

Postcolonialism is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Postcolonialism is a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of European imperial power. The name *postcolonialism* is modeled on postmodernism, with which it shares certain concepts and methods, and may be thought of as a reaction to or departure from colonialism in the same way postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. The ambiguous term *colonialism* may refer either to a system of government or to an ideology or world view underlying that system—in general postcolonialism represents an ideological response to colonialist thought, rather than simply describing a system that comes after colonialism. The term *postcolonial*

studies may be preferred for this reason. Postcolonialism encompasses a wide variety of approaches, and theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. On a simple level, it may seek through anthropological study to build a better understanding of colonial life from the point of view of the colonized people, based on the assumption that the colonial rulers are unreliable narrators.

On a deeper level, postcolonialism examines the social and political power relationships that sustain colonialism and neocolonialism, including the social, political and cultural narratives surrounding the colonizer and the colonized. This approach may overlap with contemporary history and critical theory, and may also draw examples from history, political science, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and human geography.

Sub-disciplines of postcolonial studies examine the effects of colonial rule on the practice of feminism, anarchism, literature, and Christian thought.

As an epistemology (the study of knowledge, its nature and verifiability), as an ethics (moral philosophy), and as a politics (affairs of the citizenry), the field of postcolonialism addresses the politics of knowledge—the matters that constitute the postcolonial identity of a decolonized people, which derives from: (i) the colonizer's generation of cultural knowledge about the colonized people; and (ii) how that Western cultural knowledge was applied to subjugate a non-European people into a colony of the European mother country, which, after initial invasion, was effected by means of the

cultural identities of 'colonizer' and 'colonized'.

Postcolonialism is aimed at destabilizing these theories (intellectual and linguistic, social and economic) by means of which colonialists "perceive", "understand", and "know" the world. Postcolonial theory thus establishes intellectual spaces for subaltern peoples to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and thus produce cultural discourses of philosophy, language, society and economy, balancing the imbalanced us-and-them binary power-relationship between the colonist and the colonial subjects.

Famous theorists :

Frantz Fanon:

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), the psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon analyzed and medically described

the nature of colonialism as essentially destructive. Its societal effects—the imposition of a subjugating colonial identity—are harmful to the mental health of the native peoples who were subjugated into colonies. Fanon wrote the ideological essence of colonialism is the systematic denial of "all attributes of humanity" of the colonized people. Such dehumanization is achieved with physical and mental violence, by which the colonist means to inculcate a servile mentality upon the natives. For Fanon the natives must violently resist colonial subjugation. Hence, Fanon describes violent resistance to colonialism as a mentally cathartic practice, which purges colonial servility from the native psyche,

and restores self-respect to the subjugated. Thus, Fanon actively supported and participated in the Algerian Revolution(1954–62) for independence from France as a member and representative of the *Front de Libération Nationale*.

Edward Said:

Cultural critic Edward Said is considered by E. San Juan, Jr. as "the originator and inspiring patron-saint of postcolonial theory and discourse" due to his interpretation of the theory of Orientalism explained in his 1978 book of the same name. To describe the us-and-them "binary social relation" with which Western Europe intellectually divided the world—into the "Occident" and the

"Orient"—Said developed the denotations and connotations of the term *Orientalism* (an art-history term for Western depictions and the study of the Orient). Said's concept (which he also termed "Orientalism") is that the cultural representations generated with the us-and-them binary relation are social constructs, which are mutually constitutive and cannot exist independent of each other, because each exists on account of and for the other.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

In establishing the Postcolonial definition of the term *subaltern*, the philosopher and theoretician Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak cautioned against assigning an over-broad connotation. She argues:

subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for The Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie. ... In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not *subaltern*. ... Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don't need the word 'subaltern' ... They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They're within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being

allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.

Spivak also introduced the terms *essentialism* and *strategic essentialism* to describe the social functions of postcolonialism. The term *essentialism* denotes the perceptual dangers inherent to reviving subaltern voices in ways that might (over) simplify the cultural identity of heterogeneous social groups and, thereby, create stereotyped representations of the different identities of the people who compose a given social group. The term *strategic essentialism* denotes a temporary, essential group-identity used in the praxis of discourse among peoples. Furthermore, essentialism can

occasionally be applied—by the so-described people—to facilitate the subaltern's communication in being heeded, heard, and understood, because a strategic essentialism (a fixed and established subaltern identity) is more readily grasped, and accepted, by the popular majority, in the course of inter-group discourse. The important distinction, between the terms, is that strategic essentialism does not ignore the diversity of identities (cultural and ethnic) in a social group, but that, in its practical function, strategic essentialism temporarily minimizes inter-group diversity to pragmatically support the essential group-identity.

