thinking about and doing geography.

Rene acknowledged that the way she taught was not how she wanted to teach. She was unable to have students see the world richly and connected. But when Rene described her shortcomings she failed to examine the manner in which the choices she made reproduced the ideologies she criticized. By simplifying her teaching and drawing on traditional geographic exercises, Rene reified the judgmental lens her students held. In her lesson, India lost its diversity and became a nation of singulars - language, religion, attire, etc. Without this deeper understanding and attention to difficult relationships between people, the very real difficulties these students would face on a trip from Sri Lanka to Afghanistan because of the historical and current political relationships between and within these countries are never noted. Instead, Afghanistan, India, and Sri Lanka lose their uniqueness and students do not have the space to pose their own questions or understand relationships from a different perspective. They simply take their U.S. lens of what it means to travel and assume it will allow them to traverse the world. Students were left to presume the ease of renting a car and driving themselves according to the road rules and speed limits of the U.S. even though the trip occurs across the globe. Border crossings, roads destroyed by war, and slowdowns through towns are not on the radar of students who simply see a road and believe they can drive it. Rene used the cultural universals she criticized and her students were left to see the U.S. as centre and view the world through U.S.-generated categories.

Christine: Familiarizing the Other

Christine’s teaching was inspired by courses in post-colonial African theory and cosmopolitan ethics. She called upon a cosmopolitan ethic to think about her teaching (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 1994). She explains,
Being a global citizen would mean that they value other cultures and care what happens to those cultures and care about what happens to those people and not necessarily putting U.S. interests, U.S. citizens, U.S. people, not putting their interests before other people in this world (Christine, 16 February 2007).

She argued that the lack of a cosmopolitan lens limited what people could see in the world. She was attentive to the way in which her upbringing and the insular setting where she taught put up boundaries that closed in their members and kept them from seeing other people. When people did look, their U.S. perspective caused them to look down at the people on the other side. She noted this demeanor in her students and was further troubled by the way in which these students, underprivileged in the U.S. context, perpetuated the hierarchy that limited them by positioning themselves above others. Christine wanted to break this cycle. “I want them to have enough respect for themselves that they’ll fight back against the injustices and problematic systems” (Christine, 16 February 2007).

Christine saw the world as dominated by the U.S. and wanted to share this critique with her students. Her students saw themselves as the centre of the world and Christine wanted to disrupt that. Christine saw a set of unjust systems around herself and her students and tried to make her students conscious of this injustice. Her approach began with the boundaries that caused the divide. She wanted to use the social studies to break these boundaries and challenge her students to be conscious and critical of the boundaries that divided people within and across unequal systems. As modeled in figure 3, she began by blurring the way borders existed as boundaries between people and place. She wanted to complicate boundaries and draw less attention to the boundaries themselves than to questions about why those boundaries existed and what they meant for the people on either side. She wanted her students to challenge the hierarchy created by those boundaries.

*Figure 3. Christine’s ideal landscape of geography*

Geography was a tool to help students rethink social systems. Here Christine could draw critical attention to the values, perceptions, and language of her students. Christine taught a unit on Mexico that was designed to challenge her students’ views on Mexicans. She sought to blur the boundaries between the U.S. and Mexico, between Americans and Mexicans.

The main reason I teach about this is so that you’ll value it. Value any place that’s not your own. Learning about some place that’s different than what they’re used to. I taught my kids about Mexico City. Mexico City is amazing and it wasn’t just this is the capital of Mexico so memorize it. Mexico City is filled with culture and history (Christine, 16 February 2007).
If students were to rethink their relation to these people and places, then they also needed to pose questions about these places and how and why negative perceptions arose and continued to hang around in these students' minds.

I asked them why might people not want immigration to happen and they said racism. I would want them to question why we’re afraid of the other, why we’re afraid of the other places, why we have these connotations or images of the other and of other places and other people. I challenge them in their language about place. Like the word indigenous (Christine, 16 February 2007).

Her students saw Mexicans (even those in their own city) as others on the far side of a wall and wanted to maintain that wall. In challenging this position, she hoped her students could relate to the racism surrounding Mexicans in the U.S. as well as thinking about the racism around them. If effective, Christine’s students would not only act in the world but act differently in the world because they would see themselves connected to other people and empowered to address unjust systems. This unit did not yield its intended results. In the final project, she expected to get a set of essays in support of immigration or in opposition to a literal wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Instead, the beliefs they held about immigration and the wall appeared largely unchanged at the end of the unit.

The frustration Christine felt with the failure of this unit, the time constraints she felt in relation to covering the entire textbook, and lack of knowledge on the part of her students led to a change in her pedagogy. Rather than continue her path, Christine returned to a traditional style in subsequent lessons. Rather than blurred boundaries, Christine began to share with her students a more constrained view of geography. Figure 4 reflects the renewed bounding of places in her teaching.

