



IMPERIAL DEBRIS: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination

ANN LAURA STOLER

New School for Social Research

Ruins of a Great House

. . . A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,
Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next
Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,
Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplexed
In memory now by every ulcerous crime.

The world's green age then was a rotting lime
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.

The rot remains with us, the men are gone.

But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind

That fans the blackening ember of the mind,

My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.¹

—Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948–1984*

Scholarship is produced in uneven waves of reaction and anticipation—sometimes prescient about that which has not yet entered the public domain, other times struggling to keep up what seismic shifts that render our observations belabored and late. Studies of empire hold something of both. In the United States, in the wake of September 11, 2001, and the invasion of Iraq, political commentators who sought to sanction that intervention called on a dismally familiar frame of imperial beneficence and defense—prompting the reaction of scholars long critical

of imperial regimes past and present that have thrived on occupations, dislocations, and preemptive military assault in the name of peace.

Still, academic debates about the lessons of empire—that first crescendoed and have since diminished as the war on Iraq has intensified—have been contained and constrained by the framing of issues and arguments against which critique has been posed. In the rush to account for the nature of imperial practices today and their similarities or differences from earlier European and U.S. imperial interventions, a very particular vocabulary has seized hold of our intellectual and political space. It is a vocabulary that is sharp and critical, bound to the urgent themes of security, preparedness, states of emergency, and exception that are so current today.

The less dramatic durabilities of duress that imperial formations produce as ongoing, persistent features of their ontologies, have been set aside as if less “at hand,” less pressing and less relevant to current global priorities and political situations. This special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* on “Imperial Debris” reflects on ways of addressing these more protracted imperial processes that saturate the subsoil of people’s lives and persist, sometimes subadjacently, over a longer durée. But its challenge is directed more broadly, at a postcolonial studies of the present moment—overconfident in its analytics and its conceptual vocabulary, too assured of what we presume to know about the principles and practices of empire that remain in an active register. For some critics, this has dulled its critical edge. For others, its problematics seem increasingly parochial and irrelevant, if not obsolete.²

I would defer from this latter assessment and instead identify this moment as a potentially vital one, an opportunity to recast our questions, to revisit assumptions, to embrace not that “ease” but the more uncomfortable tenor of postcolonial studies’ contemporary malaise. I think of *mal-aise* here in its rich multiple senses of embodied discomfort, a lethargy borne of vague ill-ease. Such malaise, I argue, has been prompted by (1) an overly expansive sense of what we imagine we know about the different temporalities in which imperial forms endure and (2) by a narrowing attentiveness to the actual imperial residues and remnants that may elude our chartings. What joins colonial pasts and imperial presence seems to escape some of the bald-faced rubrics on which students of the colonial have come to rely.

As I, and others, have argued for some time, postcolonial scholarship has sometimes embraced a smug sense that the nature of colonial governance is a given and we can now effortlessly move on to the complexities and more subtle dispositions of the postcolonial present.³ Literary critic Terry Eagleton concurs, suggesting that postcolonial studies suffers from an “increasingly blunted” historical

sense.⁴ Frederick Cooper, too, points to a flattening of time, analyses “unmoored” from specific relations between colonial policy and postcolonial political structures.⁵ Historical “blunting” thus can take many forms: in this article, the charge is to refocus on the connective tissue that continues to bind human potentials to degraded environments, and degraded personhoods to the material refuse of imperial projects. At issue is the political life of imperial debris, the longevity of structures of dominance, and the uneven pace with which people can extricate themselves from the colonial order of things. Rubrics such as “colonial legacy” offer little help. They fail to capture the evasive space of imperial formations past and present as well as the perceptions and practices by which people are forced to reckon with features of those formations in which they remain vividly and imperceptibly bound. They also gloss over the creative, critical, and sometimes costly measures people take to become less entangled.

ON RUIN AND IMPERIAL FORMATIONS

We turn here to look at “imperial formations,” rather than at empire per se, to register the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation. Imperial formations are relations of force. They harbor political forms that endure beyond the formal exclusions that legislate against equal opportunity, commensurate dignities, and equal rights. In working with the concept of imperial formation rather than empire, the emphasis shifts from fixed forms of sovereignty and its denials, to gradated forms of sovereignty and what has long marked the technologies of imperial rule—sliding and contested scales of differential rights.⁶ Imperial formations are defined by racialized relations of allocations and appropriations. Unlike empires, they are processes of becoming, not fixed things. Not least they are *states of deferral* that mete out promissory notes that are not exceptions to their operation but constitutive of them: imperial guardianship, trusteeships, delayed autonomy, temporary intervention, conditional tutelage, military takeover in the name of humanitarian works, violent intervention in the name of human rights and security measures in the name of peace.

By invoking Raymond Williams’s notion of a “formation,” we call attention to those “tendencies,” with “variable and often oblique relations to formal institutions.”⁷ Our interest is in dissociated and dislocated histories of the present, in those sites and circumstances of dispossession that imperial architects disavow as not of their making, in violences of disenfranchisement that are shorn of their status as imperial entailments and that go by other names. As Edouard Glissant once noted, a population “whose domination by an Other is concealed

... must search elsewhere for the principle of domination ... because the system of domination ... is not directly tangible.”⁸ Our interest is in the opacities that imperial formations produce between the elusive vectors of accountability and the lasting tangibilities in which ruination operates—and on which such formations thrive.

In its common usage, “ruins” are often enchanted, desolate spaces, large-scale monumental structures abandoned and grown over. Ruins provide a quintessential image of what has vanished from the past and has long decayed. What comes most easily to mind is Cambodia’s Angkor Wat, the Acropolis, the Roman Coliseum, icons of a romantic loss that inspired the melancholic prose of generations of European poets who devotedly made pilgrimages to them.⁹ In thinking about “ruins of empire” we explicitly work against that melancholic gaze to reposition the present in the wider structures of vulnerability and refusal that imperial formations sustain. Nor is it the wistful gaze of imperial nostalgia to which we turn. Walter Benjamin provides the canonical text for thinking about ruins as “petrified life,” as traces that mark the fragility of power and the force of destruction. But ruins are also sites that condense alternative senses of history. Ruination is a corrosive process that weighs on the future and shapes the present. Unlike Benjamin, this focus on imperial debris seeks to mark the “trail of the psyche”—a venture he rejected—as much it seeks to follow his acute alertness to the “track of things.”¹⁰

“To ruin,” according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* “is to inflict or bring great and irretrievable disaster upon, to destroy agency, to reduce to a state of poverty, to demoralize completely.”¹¹ Attention here is on *to ruin* as an active process, and a vibrantly violent verb. In this forum, we turn with intention not to the immediate violence of Iraq and declared war zones, but to the enduring quality of imperial remains and what they render in impaired states. This is not a turn to ruins as memorialized and large-scale monumental “leftovers” or relics—although these come into our purview as well—but rather to what people are “left with”: to what remains, to the aftershocks of empire, to the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind. The focus then is not on inert remains but on their vital refiguration. The question is pointed: How do imperial formations persist in their material debris, in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people’s lives?

Imperial effects occupy multiple historical tenses. They are at once products of the past imperfect that selectively permeate the present as they shape both the

conditional subjunctive and uncertain futures. Such effects are never done with in the definitely closed off *passé composé*. As Frantz Fanon wrote in his study of the extensive mental disorders that followed French rule in Algeria, it is the “tinge of decay”—the indelible smack of degraded personhoods, occupied spaces, and limited possibilities—that were (and remain) hardest to erase.¹² They are also the hardest to critically locate. Fanon worked between two poles of decay: at one pole was an evocative figurative sense that situated the breakdown of persons, their pathologies, and mental disabilities as imperial effects. As he argues, it was more than the future of such patients that was already “mortgaged” by the “malignancy” of their psychological states. “A whole generation of Algerians” who were subject to “generalized homicide” would be “the human legacy of France in Algeria.”¹³

But the ruinous “tinge of decay” for Fanon was never figurative alone. At the other pole lay the material, tangible, and physical destruction of Algerian landscapes, drained swamps, burnt-out homes, and corroded infrastructures of over a century of French rule and nearly a decade of colonial war. To work between these two poles is to acknowledge both the potential and the problems in sustaining a balance between the analytic power that *to ruin* carries as an evocative metaphor and the critical purchase that it offers for grounding processes of decomposition and recomposition, degradation, and decay. These latter processes are of our time as they reactivate the traces of another. Such remainders impinge on the allocation of space, resources, and on the contours of material life. The analytic challenge is to work productively, if uneasily, with and across this tension. In so doing, the project is not to fashion a genealogy of catastrophe or redemption. Making connections where they are hard to trace is not designed to settle scores but rather to recognize that these are unfinished histories, not of victimized pasts but consequential histories that open to differential futures.

