

Importance and Applicability of Studying Postcolonial Literature

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Abstract

The word “postcolonialism” is frequently used to describe all the civilizations impacted by imperialism from the time of colonisation to the present. Postcolonialism refers to challenges and disagreements that have persisted between the East and the West ever since the colonial era. By dispelling stereotypes about orientals, it aims to study and analyse colonialism’s effects and restore the identity of independent oriental states. It covers works by authors from countries that the British formerly colonised, including Australia, Nigeria, Canada, Kenya, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Jamaica, and more. These nations are also referred to as Third World nations. This essay also discusses recurring themes and motifs including “identity,” “language,” and “racism,” as well as their distinctive places, points of view, and storytelling techniques. Because this movement has some political and historical undertones, it is important to carefully consider them. It is necessary to give a critical analysis of a variety of representative authors, including Lessing, Rushdie, Achebe, Derek Walcott, Fanon, J. M. Coetzee, and Ondaatje, as well as certain female authors like Isabelle Illende, Jamaica Kincaid, and Eavan Boland. Additionally, a few exemplary pieces by some of the most well-known writers associated with the literary movement postcolonialism are presented critically. Examining the postcolonial components in well-known literary works like *The Grass is Singing*, *Midnight's Children*, *Things Fall Apart*, *The English Patient*, *Ceremony*, and *Disgrace* as well as *Decolonizing the Mind* and *A Small Place* is necessary.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Orientalism, Third World, Lessing, The Grass is Singing, Subaltern, Hegemony, Power, Discourse, Identity, Race

Postcolonialism can be broadly defined as the study of colonialism's consequences on cultures and societies. It is interested in the ways that European nations conquered and subjugated “Third World” cultures, as well as the ways in which those cultures have reacted to and opposed such intrusions in the past. Postcolonialism, as a body of knowledge and an analysis of political and cultural transformation, has undergone and continues to undergo three significant phases:

1. A basic understanding of the inadequacy that living in a colonised state imposes on one's social, psychological, and cultural development
2. The conflict over ethnic, cultural, and political independence
3. A rising consciousness of cultural hybridity and overlap (“post-colonialism”)

Literally, the term “postcolonial” is used to distinguish the time frame before and following colonialism. When situating postcolonialism, a rigorous historical boundary is not attainable. One could consider postcolonialism to be a continuation of colonialism. ‘Third World’ literature is referred to as postcolonial in literature. This is true since many of the third-world nations are ex-colonies of the

European superpowers. Even though these former colonies still bear the marks of the coloniser, they are deemed to as postcolonial once they have achieved nation status. Postcolonial studies refer to the broad subject of research into the literature and cultures of formerly colonised countries.

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said expands on Michel Foucault's ideas, particularly those relating to knowledge and power. Said develops his concept of orientalism using the word “discourse.” The complicated term discourse is defined by Foucault as techniques of constituting or containing knowledge that are anchored in culture, have a subjective aspect, and exhibit power.

Discourse gives significance to the topic under debate by reflecting the idea, mind, and experience of the participants (Weedon 108). The “discourse” of Foucault emphasises the changes in power while incorporating a sense of history and society. The transfer of power between the coloniser and the colonised is at the centre of Said's orientalism (orient+ism). Generally speaking, “oriental” refers to eastern countries, notably those in East Asia. Said explores the widespread Western illusions about the East in his book *Orientalism*. He thought that these misunderstandings were definitely present in Western consciousness and minds. Said refers to the Western fascination with the orient as “the other” in Jacques Lacan’s terms. The identity of oneself is defined by a contrast with the identities of the other in order to make the concept clearer. An Indian, for instance, is an Indian because they are neither Americans nor Europeans. In this instance, the Western is referred to as the “Self” while the non-Western is referred to as the “other.” Another way to think about the “other” is as a stereotype that the Western “self” has about the non-Western “other.”

