

The Colonial Gaze in Pico Iyer's *Falling off the Map*: A Postcolonial Critique

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Abstract

Pico Iyer's *Falling off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* (1993) is an account his journeys to Bhutan, Cuba, Iceland, Vietnam, Argentina, North Korea, Australia, and Paraguay, places that are, in his terms, politically, geographically, or culturally marginalised within dominant global narratives. His transnational background, extensive mobility, and apparent sensitivity to cultural difference distinguish his work from the overtly imperial travel narratives of the past. This article, however, examines the ways in which colonial modes of representation continue to operate within his accounts of these "lonely places." Drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Mary Louise Pratt's theories of the contact zone and anti-conquest, and Graham Huggan's critique of the postcolonial exotic, the study argues that Iyer's representations frequently transform cultural difference, remoteness, political isolation, and material inadequacy into objects of literary and aesthetic interest. The traveller's authority to classify places as "lonely" reveals the persistence of unequal relations between the observer and the observed. Thus, Iyer's work demonstrates how colonial habits of seeing can survive in contemporary travel writing in subtle and transformed ways.

Keywords: Colonial Gaze, Postcolonial, Travel, Lonely Places, Modernity, Marginality, Privilege

Travel writing is a genre associated with discovery, curiosity, and intercultural encounter, yet it is also deeply implicated in the histories of imperial expansion and colonial knowledge production. From the travel narratives of early explorers to the accounts of nineteenth-century imperial adventurers, travel writing frequently functioned as a mechanism through which distant peoples and places were rendered visible, knowable, and governable. Consequently, postcolonial criticism has treated travel writing with both fascination and suspicion, recognising its capacity to foster cross-cultural understanding while simultaneously reproducing asymmetrical relations of power.

Among contemporary travel writers, Pico Iyer occupies a particularly complex position. Born in England to Indian parents, educated at Eton and Oxford, and later based in the United States and Japan, Iyer embodies a transnational identity that appears to transcend traditional distinctions between East and West. His writing often celebrates hybridity, mobility, and cultural interconnectedness. These qualities have led many readers to regard him as an innocent, neutral observer whose work departs from the assumptions of imperial travel writing.

Published in 1993, *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* is one of Iyer's most acclaimed travel books. The text chronicles journeys to nations like Bhutan, Cuba, North Korea, Iceland, Paraguay, Vietnam, Argentina, and Australia. According to him these are "Lonely Places"—countries that do not fit comfortably within the global order and those that have "no seat at our international dinner tables" (4). He claims that these countries have not previously been grouped together and that the category is largely his own invention (5). Although these nations differ dramatically in geography, political systems, economic conditions, and cultural histories, Iyer unites them through a common narrative of marginality. They are described as places that have slipped outside dominant global narratives, nations that are "not on international wavelengths," "lost when it comes to visitors," and uncertain about "how they are supposed to behave" (10). The category of the lonely place is therefore not a

geographical reality but a representational construct through which the traveller organises the world. His fascination with these places reflects a desire to encounter spaces that appear untouched by mass tourism. The value of these destinations derives precisely from their perceived remoteness and rarity. Their isolation becomes a form of cultural capital that can be transformed into literary distinction.

Rune Graulund's "Travelling Home: Global Travel and the Postcolonial in the Travel Writing of Pico Iyer" situates Iyer within a broader tradition of postcolonial mobility and transnational identity. Graulund argues that Iyer destabilises conventional distinctions between home and abroad, presenting himself as travelling "in a world where the boundaries between home and away have become harder to sustain" (55). Likewise, Arularasi and Lourdes argue that Iyer's work encourages intercultural understanding stating that his observations are highly "empathetic and understanding" and that he tries to "appreciate and learn from the cultures he encounters" (2).