Spivak developed and applied Foucault's term *epistemic violence* to describe the destruction of non-Western ways of

perceiving the world and the resultant dominance of the Western ways of perceiving the world. Conceptually, epistemic violence specifically relates to women, whereby the "Subaltern [woman] must always be caught in translation, never [allowed to be] truly expressing herself", because the colonial power's destruction of her culture pushed to the social margins her non-Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and knowing the world.

Homing K. Bhabha:

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), the theoretician Homi K. Bhabha argued that viewing the human world as composed of separate and unequal cultures, rather than as an integral human world, perpetuates

the belief in the existence of imaginary peoples and places—"Christendom" and "The Islamic World", "The First World", "The Second World", and "The Third World". To counter such linguistic and sociologic reductionism, postcolonial praxis establishes the philosophic value of hybrid intellectual spaces, wherein ambiguity abrogates truth and authenticity; thereby, *hybridity* is the philosophic condition that most substantively challenges the ideological validity of colonialism.

R. Siva Kumar:

In 1997, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of India's Independence, *Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism* was an

important exhibition curated by R. Siva Kumar at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

In his catalogue essay, Kumar introduced the term Contextual Modernism, which later emerged as a postcolonial critical tool in the understanding of Indian art, specifically the works of Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Ramkinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee.

Santiniketan artists did not believe that to be indigenous one has to be historicist either in theme or in style, and similarly to be modern one has to adopt a particular trans-national formal language or technique. Modernism was to them neither a style nor a form of internationalism. It was critical re-engagement with the foundational aspects

of art necessitated by changes in one's unique historical position.

Dipesh Chakrabarty:

In *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty charted the subaltern history of the Indian struggle for independence, and countered Eurocentric, Western scholarship about non-Western peoples and cultures, by proposing that Western Europe simply be considered as culturally equal to the other cultures of the world, that is, as "one region among many" in human geography.

Derek Gregory

Derek Gregory argues the long trajectory through history of British and American

colonization is an ongoing process still happening today. In *The Colonial Present*, Gregory traces connections between the geopolitics of events happening in modern-day Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq and links it back to the us-and-them binary relation between the Western and Eastern world. Building upon the ideas of the other and Said's work on orientalism, Gregory critiques the economic policy, military apparatus, and transnational corporations as vehicles driving present day colonialism. Emphasizing ideas of discussing ideas around colonialism in the present tense, Gregory utilizes modern events such as the September 11 attacks to tell spatial stories around the colonial behavior happening due to the War on Terror.

Amar Acheraiou:

Acheraiou argues that colonialism was a capitalist venture moved by appropriation and plundering of foreign lands and was supported by military force and a discourse that legitimized violence in the name of progress and a universal civilizing mission. This discourse is complex and multi-faceted. It was elaborated in the 19th century by colonial ideologues such as Joseph-Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau, but its roots reach far back in history. In *Rethinking Postcolonialism: Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literature and the Legacy of Classical Writers*, Amar Acheraiou discusses the history of colonialist discourse and traces

its spirit to ancient Greece, including Europe's claim to racial supremacy and right to rule over non-Europeans harboured by Renan and other 19th century colonial ideologues. He argues that modern colonial representations of the colonized as "inferior", "stagnant" and "degenerate" were borrowed from Greek and Latin authors like Lysias (440–380 BC), Isocrates (436–338 BC), Plato (427–327 BC), Aristotle (384—322 BC), Cicero (106–43 BC), and Sallust (86–34 BC), who all considered their racial others – the Persians, Scythians, Egyptians as "backward", "inferior", and "effeminate. Among these ancient writers Aristotle is the one who articulated more thoroughly these ancient

racial assumptions, which served as a source of inspiration for modern colonists. In *The Politics*, he established a racial classification and ranked the Greeks superior to the rest. He considered them as an ideal race to rule over Asian and other 'barbarian' peoples, for they knew how to blend the spirit of the European "war-like races" with Asiatic "intelligence" and "competence".

Ancient Rome was a source of admiration in Europe since the enlightenment. In France, Voltaire (1694-1778) was one of the most fervent admirers of Rome. He regarded highly the Roman republican values of rationality, democracy, order and justice. In early-eighteenth century Britain, it was poets and politicians like Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Richard Glover (1712 –1785) who

were vocal advocates of these ancient republican values.

It was in the mid-eighteenth century that ancient Greece became a source of admiration among the French and British. This enthusiasm gained prominence in the late-eighteenth century. It was spurred by German Hellenist scholars and English romantic poets: Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), and Goethe (1749–1832), Lord Byron (1788–1824), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and John Keats (1795–1821). These scholars and poets regarded ancient Greece as the matrix of Western civilization and a model of beauty and democracy.

Important books of post colonial theorists:

- a) *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), by Aimé Césaire
- b) *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), by Frantz Fanon
- c) *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), by Frantz Fanon

d) *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), by Albert Memmi

e) *Consciencism* (1970),
by Kwame Nkrumah

f) *Orientalism* (1978),
by Edward Said

g) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

**Key terms of Post
Colonialism:See the ebook
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