**Postcolonialism**

*The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination.*

**Che Guevara, speech to the United Nations, December 11, 1964**

**Postcolonialism** (or **post-colonialism**—either spelling is acceptable, but each represents slightly different theoretical assumptions. When spelled with a hyphen *(post-colonialism),* the term implies a chronological order—that is, a change from a colonial to a postcolonial state. When spelled without the hyphen *(postcolonialism),* the term refers “to writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives,” both before and after the period of colonization.) consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were colonies of other countries. For the most part, postcolonial studies excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by, but remained outside of, the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition. Referred to as “third-world literature” by Marxist critics and “Commonwealth literature” by others—terms many contemporary critics think pejorative—postcolonial theorists investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other.

Rooted in colonial power and prejudice, postcolonialism develops from a four-thousand-year history of strained cultural relations between colonies in Africa and Asia and the Western world. Throughout this long history, the West became the colonizers, and many African and Asian countries and their peoples became the colonized. During the nineteenth century, Great Britain emerged as the largest colonizer and imperial power, quickly gaining control of almost one quarter of the earth’s landmass. By the middle of the nineteenth century, terms such as *colonial interests* and the *British Empire* were widely used both in the media and in international politics. Many British people believed that Great Britain was destined to rule the world. Likewise, the assumption that Western Europeans and, in particular, the British people were biologically superior to any other race—a term for a class of people based on physical and/or cultural distinctions— remained relatively unquestioned.

From the perspective of many white Westerners, the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Asia were “heathens,” possessing pagan ways that must be Christianized. How one treats peoples who are so defined does not really matter, they maintained, because many Westerners subscribed to the colonialist ideology that all races other than white were inferior or sub-human. These sub-humans or “savages” quickly became the inferior and equally “evil” Others, a philosophical concept called alterity whereby “the Others” are excluded from positions of power and viewed as both different and inferior. By the early twentieth century, England’s political, social, economic, and ideological domination of its colonies began to disappear, a process known as **decolonization.** By mid century, for example, India had gained her independence from British colonial rule. Many scholars believe that this event marks the beginning of postcolonialism or **third-world studies,** a term coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy.

The beginnings of postcolonialism’s theoretical and social concerns can be traced to the 1950s. Along with India’s independence, this decade witnessed the ending of France’s long involvement in Indochina; the parting of the ways between the two leading figures in existential theory, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, over their differing views about Algeria; Fidel Castro’s now-famous “History Shall Absolve Me” speech; and the publication of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

The following decades witnessed the publication of additional key texts that articulated the social, political, and economic conditions of various subaltern groups. In 1960 the Caribbean writer George Lamming published *The Pleasures of Exile,* a text in which Lamming critiques William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* from a postcolonial perspective. The next year Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), a work that highlights the tensions or binary oppositions of white versus black, good versus evil, and rich versus poor, to cite a few. Other writers, philosophers, and critics such as Albert Memmi continued publishing texts such as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965, English version) that would soon become the cornerstone of postcolonial theory and writings. In particular, postcolonialism gained the attention of the West with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s monumental text *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989). With the publication of these two texts, the voices and the concerns of many subaltern cultures soon heard in both academic and social arenas.

**Frantz Fanon** is one of the first figures that comes to one’s mind when the issue is post- colonialism. He was born in the French colony of Martinique and as a black intellectual, he was known for his analysis of the relationship between colonialism and racism. His medical and psychological practice enabled him to focus on harmful psychological effects of colonial administration and racist policies conducted under colonial rule. However, Fanon did not only concern with the psychology of the colonized people but also with their colonial masters. As a psychiatrist, Fanon defines colonialism as a source of violence and focuses on its psychological effects on human conscious since he believed that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of the effects of colonialism. Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in 1961), is a foundational text in post-colonial literature. In this book, Fanon considers violence, which, in his thought and many of the post-colonial writers, has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, as a destruction form of native social forms without reserving the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life. Violence, writes Fanon, is a form of elf-assertion. When the native discovers that he cannot hope to become truly ‘white’, or even expel the whites, his violence erupts against his own people. To Fanon, this violence affirmed the supremacy of white values and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life. Fanon furthers his argument by holding that in the colonial countries, the agents of government speak the language of pure force and the means of oppression and/or domination brings violence into the home and into the mind of the native (1963, pp. 37-42).

In his *Black Skin, White Masks* (originally published in 1952), another significant work on post-colonial literature which Fanon defines as a book of a clinical study, he notes that: “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.” Fanon holds that if there is an inferiority complex of the Black man, it is the outcome of a double process; primarily, economic and subsequently, the internalization of this inferiority. While attempting at a psychopathological and philosophical explanation of the *state of being* (emphasis in original) a Negro, Fanon tried to establish the attitudes of the Black man in the white world and concluded that a Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. This self-division, according to Fanon, was a direct result of colonialist subjugation and the theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is at an early stage in the slow evolution of being a man. Although Fanon noted that his observations and his conclusions were valid only for the Antilles, his writings strongly inspired anti-colonial independence movements particularly in the African continent. His deployment of the term ‘national culture’ was an attempt to plead for a greater, pan-African cause.