While these readings are valuable, they often overlook the representational structures through which Iyer constructs cultural difference. As Graham Huggan observes in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), "To define the margins can. . . be seen as an exoticising strategy. . . . To keep the margins exotic. . . is the objective of the mainstream" (22). The representation of remote or overlooked cultures frequently depends upon the aestheticisation of difference, transforming exclusion into a source of cultural value. Debbie Lisle in her book *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (2006) extends this critique by demonstrating how contemporary travel writing remains embedded within unequal structures of mobility and globalisation. The ability to move freely across borders and transform those experiences into publishable narratives is itself a form of privilege unavailable to many of the people being represented. Travel narratives often participate in the production of what Said calls "imaginative geography[ies]," dividing the world into spaces of familiarity

and otherness (54). Such divisions establish implicit hierarchies that privilege certain cultures while marginalising others.

Mary Louise Pratt extends this critique through her analysis of travel writing in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (2008). Pratt introduces the concept of the “contact zone,” referring to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in high asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (7). Travel writing emerges from these encounters, but the resulting narratives frequently obscure the asymmetries that structure them. Particularly relevant here is Pratt’s concept of “anti-conquest” to refer to “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert their hegemony” (9). This rhetorical strategy allows travellers to claim moral neutrality while continuing to exercise interpretive authority. The traveller appears humble and self-critical, yet remains the primary producer of knowledge.

Iyer’s work exemplifies this strategy of modern writers. His prose is marked by irony, self-awareness, and apparent humility. He rarely adopts the overtly authoritative tone associated with imperial travel writers. Nevertheless, he retains the power to determine which places are “lonely,” which nations are anomalous, and what meanings should be attached to their marginality. Moreover, Iyer’s authority is reinforced by significant institutional privilege. As a contributor to major international publications and a globally recognised travel writer, he possesses the economic resources, mobility, and readership necessary to transform travel experiences into cultural capital. His observations derive legitimacy not merely from personal experience but from the institutional networks through which they circulate. This privilege is central to understanding how colonial modes of representation persist within contemporary travel writing.

Iyer presents Vietnam through the language of discovery and emergence. He observes that the country “still has the bashful charm of a naturally alluring girl stepping out into bright

sunlight after years of dark seclusion. Protected, ironically, by its years of hardship and cut off from modernity. . . . [it] is still, more than most places, new to the world” (116). Here Vietnam is feminised and transformed into an object of desire for the foreign traveller. The country is imagined as a beautiful but previously secluded woman who has only recently become visible to the world. This metaphor places the traveller in the position of the discoverer who gains access to a previously hidden object. He further remarks that travellers are “eager to grab a piece of the hidden treasure before it splinters or corrodes” (116). The language of “hidden treasure” intensifies this process of commodification. Vietnam is not simply a society emerging from war and isolation; it becomes a treasure waiting to be discovered and possessed by international visitors. Vietnam's marginality therefore becomes a consumable cultural resource. Although Iyer's travel is not colonial in the literal historical sense, his language of discovery and acquisition recalls the structure of colonial exploration. Vietnam appears as a space that has remained untouched by modernity and is therefore available for the foreign traveller's gaze before it is altered by global forces.

Iyer's own privileged position complicates this representation. He is not travelling through Vietnam as an ordinary visitor struggling with the conditions he describes. He enjoys access to hotels frequented by movie actors and political leaders, placing him within a privileged international circuit. His accommodation provides him with a vantage point from which he can observe the limitations of ordinary Vietnamese life while enjoying forms of comfort and exclusivity that separate him from the majority of the population. The discomforts of the country are observed from the position of a guest who can retreat to elite hotels and international networks.

Iyer's description of Vietnamese hotels reveals the way in which the material limitations of the country are transformed into comic exoticism. He observes that “the country's facilities are still, thankfully, uncertain. Some hotels in Vietnam offer elevators, some have watercoolers,

some have girls who slip into your room the minute you return from dinner. Some have Viettronics shortwave radios in each room, some high-tech phones so complex they cannot reach even the front desk, some caged monkeys inexplicably in their gardens” (117-18). The passage presents Vietnam as a space of technological inconsistency and institutional disorder. The country is evaluated according to its distance from the standardised systems of modernity familiar to the international privileged traveller like Iyer himself.