“Ruin” is both the claim about the state of a thing and a process affecting it. It serves as both noun and verb. To turn to its verbal, active sense is to begin from a location that the noun *ruin* too easily freezes into stasis, into inert object, passive form. Imperial projects are themselves processes of ongoing ruination, processes that “bring ruin upon,” exerting material and social force in the present. By definition ruination is an ambiguous term; both an act of ruining, a condition of being ruined, and a cause of it. Ruination is an act perpetrated, a condition to which one is subject, and a cause of loss. These three senses may overlap in effect but they are not the same. Each has its own temporality. Each identifies different durations and moments of exposure to a range of violences and degradations that may be

immediate or delayed, subcutaneous or visible, prolonged or instant, diffuse or direct.

By the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* again, ruination is a process that brings about “severe impairment, as of one’s health, fortune, honor, or hopes.” Conceptually, ruination may condense those impairments, or sunder them apart. To speak of colonial ruination is to trace the fragile and durable substance and signs, the visible and visceral senses in which the effects of empire are reactivated and remain. But ruination is more than a process. It is also a political project that lays waste to certain peoples and places, relations, and things. To think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artifacts of empire as dead matter or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations and strategic and active positioning within the politics of the present.

To focus on ruins is to broach the protracted quality of decimation in people’s lives, to track the production of new exposures and enduring damage.¹⁴ Some elements of this concern are not new. Critical geographers and environmental historians have long taken the relationship between colonial rule and degraded environments as their subject.¹⁵ And the multiple legacies of empire are what postcolonial scholarship has long imagined itself to account for, if not explain. One task is to bring these fields of inquiry into more organic conversation. But notions like “colonial legacy” and “colonial vestige” are deceptive concepts that deflect analysis more than they clear the way.

As Foucault charged, such “ready-made syntheses” are placeholders for processes that unite disparate forces under one term and gloss too easily over dispersed effects.¹⁶ In the case of imperial formations, a “legacy” makes no distinctions between what holds and what lies dormant, between residue and recomposition, between a weak and a tenacious trace. Such rubrics instill overconfidence in the knowledge that colonial history matters—far more than it animates an analytic vocabulary for deciphering how it does so. As such, it defers some of the hardest questions about the uneven durabilities of colonial constrictions that we are only beginning to comprehend. Such terms do little to account for the contemporary force of imperial remains, what people count as remains, and as importantly what they do with them.

With this in mind, a focus on “ruins of empire” provides not a melancholic gaze, but a critical vantage point on one. Asking how people live with and in ruins redirects the engagement elsewhere, to the politics animated, to the common sense they disturb, to the critiques condensed or disallowed, and to the social relations avidly coalesced or shattered around them. What material form do ruins

of empire take when we turn to shattered peoples and scarred places rather than to their evocations and enchantments? Situations of disparate time and place come into renewed view. Can we think of imperial ruins as the Agent Orange–infested landscapes of Vietnam, as the hazardous wastes in former nuclear test sites of the Bikini Atolls, as the defunct sugar mills of central Java, and as the decrepit barracks of India’s railway communities which many Anglo-Indians still uneasily occupy while others refuse to recognize that these are feasible places to live?¹⁷ Under what conditions are those sites left to decompose, remanded, reconsigned, or disregarded? Some remains are ignored as innocuous leftovers, others petrify, some become toxic debris. Others are stubbornly inhabited to make a political point, or requisitioned for a newly refurbished commodity life for tourist consumption.

What of those sites of decomposition that fall outside historical interest and preservation, of those places that are not honored as ruins of empire proper and go by other names? Some remains are rejected as ruins altogether. Much depends on who is doing the labeling. As Derek Walcott noted in his Nobel lecture of 1992, the *tristes tropiques* that Claude Lévi-Strauss so lamented in his elegiac tribute to “the already decrepit suburbs” of Lahore, may have been a pathos of empire felt more by 19th-century European transients—anthropologists and the like—than those who actually dwelled there. Walcott observes that “the sigh of History rises over ruins, not landscapes” but in the Antilles the only ruins were those of “sugar estates and abandoned forts” and there “the sigh of history dissolves” (1992) That the “absence of ruins” in the Caribbean equals an absence of living history is not an assessment with which all agree. Richard Price instructs us to seek those traces elsewhere, in the “semi-parodic artworks” of the iconic Martiniquan figure of Medard, a man who in the 1950s and 1960s “made from the detritus of industrial society (cellophane from cigarette packages, silver paper from gum wrappers, bentwood from boxes of Camembert)” objects that retold stories of colonial violence as he rewrote their plots.¹⁸

But Walcott, too, was impatient with the “consoling pity” of travelers who “carried with them the infection of their own malaise,” those consumed with sadness because they “misunderstood the light and the people on whom the light falls.” Rejecting the pathos of ruins, he opted for a celebration of survival. But his vision was not only romantic. It was full of rage. His descriptions of the sewers that spewed into white sand beaches and “polluted marinas” call attention to ruined ecologies as the profit of some, and the ruination of the lives of others. “Proceed with caution,” Doris Sommer warns. Better to resist the “the rush of sentimental identification that lasts barely as long as the read” or regard.¹⁹ Melancholy, compassion, and

pity nourish imperial sensibilities of destruction and the redemptive satisfaction of chronicling loss. Ruins hold histories but are less than the sum of the sensibilities of people who live in them. Instead we might turn to ruins as epicenters of renewed claims, as history in a spirited voice, as sites that animate new possibilities, bids for entitlement, and unexpected political projects.

Some kinds of imperial ruin are easier to identify than others. Projects of cultural salvage—whether of monuments, artifacts, customs, or peoples—are available for scrutiny in the way others are not. There are resurrected ruins, like those studied by John Collins, part of the World Bank–UNESCO cultural heritage projects designed to “harvest the economic value” and capitalize on the allure of partially restored people and things. Such restorations disperse and redistribute people, making their ways of being vital to national development and productive of new inequalities.²⁰ Then there are those ruins that stirred Jamaica Kincaid’s derisive and angry view of Antigua, marked with buildings whose faded placards note “repairs pending” for decades, while damaged but “splendid old buildings from colonial times” are well maintained in carefully tended disrepair.²¹

Some imperial ruins can be distinguished by where they are located—in metropole or colony—on faded imperial maps. Others cannot. Strewn throughout the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia are the enticements of enjoying “Ruins by Day, Luxury by Night,” as eager travelers “balance the indolence of a colonial-era luxury hotel with the more demanding task of exploring centuries-old Khmer ruins from dawn ’til dusk.”²² These are more than leisurely distractions for the history-minded, knowledge-seeking traveler. Edification here, like the Grand Tour of the European bourgeois class in earlier centuries, not only distinguishes Culture from cultures. It replays the “salvage” rescue operation that European empires claimed as their benevolent task. Napoleon took more archaeologists and “rubble seekers” with him to Egypt than surgeons and surveyors. Nineteenth-century colonials in the Netherlands Indies participated in Europe’s obsession with visiting Hindu ruins when they were not accumulating tigers as trophies on their days off.