Another Martinique like Fanon, **Aimé Césaire** was an influential figure in shaping the ideas of current post-colonial writers. In *Discourse on Colonialism* (originally published in 1955), which later become a classic text in post-colonial studies, Césaire holds that colonization actually dicivilizes the colonizers and brutalize them in the true sense of the word. By equating colonization with “thingification,” Césaire claims that what Western civilization cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself but the crime against the white man and the fact that he applied colonialist practices in the European continent. This prominent claim of Césaire is called a “pseudo-humanism” of European colonial powers. Césaire also argues that colonization destroyed the great civilizations including the civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas and ruined the cultures and institutions, religions and national economies of societies which were once democratic, cooperative and fraternal (1972, pp. 2-7). Césaire is also the acknowledged inventor of the famous term “negritude” which was defined by him as “the simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as blacks, of our history and of our culture”. Césaire, therefore, emphasized the need to the development of colonial societies and the resistance to the discriminatory policies of colonizers by their own sources. By doing this, he tried to make the native people who were aliened to their own culture under colonial rule and who were ashamed of being Negroes, to realize their internal strength. In his introduction to Césaire’s distinguished poetry book *Return to my Native Land,* Kunene notes that negritude was essentially a doctrine “which asserts the blackman as a man with his own culture, his own civilization and his own original contributions” (1969, p. 20). What Césaire desired was the recognition of Negros to their own achievements in social, cultural and economic terrains which was denied by the major colonial powers.

The best-known work of **Albert Memmi**, another influential writer of post-colonial critique, is *The Colonizer and the Colonized* which was originally published in 1957 when the independence movements in the colonies were active including his own country, Tunisia. In this thought-provoking book, Memmi analyses the psychological effects of colonialism like Fanon and his analysis includes both the colonized subjects and colonizers themselves. Colonialism, which Memmi describes as “one variety of fascism”, is based on economic privilege, despite the colonizer’s ideology of more noble goals of religious conversion or civilization. Its key tools are racism and terror. Racism is ingrained in every colonial institution, and establishes [the fostering poor self-concepts in the colonized as well. The colonizers “never seriously promoted sub-humanity of the colonized](https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/20/essentialism/), religious conversion of the colonized” because it would have been a step towards assimilation and therefore “the disappearance of the colonial relationships” (72-73). “Social salvation” is not a reality either. The colonized could not rise above their social status and be permitted to assimilate. According to Memmi, the colonial system is fundamentally unstable and will lead to its own destruction. The colonized have ultimately two answers to the colonial system. The first, assimilation, is impossible because the colonizer will not allow it. Because the colonial system has not provided a democratic process, the other option is revolt. Revolt is a step in the colonial process and its built-in end. By revolting the colonized reject all colonizers, whether they be refusers or colonialists, as well as their language. Revolt often embraces religion and tradition and the colonized must find identity first, and thrust themselves, however precariously, back into a history. Memmi maintains that revolt is still a stage in colonial alienation, and colonialism doesn’t disappear until this stage is over.

The first version of **Edward Said’s *Orientalism****,* which is also defined as a seminal work in the post-colonial field together with that of Memni, Fanon and Césaire’s, was published in 1977. Said saw colonialism as a discursive component. By discursive construction, Said means the apparatuses of representation, such as archaeology, literary, history, music, ethnography, political theory, and social commentary, used by the European colonial powers to talk about the East. Said argued that this representation of the East was integral to the conquest of the East: the domination of the East through documented knowledge and archives enabled Europe to obtain and retain power. Said’s major contribution was to see colonialism as rooted in epistemological inquiry. ‘Orientalism’ is this European construct of the East as primitive, savage, pagan, undeveloped and criminal. Such a construct then enables the European to justify its presence. The poor, weak native needed to be governed and civilised. In criticizing the misrepresentation of colonial people in the political-intellectual field, Said heavily draws the work of Michel Foucault. He explicitly notes that he finds it useful to employ Foucault’s notion of discourse as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. He further argues that “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient - politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post- Enlightenment period.” Following Foucault’s ideas on the relationship between power and knowledge, Said defined Orientalism as a discourse which is produced with various kinds of power including power political, power intellectual, power cultural and power moral (1979, pp. 2-12, 94).