Iyer's treatment of Vietnamese food further intensifies the exoticising gaze. Vietnam is described as a place where “cobras. . .are slaughtered at your table” and where “coffee made from beans vomited up by a weasel” is available (118). These details are selected for their capacity to shock and amuse the Western reader. Food practices are removed from their cultural contexts and presented as spectacles of strangeness. Here, Iyer, in line with the colonial travellers of the West assumes the role of an adventurous consumer willing to encounter practices that appear bizarre from the perspective of Western culinary norms.

Iyer's description of transportation similarly transforms infrastructural limitations into an aesthetic spectacle. He writes that “traveling by car means bumping along Highway 1, through a confusion of bicycles shrouded in brushes and brooms, buses piled high with tail-wagging dogs, and horse-drawn carts, at speeds no faster than 10 mph, over 'elephant holes' that put out the backs of any foreigners who are not banging their heads against the roof, and where, after nightfall, the only lights one sees are reflections in the eyes of passing water buffalos” (118). The passage is highly visual and comic, but its descriptive structure is significant. Vietnam is presented as a landscape of disorder where people exist in a chaotic pre-modern state. Vietnam is therefore represented through the physical experience of the outsider, while the local population remains largely part of the landscape being observed.

Iyer's description of Hanoi continues this process of comic othering. He observes that “A taxi ride into town . . . might mean a motorbike race, clinging to the back of a young soldier;

laundry service meant flinging your clothes upon a bed and hoping you might see them sometime later. Prices varied wildly, and inexplicably, from one place to the next, with some articles costing eight or twelve times more in one place than another. Hanoi had certainly not resolved itself into the International Style” (123). The “International Style” functions as an implicit standard of modern urban organisation. Hanoi is judged according to its failure to conform to the standardised systems of global modernity.

Iyer's reference to the Montagnards is even more problematic from a postcolonial perspective. He observes that “they are still at least five years behind their more photographed cousins across the border” (125). Here he places the Montagnards within a developmental hierarchy. They are not simply different; they are temporally behind another group. Thus, Iyer's views on Vietnam frequently reproduce colonial habits of representation by feminising the country, presenting it as a hidden treasure awaiting discovery, measuring its institutions against Western standards of modernity, converting infrastructural limitations into exotic spectacle, and placing indigenous groups within a developmental hierarchy.

Iyer's representation of Iceland as a country where “nothing quite makes sense” establishes Iceland as a space of anomaly and cultural difference (67). The phrase is deliberately broad and rhetorically powerful: rather than identifying a particular social or historical feature that appears unfamiliar, Iyer extends the condition of incomprehensibility to the country as a whole. Iceland is therefore constructed as a place that resists the categories of Iyer's familiar world with a Western outlook. This tendency becomes apparent in Iyer's treatment of Icelandic social customs. He observes that “Roughly three eldest children in every four are illegitimate here” presenting the fact as evidence of the country's deviation from conventional social norms (67). Likewise, he remarks that “People are listed in the phone book by their first names, which does not make life easy when Jones alone take up thirty columns of the directory” (68). The apparently humorous observation turns a culturally specific naming

system into a curiosity for the foreign observer. The colonial dimension of this gaze lies in the process by which cultural difference is converted into strangeness. Iyer's Iceland is repeatedly positioned as an exceptional space that exists beyond ordinary social and geographical expectations. Its difference becomes the principal means through which it is made intelligible to the reader.

Iyer's description of Icelandic landscape intensifies this construction of strangeness. He observes that visitors arrive in Iceland seeking desolation and find it there. More than 80 percent of the country, he notes, consists of "ice fields, tundra, lava fields, and barren mountains," and that "huge stretches are as blank and inhospitable as anything" (71). He further describes the landscape as resembling "a geologist's textbook, a pockmarked mess of volcanic craters and hissing plumes of smoke" (72). These descriptions produce a landscape that appears almost pre-human and primordial.