Colonialisms have been predicated on guarding natural and cultural patrimonies for populations assumed to be needy of guidance in how to value and preserve them.²³ This sort of attention to ruins chronicles a present landscape and people already found wanting. But this gaze on the ruin, so much a part of the contemporary analysis of the ruins of modernity, a gaze that echoed Diderot’s sense that he felt “freer” in the presence of ruins, is not our interest here.²⁴ Rather than the introspective gaze of Europeans on ruins, we look to the lives of those living in them. That shift is key for tracing the dried up veins of Anaconda’s copper mines

that joined Butte, Montana and Chuquicamata, Chile and wrecked privation on the lives and bodies of their entrapped laboring populations.²⁵

Imperial nostalgia plays through and sells sojourns among colonial ruins in other, predictable ways. There is the “find” of worthy voyagers, the “ruins of Popokvil atop Bokor Mountain in Cambodia. . . . There, you’ll find the remains of French colonial-era town—a crumbling post office, an empty Catholic church.”²⁶ At the Mbweni Ruins Hotel in Zanzibar guests can sleep in what was once a school for “freed slave girls,” the first Anglican Christian missionary settlement in East Africa, made into a domesticated “colony.” Arranged in 1871 in clusters of small neat houses and garden plots, this was precisely the bucolic vision that imperial architects harbored to domesticate their recalcitrant, racially ambiguous and destitute populations throughout the colonial world.²⁷ Guests can learn the history of philanthropic imperial projects and can take solace in the multiple times that the buildings were abandoned and restored with the intervention of European good works, at the height of imperial expansion and after.²⁸ We are reminded of Renato Rosaldo’s astute observation that imperialist nostalgia is not a postcolonial pleasure but a concerted colonial one, a mourning contingent on what colonialism has destroyed.²⁹ Such ruins might be read as vestige and remnant but they are neither history’s refuse nor unclaimed debris.

Imperial ruins can also mark the contest for originary racist claims. Zanzibar’s tourists may be unknowing participants in the celebration of empire in the Mbweni Ruins Hotel, but the overt political life of Zanzibar’s ruins is lodged elsewhere—in the 60 acres of stone ruins, “the Great Zimbabwe,” from which Cecil Rhodes pilfered his prize possession, a carved soapstone bird with which he adorned his Capetown house in 1889, the year before he established a Royal Charter for the British South Africa Company. The stone birds and the ruins that housed them were confiscated by Rhodes but it was successive states controlled by white settlers and later by African nationalists who each made the ruins their own. White racial supremacy and refusal of it, as Henrika Kuklick so eloquently writes, were fought on the terrain of these ruins. “The Great Zimbabwe” was requisitioned as “proof” of racialized progenitors in the 19th century and reemerged at the center of heated political contest a century later.³⁰ Clearly, these are not all imperial “ruins” of common vintage, nor are their political entailments the same. They are, however, what the Afghanistani photographer and performance artist Lida Abdul argues, ruins “around which stories are wrapped to hide the sounds and images that roam” in an around them.³¹

“THE ROT REMAINS”

Perhaps the most critical task is to address, if not answer, a question prompted again by Derek Walcott, which provides the epigraph for this article. What constitutes, what he so searingly captures in “Ruins of a Great House,” “the rot that remains” when the men are gone? What are the forms that rot can take? What does it corrode, from what interior spaces does it take hold, and where is it that it remains? Walcott’s language is poetic, but what he looks to is not. There may be remnants that slip from immediate vision, detritus that is harder to grasp—intimate injuries that appear as only faint traces, or deep deformations and differentiations of social geography that go by other names. There are social dislocations whose etiologies are found in labels that lead away from empire and push analysis away from colonial histories and in other directions: toward “urban decay,” “environmental degradation,” “industrial pollution,” or “racialized unemployment”—to analyses of those swept aside as the refuse of a capitalist market that has since moved on.

What work does it do to identify these as ruins of empire? What insights does it offer to recast these generic processes as patterned imperial effects that produce subjects with more limited possibilities and who are hampered differently by what is left? One argument might be that such a critical move makes connections that are not otherwise readily visible. Such renaming relocates processes dislodged from their specific histories, disjointed from the connections that made some people and places more susceptible to ruin than others. These are not ruins of empire in any figurative sense. Sharad Chari’s work with those who live on the toxic edges of oil refineries and in the remains of apartheid in Durban, South Africa, make this clear.³² These are zones of vulnerability that the living inhabit and to which we should attend.

One impulse in addressing the admittedly broad sense of imperial ruin that I embrace here might be to distinguish between those processes played out in imperial centers versus those situations and sites that appear in formerly colonized regions. But more might be gained by suspending that impulse and not making such distinctions too readily. The “interior” and “exterior” spaces of imperial formations may not correspond to the common geographical designations that imperial architects scripted themselves. Terms like *metropole* and *colony*, *core* and *periphery* presume to make clear what is not. We might rather think of other criteria to distinguish the contemporary zones of imperial duress that are more mutable and as mutable as imperial formations themselves: the breadth of corridors in which people can move, the virtual barriers by which they are cordoned off, the kinds of

infrastructure to which they have access, and the preemptive racialized exclusions and exemptions in which they live.

In a recent article for a U.S. audience, Israeli novelist David Grossman describes the apathy and studied indifference that ongoing political, military, and religious conflict imposes on those living in Israel, Palestine, and elsewhere in war-torn places of the world. The image he conjures is of people whose moral compasses are narrowed, whose feelings are numbed, whose language is rendered more shallow, thinned by the onslaught on their everyday. As he puts it, there is a “shrinking of the ‘surface area’ of the soul that comes in contact with the bloody and menacing world out there.” Destruction for Grossman is inside people and out—coating their micro- and material environments.³³ The resonance—and sharp contrast—with Walcott’s “rot that remains” and Fanon’s “tinge of decay” is striking. In the nonimmediate, extended conditions of the latter, numbness can give way to critique, language can become sharpened and thickened—rather than thinned—with double-entendres that mock the security measures that terrorize and destroy rather than protect.

Stories congeal around imperial debris as do critiques. So does disqualified knowledge and subjugated genealogies decoupled from the processes of which they were a part. The overgrown ruins of the palace of Sans Souci in Haiti’s northern mountains, that Michel Rolph Trouillot has so powerfully described (built by its first black king after the defeat of the French in 1804) harbors a suspended, quieted history of the Haitian Revolution and the differential histories of colonial relations wedged between mortar and crumbling stone.³⁴

Ruins, as Kuklick found in Zanzibar, can take on a political life of their own. As Nadia Abu El-Haj writes, in Jerusalem “partly destroyed buildings were partially restored and reconstructed *as ruins* in order to memorialize more recent histories of destruction, and older stones were integrated into modern architectural forms in order to embody temporal depth.”³⁵ Her point is to underscore: Ruins are not just found, they are made. They become repositories of public knowledge and new concentrations of public declaration. But the most enduring ruins in Israel are neither recognized as ruins nor as the ruination of colonialism; they are not acknowledged to be there at all. These are the ruins of Palestinian villages razed, bulldozed, and buried by the state-endorsed Israeli Afforestation Project, an intensive planting campaign that has literally obliterated the very presence of Palestinian villages and farmsteads on Jerusalem’s periphery for over 50 years.³⁶ If planting is a key technology in Israeli politics, here ruination has a perverse, protracted, and violent colonial history. “Security groves,” as they are called,

replace Palestinian olive orchards with cypress and pines, recreational parks dense with eucalyptus trees smooth over Palestinian cemeteries. Not least, remains of Arab villages have been effaced—as are the claims of their former inhabitants that these were never “abandoned” fields but ones they owned and long cultivated.

Ruins are made but not just by anyone, anytime, or anywhere. Large-scale ruin making takes resources and planning that may involve forced removal of populations and new zones of uninhabitable space, reassigning inhabitable space, and dictating how people are suppose to live in them. As such, these ruin-making endeavors are typically state projects, ones that are often strategic, nation-building, and politically charged.³⁷ The fabrication of nuclear ruins was critical in the construction of Cold War national defense policies and in shaping a U.S. public prompted to be fascinated and traumatized by the specter of nuclear war.³⁸ Nuclear ruins remain central to the political imaginary of the U.S. security state today. Joseph Masco argues that Cold War planners saw their task to be one of molding and emotionally managing a U.S. public. They did so with simulated bomb threats and theatrical evacuations in cities and towns across the country. Strategic public operations imagined ruins, televised ruins, and simulated ruins, all with attention to particular domestic objects, pointedly anticipating the decimation of what touched Americans most closely, the hard-won household technology and material comforts of postwar quotidian life.