“Orientalism is a way of thinking founded on the idea of 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.’” The basic division between East and West has thus been accepted by a very large group of writers, including poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, as the starting point for complex theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. (Said 25)

Homi Bhabha played a significant role in the region's development despite never using the word “postcolonialism.” He made the words “ambivalence,” “mimicry,” and “hybridity” commonplace. Ambivalence refers to how colonisers and colonised perceive one another. While the colonised sees the coloniser as both admirable and corrupt, the coloniser frequently views the colonised as both inferior and exotically different. This frequently results in a conflicted feeling of blessing and curse ("ambivalence") in a hybrid environment. What does the word "mimicry" mean? The adaptation of the colonised people's culture, language, education, and attire is known as mimicry. It is not merely copying; rather, it is a process whereby what is adapted is altered to fit the cultural context of the colonised ("mimicry"). Mimicry also entails the copying of the colonizer's thought, which starts a pervasive psychological affectation. Hybridity can result via imitation. Now describe hybridity. A new culture called hybridity is created through intercultural interaction. Hybridity ("hybridity") is impacted in a variety of ways, including social, political, cultural, and religious. The terms allude to a greater comprehension of the interaction between colonisers and colonised people.

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, describes the relationship between Mary Turner, a white farmer's wife in Rhodesia in the 1940s, and her black African servant. The book looks at feminist problems as well as racial politics between Whites and Blacks. Further analysis of Lessing's description of Mary Turner is also necessary due to her unparalleled depictions of the feminine mind in the face of racial, gender, and class constraints. Among the novel's main themes are a failing marriage, white people's

obsession with sexuality, fear of black power, and the thirst for vengeance. Even though there is no longer British colonial rule, these topics are still pertinent today.

For instance, in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Crusoe stands in for the coloniser while Friday represents the colonised. Crusoe makes an effort to educate the natives. He is shown reflecting on Friday's event and imitating Crusoe after giving in to Crusoe. Bhabha views mimicry as one of the most potent tools of colonial power and knowledge. Two dimensions make up the ambivalence in Crusoe and Friday's relationship. Whether Friday fears Crusoe or respects him is unknown. Shakespeare's *Tempest* is another text that could be interpreted in this light. The play explores the conquering of an island, using the Western powers' conquest of the Caribbean island as its backdrop. The heir to the queen, Caliban, is referred to as a witch, and Prospero, who stands in for the Western authority, colonises the island. The master's language is taught to Caliban, who then uses it to curse the master. Through his play, Shakespeare aims to illustrate the negative effects of colonisation. Crusoe and Friday, as well as Prospero and Caliban, have ambivalent relationships with their masters. However, it is unknown if Crusoe views Friday as a simpleton or has sympathy for him. However, it was clear that Caliban disapproved of Prospero. In order to better understand the power dynamics between the coloniser and the colonised, postcolonialism has introduced a new way of reading texts. Also worth mentioning is J. M. Coetzee's rewrite of *Robinson Crusoe*, titled *Foe*, which was written from the viewpoint of the colonised.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "focuses... [our] attention on the continual consequences and power of colonial discourses, practises, and mindsets on the [present]" when she defines postcolonialism. (1) (Lemmerich). According to Spivak, the experiences of women in third-world nations cannot simply be conveyed or portrayed through the use of masculine language or even the vocabulary of western critical theory (Morton 7). This is a political and ethical dilemma for the oppressed communities, according to Spivak. According to her, in such a situation, women or any other minority group would be silenced, and the western critical theory is utterly unable to capture this reality. Said's concept of "marginality" is upheld by Spivak, who also emphasises how women's inability to communicate (talk) for themselves is She (the woman) is a subaltern—a word coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe social groupings that are marginalised, disenfranchised, and disempowered. In her key article "Can the Subaltern Speak," she makes reference to the issue that knowledge is merely a commodity that is developed and constantly altered by the west and disseminated to the rest of the globe for financial benefits. There are these kinds of groups and individuals in postcolonial society. In fact, Spivak suggests that because it objectifies and otherizes the subject, inquiry is always colonial. Spivak uses the Sati practise as an illustration and contends that in this instance, women were merely men's objects of desire. Their inability to communicate with the British or with their own society was primarily due to the gender parity. This efficiently and methodically silences the ladies. The lack of communication has resulted in the marginalisation it has caused.

Postcolonialism is significant in a number of matters that highlight the relationship between power and individuals. According to Foucault, power is an intense form of experience that permeates a society and exerts control over a wide range of subjects. In the following sections, we'll talk about some of these, including racism and cosmopolitanism as well as the postcolonial view of nation and nationhood.