Iyer's reliance on W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice further reveals the textual mediation of his perception. As with his use of Darwin, Naipaul, Theroux, Chatwin, Morris, and Greene in his discussion of other countries, Iyer turns to established Western writers to frame and authenticate his experience of Iceland. Iyer does not simply see Iceland; he sees it through a literary archive that precedes him. Iyer selects certain features of his destination—illegitimacy, unusual naming practices, geological desolation, and distance from modernity—and organises them into a coherent narrative of difference.

Throughout the Cuban chapter, Iyer repeatedly emphasises irony, contradiction, and improvisation. His Cuba is a nation suspended between ideological aspiration and material decline, a place where grand political narratives coexist with everyday scarcity. He observes that "its streets feel so deserted; the whole island has the ramshackle glamour of an abandoned stage" (57). While these observations are often insightful and sympathetic, they also reveal how Iyer transforms lived realities into aesthetic and philosophical spectacles for an external

readership. One such example is Iyer's description of the malfunctioning elevator at Hotel Pernik in Holguin. Rather than functioning merely as an incidental detail, the elevator becomes a symbolic representation of a society perceived as stalled or immobilised.

The humorous episodes involving the local residents and police officials following a traffic accident further illustrate this. Iyer recounts these encounters with considerable wit, emphasising their absurdity and unpredictability. The Cuban characters who populate these scenes are portrayed as resourceful, warm, and adaptable, qualities that undoubtedly reflect genuine admiration. Yet the narrative simultaneously reinforces a broader image of Cuban society as improvisational and disorderly. Bureaucratic confusion and institutional inefficiency become recurring themes, contributing to a representation in which social complexity is condensed into a series of entertaining cultural traits.

Iyer's representation of Argentina offers a particularly revealing instance of the colonial assumptions embedded in the travel narratives of Iyer. His position as a traveller is marked by considerable privilege: he has access to a guide, stays in the affluent Recoleta district, and moves through the city with the assistance of social and institutional networks unavailable to ordinary visitors. Iyer's Argentina is therefore not encountered from the position of the ordinary inhabitant but from that of the highly mobile cosmopolitan observer whose experience is facilitated by access and privilege.

Iyer's description of Recoleta makes this position especially visible. Having stayed in an elegant hotel in the area, Iyer remarks that "the place he felt closest to was the Upper East side of New York" (28). The statement is revealing because familiarity with New York becomes the standard through which Buenos Aires is recognised. Rather than encountering Recoleta primarily on its own cultural terms, Iyer experiences it through its resemblance to a prestigious urban space familiar to the international elite.

Iyer's dependence on the observations of earlier Western travel writers is highly significant. He quotes V. S. Naipaul's claim in *The Return of Eva Perón* that Argentina's air of civility was “merely a cover for barbarism” (34). The quotation is particularly significant because Naipaul himself occupies a complex postcolonial position: Indian by ancestry, Trinidadian by birth, and English by education, residence, and citizenship. Like Iyer, he embodies a cosmopolitan identity that transcends a single national belonging. Iyer's invocation of Naipaul therefore creates a chain of cosmopolitan observers who claim mobility beyond national boundaries while continuing to speak from a position of interpretive authority over other cultures.

Similarly, Iyer describes Argentina as a “land of stylish melancholics sharing yesterdays” (34). This characterization is supported by Iyer's quotation from Paul Theroux: “‘gloom was part of the Argentine temper. . . the hangdog melancholy immigrants feel on rainy afternoons far from home’” (35). The use of Theroux's observation is significant not merely as an intertextual reference but as evidence of Iyer's dependence on a tradition of Western travel writing for interpreting Argentina. Paul Theroux, V. S. Naipaul, and Charles Darwin collectively function as a kind of interpretive archive through which Iyer encounters and explains the country. Iyer's Argentina similarly appears through the voices of earlier writers. His own observations are continually supported, authenticated, or enriched by the opinions of Western travellers and writers. Argentina, thus, becomes not merely a country that Iyer encounters but a textual palimpsest of earlier Western interpretations.

