Out of Place

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Postscript: Through the doorway

I conclude this book with a consciousness that there will always be more to say about racism, ‘othering’, marginalisation, exclusion, oppression and humiliation. The world, as we know it, will always be in a state of ‘othering’ and, as such, will never be without hegemonies of power delineated along entrenchments of centres and margins. We live in a world, says Santos (2018), in which the most repugnant forms of social inequality and discrimination are becoming politically acceptable. People and groups relegated to the margins live in a perpetual state of epistemic violence where their inflicted subjugation morphs from one form into another. Similarly, there are boundless and inexhaustible conceptions and enactments of diversity not only across and in civilizations but within individuals. Postcolonialism, therefore, can have no end because we have yet to adequately capture and articulate epistemologies which take us out of Western essentialism and exceptionalism, and into a new kind of
world in which racial, social and cultural subjugation of any people becomes antithetical to the very idea of what makes us human.

As I have tried to reflect through my own experiences, there are certain ways in which the world not only functions but legitimises itself through its own actions. Knowledge is used and reproduced so that existing dominant structures are repeatedly endorsed – to the extent that any difference, whether in the form of gender, culture, race, religion or language is not seen as lived expressions of diversity but as unreachable, irreconcilable and, hence, something to be suppressed and disregarded. And yet, it is in turning towards difference and being open to it that we can shift in who we potentially can be. It is through our engagement with diverse expressions of lives that we can cross over into other worlds and other knowledge forms. All knowledges, states Santos (2018: 33), ‘are testimonies since what they know of reality (their active dimension) is always reflected back in what they reveal about the subject of this knowledge (their subjective dimension.’ It is easy for some of us to proclaim that the world is not of our making, that it was like this – bent and disfigured – long before our arrival into it. But every single time we remain silent in the face of these disfigurements we contribute to how this world is. In our preference for silence and complacency, the risk always is that, in the end, the world would not only have made us but undone us in its making.

It takes hard work to push against existing structures of inequality and exclusion, as might be encountered in schools and universities, or any other institution. These organisations often hide behind the very notion of their structuredness as a justification of their norms. Phrases such as ‘our way’ or ‘this is how it has always been done’ need intensive deconstruction both in terms of whose ways need to be retained and whose ways need to be excluded. The subtleties of language cannot be underestimated. Language, after all, is never without power. In many ways, therefore, it is easier to confront systems of inequality rather than trying to confront individual privileges. It is easier to get people to talk about the systemic
reproduction of inequality than to get the same people to reflect
upon their individual role in relation to that reproduction, and hence
their own privilege. Why would anyone want to relinquish their
privilege? Any yet it seems clear that if inequalities, marginalisation
and ‘othering’ are to be confronted and disrupted then this can only
happen with individuals as the starting point.

As individuals, we are always ‘turned’ towards others, because the
other is already turning towards us, waiting for us to listen, to hear
their cries and act with compassion (Derrida, 1988). In this regard,
says, Haraway (1988: 579–580), ‘we do need an earth-wide network
of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges
among very different – and power-differentiated communities. We
need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and
bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in
order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.’

I conclude with a knowledge and hope that in writing this book
I have offered some meaning not only to my own lived experiences,
but that I have reminded all of us that who we are is never without
meaning. As a collective, even in our estranged lives, we have it
within ourselves to find a way towards cultivating a world of mutual
regard. The challenge is to push through and disrupt the exclusion,
marginalisation, humiliation and pain. It’s the only way to emerge on
the other side. In the end, this is probably the best way to describe
what it means to be and live a postcolonial life. It is neither a state of
arrival nor does it present any assurances of recognition, inclusion
or belonging. What it offers is a hopeful avenue of sense-making, a
rupturing of a world intent on lines, borders and hierarchies.