Postcolonialism's expansion

The loss of Britain's empire at the start of World War II is the single most important factor in shaping world politics in the second half of the 20th century. The majority of Britain's official colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, South-East Asia, the far East, including the Persian Gulf, etc. were lost after that. Along with slaves from Africa and the expansion of the Indian market, Britain had taken control of various regions of North America, Canada, and the Caribbean Islands by the 17th century. However, Britain saw its imperialistic rise as a moral obligation to impose more control over nations like China, Africa, and India. Famous British author Kipling called it "the white man's burden" to civilise those who were manifestly unable to govern themselves. Numerous conquered nations, including India, Pakistan, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria, and many more, began producing literature that reflected and portrayed their own experiences both during and after colonisation. In his renowned book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962), Frantz Fanon set the fundamental theoretical groundwork for later colonial ideologies. He contends that only a violent revolution by African farmers can bring about a new world. In a subsequent instant, he used his personal experiences to illustrate the psychological relationship between colonised and coloniser in his book "Black Skin, White Mask" (1952) by highlighting the emotional harm experienced by both colonised and coloniser. His writings existed before Said's *Orientalism*.

Said's *Orientalism* criticises how the West portrays the East as anti-Western, illogical, primitive, and dishonest. Said claims that the concept of orientalism emerged from colonisers' need to understand their people in order to better govern them. Writing about the Arab-Oriental world, according to Said, "is to write with the authority of a nation...with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force." Another postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, saw herself as a postcolonial critic and concentrated her writing on the interconnections of gender and ethnicity with postcolonial themes. Bhabha uses the "language metaphor" to explain his concept of "cultural difference," which depicts cultures in semiotic terms as functioning and appointing value in a manner similar to how linguistic systems do so. (124) (Gilbert). In order to create national and cultural identities, Homi Bhabha's theory and critique explore the concepts of "Hybridity" and "Ambivalence." "Hybridity, perhaps the most important idea throughout Bhabha's career in this regard, obviously depends on the assumption that its opposite exists for its force." (128) Gilbert. He explored the "spaces" formed by predominate social structures in the works of Morrison, Gordimer, and other authors in his well-known books *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994) using psychoanalysis and semiotics.

Postcolonial Writers

Doris Lessing, J. M. Coetzee, Chinua Achebe, Franz Fanon, Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, Li-Young Li, Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and others are some of the most well-known writers of postcolonial literature. The four individuals whose ideas helped shape postcolonial theory are Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, according to Innes (p. 5). Even though each of these authors came from various countries, nations, and social classes, they were all able to make their own distinctive contributions to the creation of outstanding literary masterpieces, many of which would undoubtedly qualify as postcolonial literature. With his first book, *The Things Fall Apart* (1958), Nigerian author Chinua Achebe explores the conflicts between the native Igbo community's culture and values and those of the Christian colonisers. He spent more than three decades working in numerous colleges in Nigeria and the United States. He also

published some non-fiction articles for the 2000 collection *Home and Exile*, in addition to his fiction. Achebe and apartheid author J. M. Coetzee shared the 2007 Man Booker International Prize for their literary brilliance. As a white writer residing in South Africa during the apartheid era, J. M. Coetzee vigorously developed anti-imperialist ideas. He portrayed his own isolation from his fellow Africans in the majority of his books. Award-winning book *The Life and Times of Michael K* has a gardener as the main character Michael K and is set in Cape Town. His books are symbolic and emphasise the enduring nature of human retaliation. For his novel *Disgrace*, published in 1999, Coetzee won his second Booker Prize. Even though he received several accolades, the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature stands out as the best. Frantz Fanon is a well-known author of postcolonial literature who was interested in the psychological effects of colonisation and racism on black people. He wrote his best-known work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, in 1961 and went on to become a strong opponent of colonial rule and inspire violent revolution. Additionally, he had a big impact on a lot of philosophers, including Homi Bhabha, Jean Paul Sartre, and Edward Said. Edward Said "is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by Europeans to reinforce power, and to exclude or dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have" (Innes, 9). Novelist, critic, and poet Michael Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka and later immigrated to London with his mother. His best-known work is *The English Patient*, which won the Booker Prize and depicts the interactions of persons from many nationalities in the closing stages of World War II. Salman Rushdie is a postcolonial Indian author who has desired to write since he was a young child. *Midnight's Children*, his most popular and Booker Prize-winning book, helped him gain international recognition. He drew a timeline of Indian history from 1910 to 1976 while fusing it with his own memories. His novel *The Satanic Verses* was outlawed, and Muslims all across the world protested, calling the book blasphemous. For the book *The Satanic Verses*, he had to deal with difficulties under the guise of a "fatwa." Rushdie focuses on the intersections of history, religion, culture, and identity in the majority of his works.