In his representation of North Korea, Iyer constructs the country through a persistent rhetoric of opacity, irrationality, and cultural strangeness. Rather than presenting North Korea as a historically complex society shaped by war, division, ideology, and international politics, he frequently transforms it into a theatrical space populated by eccentric practices and enigmatic people. The country emerges as a cryptic and impassive world, resembling the

colonial construction of the East as inscrutable and resistant to the rational categories of the Western observer. Iyer's North Koreans appear to inhabit a temporal order different from his own; they are represented as if they were survivals from an earlier and less developed historical moment. The narrative thus risks producing an image of a society lacking intellectual autonomy and characterized by dullness, ignorance, and unquestioning conformity. In this respect, Iyer's representation recalls the colonial tendency to deny contemporaneity to non-Western societies by placing them in an earlier stage of historical development.

Iyer's visit to North Korea in 1990 begins with his satirical treatment of the country's veneration of Kim Il-Sung, who led North Korea from its establishment in 1948 until his death in 1994. Iyer repeatedly emphasises what he perceives as the nation's unquestioning adoration of its leader. He observes that people from every level of society extol Kim Il-Sung and that publications of every kind celebrate his greatness. The intensity of this reverence is presented as so pervasive that it appears to have displaced awareness of the wider world. Iyer even remarks ironically that even plants are named after the leader Kim Il-Sung, who is described by Iyer as an "octogenarian madman" (4). The expression reduces a complex political figure to a spectacle of irrationality and contributes to the broader representation of North Korea as a society governed by collective delusion.

The representation of the Pyongyang Koryo Hotel reinforces this image of contradiction and artificiality. Iyer is struck by the enormous size of the forty-five-storey building and by the apparent emptiness of its facilities. The hotel, despite its imposing scale, appears largely vacant and bare, with mirrors dominating its passageways, lobby, and dining room. The contrast between architectural grandeur and functional emptiness becomes emblematic of Iyer's broader representation of North Korea. His description of Pyongyang extends this impression. The deserted streets, lacking cars, bicycles, and restaurants, appear to him empty and disconcerting. As he walks through the city, he encounters "no shocks or surprises, nothing charming or

touching or strange; nothing at all, in fact” (15). The apparent absence of ordinary urban activity is thus transformed into a sign of national emptiness.

Iyer's most revealing formulation occurs when he observes that the “more modern the buildings in Korea, the more the country felt outdated” (16). This paradox is central to his representation of North Korea. Modern architecture, rather than signifying progress, becomes evidence of an artificial modernity disconnected from lived social experience. Such a formulation risks denying North Korea contemporaneity by suggesting that the country can possess the physical signs of modernity while remaining historically and culturally behind the observer.

Iyer's description of Pyongyang as “an unusual place” with “no cars or bicycles along the streets; almost no shops or restaurants or cinemas. . . . nothing charming or touching or strange. . . . no smiles on the people's faces, no fears, no expression” is significant for the way in which Iyer interprets the absence of familiar signs of urban life (15). The city is primarily defined through negation. The city becomes legible not through its own historical, political, or cultural specificities but through what it lacks in comparison with the urban environments familiar to a privileged cosmopolitan traveller like Iyer. His travel narrative therefore reproduces a colonial logic in which the Western observer possesses the authority to determine what constitutes vitality, normality and civilisation.