Ruins draw on residual pasts to make claims on futures. But they can also create a sense of irretrievability or of futures lost. The Ochagavia hospital in Santiago’s suburbs, built as a “spectacular showcase” to Pinochet’s vision of Chile’s modernity and progressivism, showcases something else: With what Jon Beasley describes as “the beached whale of a monument whose presence has been repressed and ignored,” the half-built hospital recollects what could have been rather than what was.³⁹ How such modernist ruins differ from imperial ones would be suggested not only by the different histories they unsettle and differently call on but also by the specific people dispossessed, or rendered as waste by them.

This sense of arrested rather than possible futures and the ruins they produce, is one way to convey the problematic processes of development policies. As Vyjayanthi Rao shows, the building of the Srisailem megadam in southern India that began in 1981 and displaced more than 150 thousand people and submerged over 100 villages makes real a failed future and the forceful presence of imperial debris in visceral ways. During the dry season, these submerged villages reappear to haunt those who once lived there and then disappear, every year as both sign and substance of unfulfilled promise. The village ruins contrast the archaeological

salvage project of Hindu temples enacted in the same space. Here, the critique of development is laid bare in a landscape scarred with ruined villages, laid to waste alongside the transplanted temple ruins, preened for historical tourism and preserved as part of India's national heritage.⁴⁰

Looking to imperial ruins not necessarily as monuments but as ecologies of remains opens to wider social topographies. We might think here of Agent Orange in Vietnam, seeped deep in the land and in bodies disabled and deformed over three generations. The ruins of Native American burial sites mark only one site in a broader contested ground of new land claims and entitlements.⁴¹ But we might also think of what I elsewhere call "the carceral archipelago of empire" that has distributed throughout the globe—convict islands; detention centers; pauper, children's, and penal colonies—gradated zones of containment that mixed and matched "security" and defense with confinement, abuse, "education," and abandonment.⁴² Such infrastructures of large and small scale bear what captivated Walter Benjamin, the "marks and wounds of the history of human violence."⁴³ With these spatially assigned "traces of violence," it is more than the "deadening of affects" to which we turn.⁴⁴

Focusing on the materiality of debris, we seek to stay in the "logic of the concrete" as Nancy Hunt urges in *Colonial Lexicon* when she redirects us back to Lévi-Strauss's term.⁴⁵ Ruins can be marginalized structures that continue to inform social modes of organization but that cease to function in ways they once did. What happens at the threshold of transformation when unfinished development projects are put to other use, when test sites are grown over, or when Soviet military camps are abandoned and remade as in the Ukrainian–Polish borderlands that Karolina Szmągalska-Follis writes about here?⁴⁶ What happens when island enclaves, no longer a declared nuclear zone, as in the Bikini Atoll, become repositories of vulnerabilities that are likely to last longer than the political structures that produced them? Each of these points not to ruins set off from people's lives but what it might mean to live in ruins—through, with, and as adept *bricoleurs* around them.

In thinking about imperial debris and ruin one is struck by how intuitively evocative and elusive such effects are, how easy it is to slip between metaphor and material object, between infrastructure and imagery, between remnants of matter and mind. The point of critical analysis is not to look "underneath" or "beyond" that slippage but to understand what work that slippage does and the political traffic it harbors. Reading W. G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction*, a meditation on Germany during and just after World War II, the numbness of living in the

still-smoldering ruins and the sheer mass of debris strikingly contrast the sorts of remains we write of here.⁴⁷

Our focus is not on present war zones (imperial or not) but it is on zones of abandonment.⁴⁸ If it is Giorgio Agamben who developed the concept of social abandonment, it is João Biehl's extraordinary ethnography, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* where it is given flesh. For Biehl, that zone produces persons who become "a human ruin," "leftover" in their unexceptional, patterned subjection "to the typically uncertain and dangerous mental health treatment reserved for the urban working poor" in Brazil.⁴⁹ The social abandonments under scrutiny in these pages are ruinations of a different sort: sites of risk proportioned by imperial effects. We track the "concrete trajectory" of colonial exclusions and derailments that carve out the structures of privilege, profit, and destruction today. Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) could help lead us back in that direction. There are no index entries for "empire" or "imperialism" in her powerful study of what she calls "the disaster capitalism complex," but the psychic and material connections are threaded through every chapter—from the current \$200 billion "homeland security industry" to U.S. support for military governments that eviscerated the subsistence of peoples in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil.⁵⁰

This is not to suggest that complex histories of capitalism and empire should all be folded into an imperial genealogy. It is, however, to attend to the evasive history of empire that disappears so easily into other appellations and other, more available contemporary terms. It is to recognize that the *bio* in biopolitical degradations is not haphazardly joined with histories of empire. The social terrain on which colonial processes of ruination leave their material and mental marks are patterned by the social kinds those political systems produced, by the racial ontologies they called into being, and by the deficiencies and threats associated with them.

Zygmunt Bauman identifies the production of waste and "wasted lives" as the required, intended, and inevitable debris of the modern.⁵¹ Bauman may be partially right but such a frame can only account for the fact of accumulated leftovers, of superfluous, obsolete, and bypassed people and things. It cannot, however, account for their densities and distribution. Modernity and capitalism can account for the left aside, but not where people are left, what they are left with, and what means they have to deal with what remains. Globalization may account for the dumping of toxic waste on the Ivory Coast but not the trajectory of its movement and the history that made west Africa a suitable and available site. Again, there are ruins of empire that are called "ruins" as well as those that are not. The modern production of nuclear testing can account for the proliferation of waste dumps, but not the campaign in

1996 to locate the Ward Valley nuclear waste dump in the heart of the Mojave Desert National Preserve and on land that Native American nations held sacred.⁵² At issue is whether this latter recognition produces more effective histories, what Fernando Coronil calls “relational histories,” that “connect fragments to wholes” of the imperial present.⁵³ Rethinking imperial formations as politics of dislocation and deferral that cut through the nation-state by delimiting interior frontiers as well as exterior ones, is one step in reordering our attention.⁵⁴

RACE AND IMPERIAL DEBRIS

Might we turn back to James Agee and Walker Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* not to mark the universal dignity and damages that dire poverty bestows, but as specific places and specific sorts of people abandoned by specific state policies and historical acts, as the embodied ruins of a racialized American empire?⁵⁵ And why does it seem so counterintuitive and forced to do so?

Kathleen Stewart makes it seem less so in her ethnography of those people who live among the detritus of West Virginia’s coal mining industry today. She excavates “the ruined and trashed” economy of the U.S. South, whose historical veins are coursed through with U.S. Coal and Oil Company land buyouts at the turn of the century, with hills that “became a wasteland of the unemployed” during the Great Depression, and with “over 100,000 dead in the mines since 1906.”⁵⁶ She might tell that story, as she insists in the conditional tense, but says she will not reproduce a seamless narrative. Instead she takes the “trash that collects around people’s places, like the ruins that collect in the hills” to track the composition and decomposition of people’s lives, their movement between decay, melancholy and agentive engagement.⁵⁷ As she puts it, “things do not simply fall into ruin or dissipate . . . [they] fashion themselves into powerful effects that remember things in such a way that ‘history’ digs itself into the present and people cain’t [*sic*] help but recall it.”⁵⁸ Agee’s story might be rewritten in a similar vein, not as the iconic story of the dignity that emerges from the indignities of being poor white in the rural south, nor only as a national, domestic racial story of industrializing America. One could imagine a reframing of this form of ruination as one moment in a broader history of U.S. empire, a history that would track cotton production and the creation of expert knowledge of eugenics that authorized institutionalized neglect both of newly freed blacks and “poor whites.”⁵⁹ These are not untold stories but they have not been told as racialized histories of U.S. empire.