There are renowned female writers who have contributed more than male writers to postcolonial literature, like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Jamaica Kincaid. *A Small Place* by Kincaid provides information on Antigua. She wrote mostly about women's interactions with other women, as well as the effects of colonialism and patriarchy on women's self-image. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a notable scholar of postcolonial literary theory and another female author, translated the preface and the entirety of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* into English. She frequently discussed her critical views of postcolonial literature in interviews.

The main concepts of postcolonial writing

'Cultural domination' and 'Racism', 'Quest for Identity', 'Racial Discrimination', 'Inequality', 'Hybridity', along with some odd presenting techniques, are only a few of the common themes and motifs in postcolonial literature. The majority of postcolonial writers focused on and illustrated a variety of subject ideas that are closely related to both "coloniser" and "colonised." White Europeans consistently emphasised racial prejudice to demonstrate their superiority over colonised people. The integration of apartheid into national laws was most pronounced in South Africa. The "Groups Areas Act," "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act," "Immorality Act," "Population Registration Act," "Bantu Authorities Act," and "The Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act" are a few of the most noteworthy laws of this type. All of these laws discriminated against colonised people and imposed limitations on them. In their work, Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee both demonstrated how apartheid

ruined South Africa in numerous ways, including psychologically, morally, and economically. Language was vital in the postcolonial environment for the control and enslavement of colonised people. In order to dominate their subjects, colonisers frequently forced their language on them. Therefore, the majority of postcolonial writers deal with the challenges in a variety of ways by fusing the native language with that which has been imposed; the resulting hybrid language emphasises the fractured condition of the colonised mentality.

Literature evaluation

Although postcolonialism focuses on the consequences of colonisation, its early detractors, including Said and Spivak in the 1970s, did not use the same term. The phrase was initially used to discuss cultural connections among colonial cultures and the literary realm before being used to the perspective of former Western colonies. Nearly from the beginning, postcolonialism was a potential locus for disciplinary and interpretive conflict. As a result, it has successfully made room for some critical debate on the term's use and hyphenation. This has made it possible for some critics to distinguish between hyphenated post-colonial theory and postcolonialism, in addition to the main post-structuralist influences and contributions (Ashcroft et al., 2013).

The stated theory, however, grew until it was utilised in many disciplinary analyses applied to both the past and present of colonial legacies, and even the resistance of its subjects, despite the fact that its application was restricted to the approach to colonial cultural works and the representations of the colonised. Though there is still a lot of debate about the word "post" in academics, some critics prefer to define the colonial period as the legacy and its impacts on the lands and the people rather than the physical occupation of the lands and cultures. While some theorists accept the hyphenated post-colonial reference, others reject it, refusing to accept that colonialism only existed for a limited amount of time and advocating for its continued existence in dormant forms. The method, impact, and responses to the colonial act—including its neo-colonial manifestations—have so attracted attention in recent accounts (Ashcroft et al.).

A comprehensive body of knowledge exists in the discipline of postcolonial study. The term postcolonial was once used to describe independent nations but has since come to refer to an entire field of research that aims to understand the flaws in that same independence. Postcolonialism, which draws on history, sociology, and the more advanced study of critical theory, creates a critical space between the perspective and power of the coloniser and the experience of the colonised body, identifying as such the pervasive colonial dynamics present in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres and their effect on the upkeep of unequal power relations. It employs a variety of analytical frameworks and topics, including feminism, postmodernism, identity creation, and resistance, and it equally seeks to navigate the independence, reliance, repression, and resistance that this intersection entails. Postcolonial theory connects with several and occasionally incompatible ideas due to its multidisciplinary nature, including Marxism and Poststructuralism, which casts question on its relevance and applicability. Disagreements over the theory's basic semantic frame reflect the same weaknesses (Ghandi, 1998).

Conclusion

Actually, postcolonial literature addresses a variety of subjects, including the politics of rewriting, translations, nationalism and its relationship to the nation. It's a very appealing genre and one of the most widely read in literature. Postcolonial fiction has made reference to a wide range of different colonies,

such as those in Africa, Australasia, the Caribbean, Ireland, Latin America, and South Africa. Cultural, political, geographical, psychological, and post-structural issues make up the bulk of postcolonialism's concerns. The principal colonial empires were the British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. In terms of matters of politics, geography, culture, and customs, it is also an important piece of literature that helps understand both the "coloniser" and the "colonised".

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