Iyer's description of Australia in *Falling Off the Map* provides one of the clearest examples of how colonial modes of representation persist in his travel writing. He constructs Australia as an otherworldly space, a country that appears to have “fallen off the planet”, “border[ing] nothing” and “on the way to nowhere” (173-74). Such descriptions transform geographical remoteness into cultural and historical marginality. Australia becomes not simply a nation located at a considerable distance from other global centres but a place that appears to exist outside the ordinary structures of world history. Iyer's emphasis on its strangeness is

intensified through his description of Australia as a land of "inversions," where "Christmas is celebrated in midsummer," where "water goes the wrong way down the drain" and crows "fly backwards" (174). These details convert geographical and climatic difference into signs of an inverted world, recalling the colonial tendency to represent distant territories as spaces of anomaly and deviation from the norms established by the European observer.

Iyer's visit to Australia in 1988 coincided with the country's Bicentenary celebrations, a moment of heightened national visibility marked by significant achievements in sports, music, and the arts. These developments attracted increasing numbers of international visitors and threatened, in Iyer's perception, to diminish the very remoteness and emptiness that made Australia an object of fascination for him. His journey therefore appears motivated by a desire to encounter the country before its perceived isolation was overwhelmed by international attention and tourism. Iyer invokes D. H. Lawrence's earlier description: "You just walk out of the world and into Australia" (173). The quotation reinforces his construction of Australia as a place existing beyond ordinary geographical and cultural boundaries, almost as though one were stepping outside the familiar world and into an alternative realm.

This representational strategy produces a paradox. Australia is historically and culturally complex, yet Iyer repeatedly renders it strange, remote, unfamiliar, and apparently awaiting discovery. The continent is consequently transformed into a kind of textual *tabula rasa*, a blank space upon which the traveller can inscribe his own impressions. From a postcolonial perspective, this representation recalls the logic of *terra nullius*, the colonial doctrine that denied the prior sovereignty, historical presence, and complex social organization of Australia's Indigenous peoples in order to legitimize British possession of the land. Iyer does not explicitly endorse this doctrine, and his intention is clearly not to justify colonial occupation. Nevertheless, the language of discovery, emptiness, remoteness, and unfamiliarity echoes the

representational strategies through which colonial travellers historically transformed inhabited territories into spaces awaiting Western interpretation.

Iyer initially constructs Bhutan through the familiar colonial trope of geographical remoteness. He describes it as a kingdom “tucked away in the depths of High Himalayas. . . . [with] no TV, no daily newspapers, no air links with the outside world save Dhaka and Calcutta” and he also states that “its Olympic athletes had never seen boats before they left the country, or high-rise buildings, or even crowds” and the land “seemed to belong to fairy tale” (86). The description produces Bhutan as a space located outside ordinary modernity. Its isolation, remoteness, and unfamiliarity are not merely recorded; they are organized into a coherent image of the exotic Other. The country is therefore made intelligible through its distance from the norms of international modernity.

Iyer's description of the public library reinforces this representation of institutional inadequacy. He describes “the inner sanctum of the public library, a kindergarten-size room appointed with a few rickety baby-blue shelves, less than four feet tall, and a couple of worktables, distinguished by a total absence of lights” (103). Bhutan is represented through the gap between what a modern institution should be and what it appears to be in the traveller's eyes.

Similarly, Iyer's description of everyday malfunctions produces a comic portrait of Bhutanese life: “Things went wrong every day in Bhutan. Keys fell off chains, doors locked one in, taps refused to turn heater spitting out white sparks, hissing like a snake, and then, with a magician's flamboyant puff, exploding into oblivion” (105). The passage transforms ordinary mechanical failures into a theatrical spectacle. The country becomes a space where technology is not fully mastered and where modern conveniences remain precarious.