Moving between ruins and ruination, between material objects and processes is sometimes easier said than done. Sometimes the ruins retain ghosts in vivid form

that reappear as they anticipate accidents not averted. Some such phantoms haunt central Java's sugar factories, described by John Pemberton as "forces moving on their own, operating by uncertain contracts and demanding untoward sacrificial exchange."⁶⁰ But in fact, in much of the colonial tropics, one is struck by the absence of colonial ruins, as in vast tracts of Vietnam once overrun by a multinational plantation industry. In some places, as Walcott claims, there is hardly a trace of a colonial ruin at all. There are not petrified dwellings as in Dresden partially burned to the ground, not open sewers clogging the senses, not a rampage of rats claiming new quarters, not the zoos Sebald so horrifically described full of mangled animals, no debris of watches that stopped ticking, no dolls with severed heads. Here we are not talking about an event of bombardment and the fast-acting decomposition that follows. The ruins of empire may have none of the immediacy of a freeze-frame.

But they can be as close at hand with an immediacy of another kind. "The Coolie," a fragment of E. Valentine Daniel's poem on Sri Lanka's tortured colonial history, provides a counterpoint to the master's ruinous tale.⁶¹ In Daniel's telling, colonialism is "like a rash spread on the skin of the landscape for cash." Such ruination can incite vibrant refusal to accept its terms and recast the story. As Hunt argues, hunting down the rusted guns in the Congo is really not the point of getting at the remains of the violence of rubber extraction under King Leopold—nor is it really what is left.⁶²

But sometimes, live ammunition is the political point, as in Vietnam today. These are not "ruins" *per se*, although of the over eight million tons of bombs dropped in Vietnam 30 years ago, there remain over 300 thousand tons of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) that includes cluster bombs, M79 grenade bombs, and flechette bombs still in the soil.⁶³ Limbs and lives are still being lost. Agent Orange, the military colloquialism for the 20 million gallons of deadly herbicides sprayed across Vietnam for ten years between 1961 and 1971 by U.S. forces has potent presence still. Its purpose was described as twofold: to lay bare the jungles and the cover under which Vietcong soldiers could potentially hide, and to destroy their food supplies. It defoliated more than five million acres of land.⁶⁴ Five hundred thousand acres of crops were destroyed. Toxic residues remain in soils, riverbeds, and the food chain.⁶⁵ On Sri Lanka's battered colonial history, Daniel writes:

. . . . The sole witness

to blood shed? The land, of course, with its wounds unfurled:
gouged here, leveled there, rivers running dry-bedded,
filling pits, flooding dams, in this unredeemed world.

The witnesses were also bodies themselves. Ten diseases are presently linked to exposure at the lethal levels used in Vietnam: these include cancers; respiratory disorders; severe mental retardation; and muscular-skeletal, organic, and developmental birth defects.

There is nothing “over” about this form of ruination: it remains in bodies, in the poisoned soil, in water on a massive and enduring scale. In 1984, Vietnam Veterans filed a class-action law suit against Dow Chemicals, Monsanto, and five other companies. They were accorded an out-of-court settlement of \$180 million. No compensation has ever been made to Vietnamese civilians.⁶⁶ This particular “imperial debris” rests in the deformed bodies of children whose grandparents were exposed.

LOVE OF RUINS VERSUS RESENTMENT IN THEM

In 1964, Derek Walcott wrote that “decadence begins when a civilization falls in love with its ruins.”⁶⁷ By Walcott’s account, England is doomed, as are those transposed excolonial subjects like V. S. Naipaul who pined for the grandeur of empire (as much, or more, than some British nostalgics themselves). Some ruins are loved more than others. One set of “nobly built but crumbling spaces” in the English “cult of ruin” enjoy particular and current favor. Ian Baucom refers to these as part of “country-house England”:⁶⁸

this ordered and disciplinary England that at once is financed by the economics of empire and marks, in dazzling expanses of Italian marble and filigreed iron, the dominion of the metropolis over domestic and colonial countrysides—for which a current generation of English nostalgics yearn.⁶⁹

Nostalgia is often about that which one has never known or ever seen. It also carries a sense that one is already always too late. As Naipaul laments in the *Enigma of Arrival*,

I had come to England at the wrong time. . . . I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which (like a provincial, from a far corner of the empire) I had created in my fantasy.⁷⁰

Lévi-Strauss shared the same sense of “missing out,” of belatedness in his first ethnographic travels. Disappointed by the “already decrepit suburbia” of Lahore,⁷¹ annoyed by the

huge avenues sketched out among the ruins (due, these, to the riots of the recent years) of houses five hundred years old . . . when was the right moment to see India? At what period would the study of the Brazilian savage have

yielded the purest satisfaction, the savage himself been at his peak? . . . Either I am a traveler of ancient times . . . or I am a traveler of our own day. . . . In either case I am the loser . . . for today, as I go groaning among the shadows, I miss, inevitably, the spectacle that is now taking shape . . . what I see is an affliction to me; and what I do not see, a reproach.⁷²

Lévi-Strauss cringes with self-mockery at his disdain for the now. Naipaul doesn't bother. If both are only too aware that they have been duped by an imaginary of the ruin, they still crave the Real. Naipaul wants more than the ruins of empire. Like Lévi-Strauss, his nostalgia is for what he can never know and has never seen. For the latter, it is a primitive in his prime, for the former, the evidence that empire was in opulent and working order. Both desire a state before the fall. Ian Baucom pinpoints when "things went wrong" for Naipaul—just when his England was sullied by large-scale migration of ex-colonial subjects.⁷³ But maybe things went really wrong when those subjects more loudly refused colonial terms of privilege, voided the imperial contract, and had no regard for Naipaul's ruins at all.

Imperial ruins, as we locate them here, are less sites of love than implacable resentment, disregard, and abandonment. Faisal Devji aptly refers to them as the "scene of a crime," but also as an ungraspable moment, a vanishing point that can never come into clear view.⁷⁴ As documents to damage, they can never be used to condemn the colonial alone. Nor should this be the point.⁷⁵ To call the low-income high rises that hover on the periphery of Paris where most of the riots took place in fall 2005, "ruins of French empire" is a metaphoric and material claim. It makes pointed material and affective connections that public commentators have only made as a generic indictment of a colonial history that is now of the past. It reconnects the timing of their construction (beginning in 1950), with the material cement blocks that were used, with the former colonial North African people housed in them (that replaced the segregated shanty towns of immigrants working for Peugeot), with the political and economic barriers erected to keep them in place. It connects state racism with its colonial coordinates and with the 40 percent unemployment of those who live on the outskirts of France's political and economic life and in barrack-like tenements.

The geographies of the revolts are colonial through and through.⁷⁶ More importantly, understanding these sites as the ruins of empire registers the claims that young people in Clichy-Sous-Bois and elsewhere in France are making when they proclaim themselves *indigènes de la république* and demand, as Hannah Arendt

so succinctly put it, “the right to have rights.” As reported in the press, Clichy-Sous-Bois has no local police station, no movie theater, no swimming pool, no unemployment office, no child welfare agency, no subway or interurban train into the city. Cordoned off and excised from the polity, they are making claims that refuse those conditions and terms. As Fanon predicted, French rule would not only wreak havoc on the future of the colonized. Those relations would “haunt French believers in democracy.”⁷⁷ And it does. It took 50 years for the French government to officially acknowledge the use of the term *Algerian War*—the same amount of time it took some French scholars to acknowledge that the French Republic was from its start a racialized colonial one.⁷⁸

Ruination weaves its way back through racialized hierarchies and the concerted aphasias on which privileges depend. In the recently released film, *Caché* (Hidden), the well-known French intellectual George Laurent, a successful TV host of a literary program, finds his Parisian home under surveillance. Two videocassette tapes, anonymously, arrive at his front door, soundless tapes shot from the alley just in front of his home, followed by moving stills of the house in which he grew up. Both tapes are unflinching, immobile and with nothing happening at all. By the time the third one arrives husband and wife are completely rattled. George follows the tape’s cues that lead him to the apartment door of a low-income high rise. There he finds a man from his past, Majid, son of the Algerian couple who worked for his parents and lived briefly with his family when they were both small boys.