*Figure 4. Christine’s constrained landscape of geography*

During a unit on Japan, like that on Mexico, Christine wanted students to understand and value the country and its people. With her students focused on the superiority of the U.S. she wanted them to see that the rest of the world was not inferior. She was aware of the Japan they would encounter in U.S. history and wanted to undermine and counter this perception before it arose. Christine focused on Japan’s strengths – how they managed their economy and how they built an infrastructure that could withstand tsunamis. At the heart of her lesson was value – valuing others and seeing that the Japanese could accomplish the same things and more that Americans could accomplish. She was trying to disrupt their superior worldview and develop one that celebrated other places. But her practice focused on a study of common physical features of Japan, a representation of singular identities of Japanese people, and a loss of complexity. She presented Japan as a uniform place where landscapes, the people, and the economy were static and common. While the U.S. had regions, Japan
had a generalisable geography. She tried to address some of these issues but found it difficult to teach Japan in a complicated manner when students struggled to differentiate Asia and Japan as a place within Asia.

When Christine shifted methods, she knew she was simplifying her teaching and abandoning her goals. The post-observation discussion focused on the limited knowledge her students brought and her response. Her critical lens on geography teaching faded through the semester. She remained concerned about her methods, but lost the attention to the impact that teaching had on the mindset of her learners. She might use Appiah (2006) to see the curriculum but failed to let him show her how her teaching reified the structures she questioned. Her lens became less questioning and sustained the hegemonic view of the colonizer. The impact of Christine’s change – the reification of the U.S. as unique from and central in the world – was evident in the kinds of questions her students posed about Japan. Their questions about poverty in Japan compared to the wealth of the United States and about Japan as simply another part of Asia indicated ways of thinking that Christine wanted to disrupt. But her students remained intent on seeing difference. The U.S., an independent country full of infrastructure and lacking in poverty, was a contrast to the barely noticeable Japan in which people’s small houses indicated their lack of wealth and advancement. Asia was diverse, like the U.S., but Japan was uniform. It had a single typography while the U.S. had many. She tried to meet her students where she thought they were. Without models for how to balance the misunderstandings her students held with her desire to challenge their ideologies, Christine drew upon the kind of geography teaching she knew best without examining the hidden curriculum she was teaching.

Wendy, Rene, and Christine shared a critique of geography as traditionally taught. They were less concerned about methods and more concerned about the ways this study of geography limited how their students came to know others in the world. Knowing the many ways in which students will interact with people beyond their immediate communities, these interns wanted to offer their students different ways for making sense of other people in a more just and open-minded fashion. Although they wanted to free their students from an imperial ideology, each demonstrated that it rested within them and surfaced at some juncture. For Wendy, it framed her pedagogy, Rene was lured to it when she had no models, and Christie fell back to it when she struggled to do what was asked of her. What is notable is not just that these surfaced but the manner. There is a noticeable shift in critical reflexivity from when they talked about how their students (and other teachers) saw the world and the impact of their own teaching. The critical lens they extolled before was not part of their classroom practice and they did not read their teaching as a potentially colonizing text.

A Strategy Involving the Glocal: Alan’s “Solutions”

Alan shared many traits with the other interns. He was born and schooled in a suburban environment which affected his teaching. He wanted to challenge the way in which his students positioned themselves in the world. He shared a lack of experience and few models to rely on. What distinguished Alan was his use of the local, his conceptual study, and his reflexive practice. Alan’s teaching context had a very strong sense of place (Duncan & Duncan, 2001; Harvey, 1996). He described his teaching community using words like “narrow”, “rural”, and “isolated.” He took advantage of this insular community as a resource for helping students understand the larger world. He used the local sense of place as a frame for teaching conceptually, helping his students understand other places, and evaluating economic and political structures that linked places far and near. Alan helped students examine and understand local systems as a way of helping them critically inquire into less familiar systems. Using local attachments in this manner allowed him to draw on students’ interest and local
knowledge so that he could scale up from Smallville. He was also reflexive about his practice, noting when the thinking he wanted was not received. In this way, he is able to offer a model for transcending the dilemmas that the other teachers faced and retaining his intentions.