Iyer visits Paraguay in 1992, a Latin American country that slipped into anarchy and criminal dictatorship when all the other countries of the continent moved towards democracy. There Iyer found damaged traffic lights, dirty hotels, dilapidated buildings, shops selling contraband goods and even encountered sights of people relieving themselves. According to Iyer, it is “one of the forgotten corners of the world” (149). Before his trip to Paraguay, Iyer paid a visit to the local store to look for books on Paraguay, but could not find even a single one. There he finds stores selling coats made entirely of the skin of endangered species of animals like jaguars and ocelots (147). Vehicles often sped fast without observing the speed limit. Iyer, when he asked his driver whether the Paraguayan police would do anything to stop the crime, he said that it was the police themselves who performed crimes the most (151). Paraguay had been home to many deposed dictators and a refuge to many of the world’s most wanted war criminals and fugitive Nazis (150). And as Iyer observes, Paraguay is a place “where everything could be had for a price, the latest boom market was in babies” (148). A country torn by wars, unstable governments, faulty government policies and military aggressions, it was slipping into anarchy, degeneracy and underdevelopment each day, and the country “was like nothing I had ever seen before” according to Iyer (143).

Just like in North Korea, in Paraguay also Iyer finds people blindly venerating their leaders in spite of their dictatorial rule and cruelties. They blindly worship their leaders, whose deeds are far from any kind of greatness. Just like the Tower of Juche Idea in North Korea, The Plaza of Heroes in Paraguay houses a huge national monument called the Pantheon of Heroes. Here one can find memorials of all the country’s great men like Dr. Francia, who “had himself named Dictator for Life and had every dog in the country executed”, Carlos Lopez, a “dictator who had ruled without ministers or advisers” and Francisco, who is regarded a ““monster without parallel”” (144). Most of the plaques there, displayed messages as absurd as congratulating Paraguayan leader Francisco on his sixtieth birthday, though he died at the age

of forty-two. There is yet another plaque congratulating the leader for his heroic deeds like executing hundreds of his own people, including his two brothers. The Museum of Military History in Paraguay also seemed to lack the required standard. With the exception of one room, all the other rooms in the building were set aside to display things as silly as the paintings of Madame Lynch, the Irish born Mistress Wife of Paraguayan President Francisco Solano Lopez, and her toilet, dishes, fan, comb, shawl and jug.

Although Iyer exposes the country's political corruption, authoritarian history, poverty, and social disorder, his description frequently transforms Paraguay into an exotic spectacle of backwardness. He positions Paraguay within a hierarchy in which the Western traveller becomes the observer of a supposedly neglected and inferior society. While his criticism of dictatorship is legitimate, the narrative risks turning a complex history of colonialism, war, political violence, and national trauma into a collection of bizarre curiosities. Thus, despite his cosmopolitan intention to introduce forgotten places to global readers, Iyer's representation reproduces a colonial binary between the rational, modern Western observer and the chaotic, primitive, and incomprehensible Paraguayan "Other."

The analysis of Pico Iyer's *Falling Off the Map* demonstrates that contemporary travel writing may move beyond the overt assumptions of imperial exploration while continuing to reproduce certain colonial habits of representation. Iyer's attention to countries overlooked by dominant global narratives is significant, and his writing is frequently marked by irony, self-reflexivity, curiosity, and an apparent willingness to engage with cultural difference. The analysis reveals the persistence of the colonial gaze in the ways in which places and peoples are classified, interpreted, and made meaningful. The category of the "Lonely Places" transforms marginality into a distinctive aesthetic and literary experience, while descriptions of remoteness, disorder, strangeness, backwardness, and historical suspension often make cultural difference legible through standards derived from the traveller's own frame of

reference. The authority to identify certain countries as forgotten, anomalous, or outside the mainstream remains with the traveller, whose mobility and institutional privilege enable him to convert encounters into cultural knowledge and literary value.

Iyer's work thus reveals that colonial representation does not necessarily depend upon explicit claims of superiority or domination. It may also operate through apparently sympathetic, humorous, and self-conscious descriptions that aestheticise difference and retain the traveller's authority to define the Other. A postcolonial reading of Iyer's work consequently calls for neither outright rejection nor uncritical celebration, but for sustained attention to the complex relationship between travel, privilege, representation, and power.

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