The disquiet of the tapes starts unraveling the quiet of George’s comfortable bourgeois family. The husband and wife’s transfixed and repulsed viewing are interspersed with flashbacks of a childhood in which the Algerian couple who worked for his parents were killed during the Paris massacre in 1961. Their six-year-old orphaned son is left to their employers’ care. Jealous of his presence, aware that his parents are planning to adopt Majid, George, as child, stages an ugly sacrifice of a chicken by the Algerian boy. As planned, Majid is seen as a troubled nuisance and is promptly sent off to an orphanage. Screen memories emerge again and again—the more George denies them, the more present the haunting becomes.

In one of the most brutally graphic scenes of colonial *ressentiment*, Majid, now grown to a broken, withered, impoverished middle-aged man calls George to his shabby apartment one last time. Graciously requesting George to enter, he calmly slashes his own throat in front of the only person he wants to witness the anguish of his life and death. What is “hidden” in *Caché* is at once the camera, the memory, the photographer, a history of dispossession, and the history of French empire. French culture emerges here predicated on more than a series of historical denials

but as a culture of concealment that severs racism from ruination as it disconnects the comfortable ranks of French society from the history of racialized privilege and wealth. There is nothing “forgotten” here about French colonialism. This is aphasia, a “disconnect” between words and things, an inability to recognize things in the world and assign proper names to them. Not one of the laudatory reviews of *Caché*’s “brilliant” treatment of hidden pasts comments on, or even alludes to, the colonial watermark of the film: not to the massacre of Algerians in modern Paris, not to the ruination of a life without home or education, not to the segregated housing where Majid lives.

Sebald remarks that Jean Amery saw resentment as essential to a critical view of the past. As Amery put it, “resentment nails every one of us onto the cross of this ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone.”⁷⁹ I am not sure I agree. Resentment is an active, critical force. It does not demand that “the event be undone.” Rather it demands that the conditions of constraint and injury be reckoned with and acknowledged. The state of emergency that the France state imposed across over a quarter of its national territory during the 2005 riots was in part a response to the riots but also to decades of a systematic project to destroy the agency, health, and livelihood of a very particular population. This form of ruination defines both a process and sustained project on which imperial states did and continue to deeply depend. It does not produce passive or docile subjects but political and affective states of sustained resentment that redirect what will be in ruins and who will be living in them.

Nicolas Sarkozy, France’s new president, joins Amery in missing the point. This last summer, soon after taking office, in a carefully staged visit to Senegal, he declared his “love of all Africa and his respect and love for Africans.” This generic embrace was bad enough, but Sarkozy’s address to this “wounded continent” had a darker side. Addressing himself with “frankness and sincerity” to Africa’s youth, he urged them “not to dwell on the past,” not to blame today’s European generations for the deeds of earlier ones, not to expect today’s generations “to expiate the crimes” of those who came to conquer “a long time ago.” He asked Senegal’s youth to remember that the colonizer indeed took and pilfered, “but also gave.” That they “were wrong but sincere, truly committed to ‘a civilizing mission.’”

If the speech declared itself to be a “sincere” acknowledgment of a colonial history of pilferage and exploitation, this was not its structuring frame. Colonialism, for Sarkozy, is a finished violence and a closed story. Most important, he reminded his audience in Dakar (and on the global stage) that colonization may be responsible

for “self-loathing of the colonized” but not “for all the present-day difficulties of Africa”: “It is not responsible for the bloody wars that Africans wage among themselves. It is not responsible for corruption. It is not responsible for waste and pollution.” Sarkozy and his speechwriter place “the real tragedy of Africa” elsewhere: in the fact “that the African has not sufficiently entered history.”

At many levels, Sarkozy’s speech expressed the sort of “inner illusion” that Avital Ronell assigns to “stupidity”—to the ineluctable evasion of reflection, to a kind of sincerity that reproduces unintelligibilities and stupefied states.⁸⁰ African intellectuals, Achille Mbembe notable among them, quickly and eloquently made the case for why Sarkozy’s words had so little to say to people in Dakar, and Africa more broadly; contained nothing they needed to hear; and addressed little about what concerns them now.⁸¹ What was pernicious about Sarkozy’s speech was both what went without saying and what could be said because it was not deemed provocative but innocuous for the French audience to whom it was largely directed. Sarkozy is only symptomatic. Stereotypes of race and culture dripped as “common sense” from every phrase. Perhaps most disturbing was the vision of French empire he embraced, one that so facily dismissed what remains and what people are left with.

For students of colonial studies, it should sound an alarm. The point would not be, as some French scholars have recently done, to mount a charge that every injustice of the contemporary world has imperial roots but, rather, to delineate the specific ways in which waste accumulates, where debris falls, and what constitutes “the rot that remains.” One task of a renewed colonial studies would be to sharpen and rethink what constitutes an effective history of the present. This would not be to settle scores of the past, to dredge up what is long gone, but to refocus our historical lens on distinctions between what is residual and tenacious, what is dominant but hard to see, and not least what is emergent in today’s imperial formations—and critically resurgent in responses to them.

ABSTRACT

In this article, I look at “imperial formations” rather than at empire per se to register the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation. Imperial formations are relations of force, harboring political forms that endure beyond the formal exclusions that legislate against equal opportunity, commensurate dignities, and equal rights. Working with the concept of imperial formation, rather than empire per se, the emphasis shifts from fixed forms of sovereignty and its denials to graded forms of sovereignty and what has long marked the technologies of imperial rule—sliding and contested scales of differential rights. Imperial formations are defined

by racialized relations of allocations and appropriations. Unlike empires, they are processes of becoming, not fixed things. Not least they are states of deferral that mete out promissory notes that are not exceptions to their operation but constitutive of them: imperial guardianship, trusteeships, delayed autonomy, temporary intervention, conditional tutelage, military takeover in the name of humanitarian works, violent intervention in the name of human rights, and security measures in the name of peace.

Keywords: empire, imperial ruins, ruination, colonial legacy, environmental degradation, psychic harm

NOTES

Acknowledgments. This project was originally conceived as a sequel and response to the conference, "Ruins of Modernity," organized by Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle and held at the University of Michigan in March 2005. I thank them for inviting me to comment on the panel on empire and for the inspiration. At the New School for Social Research, Adriana Petryna and I worked together on a call for papers in fall 2005. As originally planned, a graduate student conference, organized by anthropology students Imogen Bunting, David Bond, and Joe Stefano was to proceed this one and took place in April 2006. Karolina Szmagalska-Follis's paper was presented there. Imogen Bunting died suddenly of an undiagnosed heart condition one week before this conference was to take place. It was postponed until fall 2006. The issue and the spirit behind this intervention is dedicated to her intellectual passion and commitments.

An earlier version of this introduction was prepared for that conference. The revised papers included here as articles reflect the collective nature of our conversations. Among those whose contributions shaped my thinking but whose work does not appear here, I thank Jacqueline Brown, Sharad Chari, Diane Fox, Beatriz Jaguaribe, Gary Wilder, and especially Vijayanthi Rao, whose insights resonate throughout this introduction. Claudia Barrachi, Faisal Devji, Hugh Raffles, Claudio Lomnitz, Karolina Szmagalska-Follis, Hylton White, and Jonathan Veitch participated as generous and critical commentators. Funding was provided by the Dean's Funds of the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College at the New School. I thank Kim Fortun and Mike Fortun for the editorial energy they put into this volume and two anonymous *CA* reviewers for their comments. I also thank Etienne Balibar, David Bond, Larry Hirschfeld, Achille Mbembe, Richard Price, and Emily Sogn for their readings.