Alan's intentions in teaching geography were to have students understand that the local and global were connected and part of a system that resisted scalar differentiation. Geographers utilize the term “glocal” to reflect this interconnection (Delanty, 2000; Swyngedouw, 1997). His view of the world and our ideal relationship to it is reflected in figure 5. The overlay of the world reflects his attempt to put these ideas—local and global—into conversation. The view comes largely from his undergraduate background in international relations, development, and economics where he studied the interplay of countries and their politics. Alan did not merely want his students to be familiar with others or to think better of them; he wanted them to see how their lives were interconnected. He wanted his students to understand how their local actions affected the globe and how global actions affected their community. He achieved this in his teaching because he did not teach about places; he taught about the systems and concepts that framed the world.

Figure 5. Map of Alan’s view of the world

Alan made an effort to help his students see themselves as global actors even if they never left home. He wanted students to see that systems were global; the way in which actions in one place were implicated in giving meaning to and shaping the realities of people in other places.

I think it is more showing the relationships, where things are in relationship to each other. When they see China trying to get resources from Africa, we talk about that in the news... being able to see why is China going to Africa when they are this far away from it or with us there in the Middle East. Why are we in the Middle East looking at oil or trying to get oil from there. I want them to start asking questions when they’re reading that newspaper article about what’s going on here that I’m not seeing or what else is going on there (Alan, 8 February 2007).

In this conversation Alan illustrated his approaches to the glocal. He explored the interests that drew together seemingly distant places. In the examples cited above, Africans’ interactions with their oil fields were affected by the economic needs and political interests not only of the Africans but of China or the United States as well. Africa had less control over its oil supply and negotiation with world demand than donor countries that forged relationships to take advantage of a natural resource that exists
outside their boundaries. Thus, China and the life of the Chinese were shaping the lives of Africans, and the Africans, through their ability to supply China with oil, were affecting the lives of the Chinese. For Alan, this had an additional connection to how we might choose to respond to these global power struggles through our local decisions as voters and consumers. Alan wanted his students to understand the complex interactions and to see themselves as agents in shaping the field. Of course, he wanted them to act in a just manner.

Alan developed numerous lessons around a decision to build a Wal-Mart in Smallville. These lessons demonstrated concepts such as sense of place, connectivity, impact, and glocalization. Alan was able to implicate his students and their isolated community through Wal-Mart.

My kids were talking about the new Wal-Mart that’s going to be built in Smallville and I showed them a video on Wal-Mart – “Is Wal-Mart good for America?” They went to a city in Ohio that was literally a clone for Smallville. When the kids finally saw the lower pricing and how they get their pricing. I said, think of Goodrich’s…having one store in Smallville versus Wal-Mart where a third of the American population shops every week. Which one has more buying power? (Alan, 23 February 2007).

Alan went on to explain the economic impact.

You have to understand the economic choices you make…it doesn’t matter to you because you’ll buy your $50 DVD player and go watch a movie, but you have to understand that the money in turn goes somewhere else. It doesn’t stay in your community. It fosters growth in China if that’s where it was made and it encourages Wal-Mart to keep doing that because you’re basically giving your stamp of approval to their behavior. By buying something at Wal-Mart, you are encouraging them…“I like your low prices; I don’t care what you do. I’m endorsing your behavior.” One of the kids made an interesting point…basically we value lower prices over taking care of our community (Alan, 23 February 2007).

Alan relied on students’ understanding of their locality as a starting point into understanding a concept that he hoped would help students make connections between their own lives and other places and people. He broke down these larger concepts into manageable and relevant pieces for his students. For example, he talked about a sense of place by starting in Smallville and then examining the ways people around the world attached meaning to their community. He used their desire to preserve their local identity and businesses as a way to talk about Africa and the exploitation of oil. In both cases, students were able to see who benefited and how in these global economic systems. He talked generally about a sense of conflict between peoples and then allowed them to study Northern Ireland as an example. In each of these cases, the place studied was an example of a larger concept being developed rather than a study of the place itself. He was asking students to understand a concept rather than a place. He was commonly drawn to examples like Wal-Mart where students had to understand an unequal distribution of resources, see their role in it, and identify how it affects themselves and others in the world. In this way, Alan brought the other closer to home; decisions were not empty but richly connected to the lives of people they had never met just as people they never met were making decisions about their community and lives.

Alan wanted this understanding to carry students beyond their community and to see the interconnectivity of the global and local. He recognized that his teaching did not
always serve this purpose. During an activity designed to have students compare different economic systems and their access to trade, he realized that students became more focused on assigning global economic indicators to countries than assessing their role in the global economy. He revised the activity to have students categorically defend their use of labels. In the process they recognized the values and lack of definition such labels held. Countries students identified with suddenly became undeveloped nations according to some criteria. This did not fit their paradigm and caused them to dig deeper and evaluate the limitations of labels and the limited information they provided. This project and others demonstrate that Alan was not “perfect” in his delivery of the purposes he avowed. Instead, it highlights his reflexive practices. He was constantly aware of the questions students posed and the positions they took in relation to the world. He was far more able to see when assignments and strategies produced an unintended hidden curriculum and worked to reshape this. He was regularly critical of his shortcomings in relation to his goals, but regularly reflective about the impact of his teaching on his students and able to adapt accordingly.

**Closing Comments**

Loomba (1998) and Vaughan (1994) argued that the strength of colonialism now and in the past was the way it conquered the mind of the colonized. This internalisation of exploitative structures from the institutional level to the personal level helped to fully integrate colonial ideologies into people and places. While other papers may refute or support this analysis of the colonized mind, this paper is interested in the colonizer’s mind. The hegemonic system relies on both sides having internalised a particular view of the world. The interns highlighted in this paper share with Cook’s (2008) volunteers an understanding of the complex ways in which this worldview emerges at a conscious and subconscious level. At the conscious level, these teachers are resisters who want to challenge the imperial systems they feel structure the world. But their actions show that their subconscious delineation of the world has not disappeared. This is not surprising, as they were educated in a system they described as preparing them to believe the U.S. has a superior position.

For Wendy, Rene, and Christine, these goals were interrupted by their subconscious. The courses they taught were organized in a manner that divided the world from the start. They took a regional and national approach to the world – the study of Mexico, Japan, Congo, India, etc. They learned the world through these boundaries and represented these boundaries to their students. In so doing, they reinforced the prevalence of the nation-state and did not help their students to scale above and below this level to examine patterns, differentiations, and relationships that exist there. This traditional approach to organization reinforces a Western lens on the world through the way in which they teach these places. Some interns started with this approach and others found themselves there when students failed to adopt proper ideologies in a different approach. This is not a paper designed to suggest that this teaching is good or bad. If the teachers had different intentions, this paper might seem less critical. But these teachers wanted to share a critical lens with their students, a lens they failed to use on themselves. When these teachers described their practices and its advantages and disadvantages, they analysed them according to depth of understanding and misunderstandings. Their reflections were not attentive to the way in which their students were dividing the world or the U.S.-centric, U.S.-privileged language their students were using. Given their critique, this is a glaring oversight and provides cause for disruption.

This paper may seem pessimistic in a first read, but it is not meant to be. In these teachers, there is hope. One element of hope is Alan who found a way to teach differently. His mentor wanted him to teach a traditional geography class complete with
map labeling and a country-by-country study. Alan argued his case for doing differently
and was given full reign of the geography class for the year. He knew from his
international studies coursework that the national or regional approach would not have
the desired results on helping his students understand the interconnected world. He
had the tools to consider the intersection of what he taught, how he taught, and the
kinds of thinking these might produce. Further, he quickly assessed the local values
and how to use them. He taught in the most insular community – most of his students
had never met someone who was not White – but was able to make the minds of these
students less insular. The other interns wanted the same thing. This differentiates them
from many geography teachers who have internalised the colonizer mentality and
teach geography through a lens of development – assessing how well countries
measure up in the global economy and suggesting a level playing field for participation
in the global economy. Although some of the interns taught this unintentionally, they
held a different worldview. These interns’ experiences with place encouraged them to teach in a complex, socially-constructed
manner which could impact how students came to understand themselves as citizens
in a global world. They purposely wanted to present places so that students were less
inclined to view the U.S. as the centre of the world or as superior to other countries
(Willinsky, 1998). They also wanted their students to see that their lives interacted with
the lives of others far and near. These interns sought to challenge the imperial roots of
geography education (Fairgrieve, 1926; Kent, 2002).

There needs to be more work in preparing teachers to implement their beliefs into their
practice. If geography is the form of literacy that provides the tools for reading the
world as a text, then prospective teachers need coursework that disrupts traditional
experiences with geography. These courses should include critical experiences in
human and physical geography that attend to deconstructing the ways in which the
world is named, not only experiences in naming the world. This coincides with more
complex ways of understanding how places are structured. But perhaps the most
important lesson in this story is not about the content we give to teachers, but about the
need to consciously confront worldviews. As theorists around the world argue about
how to de-colonize the colonized mind, the same must be asked here of the colonizer’s
mind. We have not yet named the practices that allow our students to critically
evaluate the institutions around them and how these limit their knowledge (if knowledge
is not presented to us, how do we know it exists?). We see how difficult it is to disrupt a
Western framework in those who want to be disrupted. Thus, the task at hand is
significant. It is not merely teaching about the world to see and name patterns, but to
see oneself as Alan does - an important cog in a global system, too small to affect
change individually, but contingent upon individual changes in perspective and action.
De-colonizing the world cannot come from merely attending to the colonized. After all,
this is a global hegemonic system.

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