1. See Walcott 1987:20.
2. See, for example, Dirlik (2002:611) who argues that "it is no longer very plausible to offer colonialism as an explanation of [the] condition" in which the "vast majority of the populations of formerly colonized society live in conditions of despair."
3. See Stoler 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, in press a.
4. See Eagleton 2003:7.
5. See Cooper 2002.
6. For an extended discussion of this issue, see Stoler 2006b and Stoler and McGranahan 2007.
7. See Williams 1978:117.
8. See Glissant 1989:20.
9. For one good example of the continuing pleasures yielded by this laconic mood, see Woodward 2001.
10. See Benjamin 1999:212.
11. From the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1964:1095.
12. See Fanon 1963. The full quote opens the chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorder" and reads: That imperialism which today is fighting against a true liberation of mankind leaves

- in its wake here and there tinctures of decay which we must search out and mercilessly expel from our land and our spirits. [p. 249]
13. See Fanon 1963:251–252.
 14. Not all ruins located in empire are imperial ones. See, for example, Lambek's (2002) nuanced study of Malagasy relics.
 15. Two foundational works that do this with different spatial and temporal scales are Watts (1983) and Cosby (1986). A strong tradition of such work in Madagascar includes Boiteau (1958), Jarosz (1993), Kull (1995), and Sodikoff (2005).
 16. See Foucault 1971:22.
 17. On the Indian railway communities, see Bear 2007.
 18. See Price 1985, 1998.
 19. See Sommer 1999:15.
 20. See Collins's contribution to this volume and his forthcoming book *The Revolt of the Saints: Memory and Redemption in the Twilight of Brazilian "Racial Democracy"* (in press).
 21. See Kincaid 1988:9.
 22. See Landler 2000.
 23. On rural people's efforts in Zululand to reckon with what is left and the "demands of the dead" just after apartheid's end, see Hylton White (n.d.).
 24. See Hell and Schonle (in press) for a pointed critique of the "imperial ruin gazer" and the new ruins which have become part of it.
 25. On these industrial ruins of U.S. empire, see Finn 1998.
 26. See Eagleton 2003.
 27. On the scale and scope of this imperial imagery, namely, the depoliticized small-scale farmer ensconced in his self-contained space, see Stoler in press a.
 28. See <http://www.mbweni.com/mbweniruins.htm> (accessed February 6, 2008) and numerous other sites with visitor comments.
 29. See Rosaldo 1989:68–87.
 30. See Kuklick 1991:135–169. On another sort of contested colonial monument, the war memorial, see Mann 2005.
 31. This quote appears on one of the postcards in a collection of photographs made by Lida Abdul, no date and given to me by Hugh Raffles, who I thank for them.
 32. See Chari 2005.
 33. On the relationship between people and debris, on the affective space produced by living in piles of rubbish and ruined environments see Yael Navaro-Yashin's (2006) powerful analysis of Lefkosa/Lefkosa, a city divided since the Turkish invasion of Northern Cyprus in 1974.
 34. See Trouillot 1995.
 35. See Abu El-Haj 2001:164.
 36. See Cohen 1995 and Khalidi 1992. I thank Jennifer Lynn Kelly for the references cited here, for pointing me to the Afforestation Project, and for sharing her research on it with me.
 37. Abu El-Haj illustrates this point in detail. Masco and Collins each look to different features of state-managed ruins in their essays in this issue as does Vyjayanthi Rao's striking paper, "The Future in Ruins: Narratives of Displacement and Formations of Development," not included here.
 38. See Masco this issue.
 39. Bearsley-Murray 2005. Also see Swarms, who looks at the critical purchase that colonial nostalgia can afford in the face of devastated landscapes and "dimming memories of modernity" (Bissel 2005:21). Failed futures may be documented through processes of ruination in a more figurative sense as Gary Wilder did in the paper presented at the conference on the untimely visions of Aimé Césaire, Victor Schoelcher, and Toussaint Louverture, whose political energies were "condensed in the ruins of their not yet realized emancipatory" projects.
 40. See Rao 2005.
 41. On the history and contemporary battles over the theft, protection, and repatriation of American Indian remains and objects, see Kathleen S. Fine-Dare 2002.
 42. See Stoler in press b.
 43. See Buck-Morss 1989:163.

44. See Buck-Morss 1989:182, 170, respectively.
45. See Hunt 1999.
46. See Szmagalska-Follis this issue.
47. See Sebald 2003.
48. See Agamben 1998:27–28; and Biehl 2005.
49. See Biehl 2005:18.
50. See Klein 2007.
51. See Bauman 2004.
52. On the Ward Valley Nuclear Waste Dump proposals of 1996 and the successful campaign that suspended its construction in 1999, see <http://www.alpinistas.org/env/ward/ward.html>, accessed February 8, 2008.
53. See Coronil 2007:645.
54. See Stoler 2006a; also see de Genova 2007.
55. See Agee and Evans 1988.
56. See Stewart 1996:90–112.
57. See Stewart 1996:96.
58. See Stewart 1996:111.
59. For one minor effort to reconsider the focus on “poor whites” in broader imperial policies, see Stoler 2006b.
60. See Pemberton 2003.
61. See the segment from “The Coolie” in Daniel (this issue).
62. See Hunt this issue.
63. It is estimated that 82-million “bomblets” were dropped in Vietnam between 1961 and 1973. Duds from those continue to be found in 43 of the 65 provinces in Vietnam, 30 years later. Similar cluster bombs were used by the United States in Kuwait in 1991 and in Afghanistan in 2001. See Massy 2007. The estimates of unexploded ordnance range between as little as 300,000 tons and as much as 800,000 tons. I have taken the more conservative estimate.
64. See Fox 2003. Also see Fox 2007, Browning and Forman 1972, and Whiteside 1971.
65. In the most recent study of dioxin use by U.S. troops in Vietnam, epidemiologist Jeane Stellman at Columbia University estimates, on the basis of detailed lists of over nine thousand herbicide spray missions, that far more dioxin was sprayed than any government study has ever acknowledged. See “Columbia University Study of Agent Orange and Vietnam Veterans,” http://www.nypcancer.org/prevention/issue6/spo_age_ora.html (accessed February 8, 2008).
66. In May 2005, a lawsuit filed by Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange against the chemical companies was dismissed. In July 2005, a program to investigate the health and environmental damage caused by the defoliant was cancelled before it began. See Butler 2005.
67. See Wolcott 2006.
68. See Baucom 1999.
69. See Baucom 1999:172.
70. See Baucom 1999.
71. I thank Trisha Gupta for pointing me to this passage on Lahore.
72. See Lévi-Strauss 1964.
73. See Baucom 1999:186–187.
74. Faisal Devji’s comments at the “Scarred Landscapes/Imperial Debris” conference, October 2006.
75. See Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper’s review of Marc Ferro’s *Le livre noir du colonialisme* in which they make the important point that the “prosecutorial stance,” and the currency of indicting the colonial in France today and equating it with totalitarianism misses “the limits of power as actually exercised, the constraints on colonial regimes’ ability to transform or to exploit, . . . their frequent dependence on indigenous economic and political actors whom they could not fully control” (2004).
76. The point has made been with force by Balibar (2007) and by others but with strikingly little historical analysis.
77. See Fanon 1963.

78. For one indication of how the scholarly terrain on French colonial history has dramatically changed over the last five years see Bancel et al. 2003; Blanchard et al. 2005; Stora 1999.
79. See Sebald 2003.
80. Ronell 2002:18.
81. See Mbembe's critique of Sarkozy (2007). Other responses can be found at <http://www.liberation.fr/rebonds/discoursdesarkozyadakar/> (accessed February 8, 2008). For the full French text of Sarkozy's speech, see <http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/root/bank/print/79184.htm> (accessed February 8, 2008).

Editor's Note: Articles published in *Cultural Anthropology* have analyzed postcolonialism from numerous angles. See, for example, Danny Hoffman's article about the origins of violence in postcolonial African cities (2007), Liam Buckley's article on colonial photos in a postcolonial archive (2005), and Ana Maria Alonso's article on the aesthetics of Mexican nationalism (2004).

Cultural Anthropology has also published articles that theorize how the past operates in and shapes the present, and future possibilities. See, for example, Rosalind Shaw's "Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone" (2007), Carole McGranahan's "Truth, Fear, and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance" (2005), and Casey Blake's "The Usable Past, the Contemporary Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America" (1999). A list of *CA* articles on the theme of memory can be accessed here at <http://culanth.org/?q=node/22>.

REFERENCES CITED

- Abu El-Haj, Nadia
2001 *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Agamben, Giorgio
1998 *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Agee, James, and Walker Evans
1988 [1939] *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Alonso, Ana Maria
2004 Conforming Disconformity: "Mestizage," Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism. *Cultural Anthropology* (19)4:459-490.
- Balibar, Etienne
2007 Uprisings in the "Banlieues." *Constellations* 14(1):47-72.
- Bancel, Nicolas, Pascal Blanchard, and François Verges, eds.
2003 *La république coloniale*. Paris: Hachette.
- Bear, Laura
2007 Ruins and Ghosts. In *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy, and the Intimate Historical Self*. Laura Bear, ed. Pp. 257-284. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bearsley-Murray, Jon
2005 Interrupted Pasts and Futures. Paper presented at the "Ruins of Modernity" conference, University of Michigan, March.
- Baucom, Ian
1999 *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt
2004 *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Benjamin, Walter
1999 *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Biehl, João
 2005 *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Bissell, William Cunningham
 2005 Engaging Colonial Nostalgia. *Cultural Anthropology* 20(2):215–248.
- Blake, Casey Nelson
 1999 The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past, and the Civic Past: Memory in Contemporary America. *Cultural Anthropology* 14(3):423–435.
- Blanchard, Pascal, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, eds.
 2005 *La fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Boiteau, Pierre
 1958 *Contribution à l'histoire de la Nation Malgache*. Paris: Editions Sociales.
- Browning, Frank, and Dorothy Forman, eds.
 1972 *The Wasted Nation*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Buckley, Liam
 2005 Objects of Love and Decay: Colonial Photographs in a Postcolonial Archive. *Cultural Anthropology* 20(2):249–270.
- Buck-Morss, Susan
 1989 *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Burbank, Jane, and Frederick Cooper
 2004 *Review of Le livre noir du colonialisme. XVI–XXI siècle: De l'extermination à la repentance*. Marc Ferro, dir. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 44(1–2):455–463.
- Butler, Declan
 2005 U.S. Abandons Health Study on Agent Orange. *Nature* 434(7034): 687.
- Chari, Sharad
 2005 “Apartheid Remains.” Paper presented at the “Scarred Landscapes/Imperial Debris” conference, New School for Social Research, New York, October.
- Cohen, Shaul Ephraim
 1995 *The Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Collins, John
 In press *The Revolt of the Saints: Memory and Redemption in the Twilight of Brazilian “Racial Democracy.”* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cooper, Frederick
 2002 Decolonizing Situations: The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Colonial Studies, 1951–2001. *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 20(2):47–76.
- Coronil, Fernando
 2007 Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 122(3):645.
- Cosby, Alfred
 1986 *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- de Genova, Nicolas
 2007 The Stakes of an Anthropology of the United States. *New Centennial Review* 7(2):231–277.
- Dirlik, Arlif
 2002 “Historical Colonialism in Contemporary Perspective.” *Public Culture* 14(3):611–615.
- Eagleton, Terry
 2003 *After Theory*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fanon, Franz
 1963 *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

- Fine-Dare, Kathleen S.
 2002 *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAG-PRA*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Finn, Janet
 1998 *Tracing the Veins, of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel
 1971 *Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Fox, Diane
 2003 *Chemical Politics and the Hazards of Modern Warfare: Agent Orange*. In *Synthetic Planet: Chemical Politics and the Hazards of Modern Warfare*. Monica Casper ed. Pp. 73–89. New York: Routledge.
 2007 *One Significant Ghost: Agent Orange: Narratives of Trauma, Survival, and Responsibility*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington.
- Glissant, Edouard
 1989 *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Hell, Julia, and Andreas Schonle
 In press *Ruins of Modernity: Introduction*. In *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hoffman, Daniel Lee
 2007 *The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities*. *Cultural Anthropology* 22(3):400–428.
- Hunt, Nancy
 1999 *Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jarosz, Lucy
 1993 *Defining and Explaining Tropical Deforestation: Shifting Cultivation and Population Growth in Colonial Madagascar (1896–1940)*. *Economic Geography* 69(4):366–379.
- Khalidi, Walid
 1992 *All the Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Kincaid, Jamaica
 1988 *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Klein, Naomi
 2007 *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Holt.
- Kuklick, Henrika
 1991 *Contested Monuments: The Politics of Archeology in Southern Africa*. In *Colonial Situations: Essays on the Contextualization of Ethnographic Knowledge*. George Stocking Jr., ed. Pp. 135–169. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Kull, Christian
 1995 *Isle of Fire: The Political Ecology of Landscape Burning in Madagascar*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lambek, Michael
 2002 *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga, Madagascar*. New York: Palgrave.
- Landler, Mark
 2000 *Ruins by Day, Luxury by Night*. *New York Times*, November 26: 10.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude
 1964 *Tristes Tropiques*. New York: Antheneum.

- Mann, Gregory
 2005 Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa. *The American Historical Review*. Electronic document, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.2/mann.html>, accessed February 8, 2008.
- Massey, Ellen
 2007 Disarmament: Will the U.S. Finally End Cluster Bomb Imports? Inter Press Service. Electronic document, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=38614.29>, accessed December 2007.
- Mbembe, Achille
 2007 Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa. *Africa Resource*. Electronic document, <http://www.africaresource.com>, accessed December 29, 2007.
- McGranahan, Carole
 2005 Truth, Fear, and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance. *Cultural Anthropology* 20(4):570–600.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael
 2006 Abjected Spaces: Political Debris and the Affects It Engenders. Paper presented at the "Affect in Political Life" conference, Cambridge, April 7–8.
- Pemberton, John
 2003 The Specter of Coincidence. In *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'Gorman*. Anderson Audrey Kahin and James T. Siegel, eds. Pp. 75–90. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.
- Price, Richard
 1985 An Absence of Ruins? Seeking Caribbean Historical Consciousness. *Caribbean Review* 14(3):24–30.
 1998 *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rao, Vyjayanthi
 2005 The Future in Ruins: Narratives of Displacement and Formations of Development. Paper presented at the "Scarred Landscapes/Imperial Debris" conference, New School for Social Research, New York, October.
- Ronell, Avital
 2002 *Stupidity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato
 1989 Imperial Nostalgia. In *Culture and Truth*. Pp. 68–87. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sebald, W. G.
 2003 *On the Natural History of Destruction*. New York: Random House.
- Shaw, Rosalind
 2007 Displacing Violence: Making Pentecostal Memory in Postwar Sierra Leone. *Cultural Anthropology* 22(1):66–93.
- Sodikoff, Genese
 2005 Forced and Forest Labor in Colonial Madagascar, 1926–1936. *Ethnohistory* 52(2):407–435.
- Sommer, Doris
 1999 *Proceed with Caution: When Engaged with Minority Writing in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stewart, Kathleen
 1996 *A Place on the Side of the Road*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stoler, Ann Laura
 2006a Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty. *Public Culture* 18(1):125–146.
 2006c Refractions off Empire: Untimely Comparisons in Harsh Times. *Radical History Review* 95:93–107.

- In press a Along the Archival Grain: Thinking through Colonial Ontologies. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- In press b The Carceral Archipelago of Empire: Towards an Historical Ontology of Detention and Containment. *Annales*.
- Stoler, Ann Laura, ed.
 2006b Haunted by Empire. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stoler, Ann Laura, and Carole McGranahan
 2007 Reassessing Imperial Terrain. In *Imperial Formations*. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue, eds. Pp. 3–42. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research.
- Stora, Benjamin
 1999 Le Transfert d'une Mémoire: De l'"Algérie française" au racisme anti-arabe. Paris: La Découverte.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph
 1995 Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Walcott, Derek
 1987 Collected Poems 1948–1984. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
 1992 The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory. Nobel lecture, December 7, 1992. Electronic document, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html, accessed February 8, 2008.
 2006 A Dilemma Faces WI Artists. In *Derek Walcott*. Edward Baugh, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watts, Michael
 1983 Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- White, Hylton
 N.d. "The Dwelling of Culture." Unpublished MS, Department of Anthropology, New School for Social Research.
- Whiteside, Thomas
 1971 The Withering Rain: America's Herbicidal Folly. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Williams, Raymond
 1978 Marxism and Literature. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woodward, Christopher
 2001 In Ruins. New York: Pantheon.