**“Subaltern”** is one of **Spivak**’s most-cited but also frequently misinterpreted concepts that she used in order to draw attention to the representation of the Third World within Western discourse. The term “subaltern”, meaning of “inferior rank”, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those “groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power.” Spivak emphasizes that the essential subjectivity of the subaltern was constrained by the discourses within which they are constructed as subaltern, in this respect, it would be misleading to assert that it was a simple matter of allowing the subaltern (oppressed) forces to speak. Her controversial question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is not an assertion of the inability of the subaltern voice to be accessed or given agency, but only a warning to avoid the idea that the subaltern can ever be isolated in some absolute, essentialist way from the play of discourses and institutional practices that give it its voice (Ashcroft et all, 1998, pp. 79, 215). As a Marxist, Poststructuralist, and Feminist She theorises the condition of native woman within patriarchal and colonial structure. She argues that a subaltern woman has no position of enunciation. She remains within the discourse of patriarchy and colonialism as a the object of somebody else’s discourse.

The concept of “Other” and characterization of colonial subjects through dominant colonialist discourses, discursive practices, or assumed “scientific” race theories which explain the *inferiority* of the colonized also have a crucial place in post-colonial literatures. In colonial era, with help of the “modern” sciences, the cultural basis of othering was laid through the notions of *superior race* and *mission civiliatrise*. The term “othering” was actually coined by Spivak for the process by which colonial powers create their “others” through discourses. While the construction of the Other is fundamental to the construction of the Self, the “Other” corresponds to the focus of desire or power in relation to which the subject is produced. Spivak draws attention to the process by which the other is the excluded or “mastered” subject created by the discourse of power. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects and to Spivak, it is a dialectical process because “the colonizing *Other* is established at the same time as its colonized *others* are produced as subjects” (Ashcroft et all, 1998, pp. 171-172).

Another key figure in the post-colonial analysis of the interpellation of the native subject is **Homi Bhabha**. His works develop a set of challenging concepts (such as hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence) that radically interrogates the effectiveness of colonial discourse. Bhabha begins his reading by noting how identities in the colonial encounter are never stable or fixed. Colonial encounters are transactions between the colonizer and colonised. The European in the colony constructs his identity only through a relationality based on difference. Relying on Lacanian psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, Bhabha proposes that identities, even in the colonial context, are based on differential relations. This means the coloniser can never possess a self-identical identity, because it requires the colonised to validate it. One should recall here poststructuralism’s argument that all identity/meaning is based on the difference of one letter/ sound/ signifier from another. Identity, therefore, is constantly shifting, liminal, and displaced. With this move, Bhabha suggests that we cannot see colonial identity as fixed or Monolithic; it is unstable shifting and relational.

Bhabha proposed that colonial discourse is actually conflictual and ambivalent. The colonial master, far from being the strong, unflinching and certain Englishman, is actually informed by two contrary psychic states, what Bhabha terms, fetish and phobia. These two contrary states result in stereotypes of the native subject. Bhabha argues that the fetish/ phobia structure of colonial relations results in a condition where the White man seeks and desires the Other, while at the same time wishes to erase the difference. The repetition of stereotypes is not, for Bhabha, a sign of the power of colonial discourse. Rather he treats this repetition as a sign of its inherent instability. Stereotypes are invoked and repeated not because they are stable but because unless repeated they lose their power and validity as signs. An example of this structure of repetition Bhabha cites, in his essay, ‘Signs Taken for Wonders’, the ‘English book’. The ‘English book’ is the Bible. Bhabha argues that the Bible functioned as a sign of colonial power/ authority: the authority to disseminate the book throughout the colony. However, Bhabha notes, the sign (book) is riddled with ambivalence in the very act of disseminating it. Bhabha suggests that the book is translated by natives into their own contexts, a process that often involve subversion and sometimes resistance. Thereby the book acquires a wholly different form, and by extension loses its authority as a colonial sign. It is now a sign that has been rewritten by the native. This is the inherent instability of colonial discourse and the potential for resistance. Bhabha uses the term ‘ambivalence’ to describe the rupture between the hope-for original authority of the English book/ sign and the effect of repetition and difference.

Extending this argument about the potential resistance by the native subject, Bhabha proposes the idea of ‘mimicry’ (in ‘Of Mimicry and Man’). Mimicry is the disciplined imitation of the White man by the native. The native has been taught, consistently, that he needs to try and ape the White man and his culture. Mimicry is sought through Western education, religion, and structures that the native is trained to think or behave like the White man. However, Bhabha sees this as a site where colonial authority actually breaks down. What happens in the Colonial encounter is that the native becomes Anglicised but is never fully or truly white. He is a mimic who can now insinuate himself into the colonial structure, respond in English and adopt the structure of logic and reasoning in argument which Western education has taught him. The mimic man here appears to follow the white man's authority - to show the power of colonial discourse - but in effect fractures and disrupts it. As Bhabha puts it, ‘the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also distracts its authority’. This mimicry also fails because the colonial master, on the one hand, wants the native as similar to himself as possible, on the other, wishes to keep the difference between himself and the native. That is the colonial wishes to both erase and reinforce differences. This dual state of mimicry by the native - one that is the direct result of the fractured nature of colonial discourse - is what Bhabha terms ‘hybridity’.

According to Bhabha, hybridised native who refuses to return the colonial gaze, and who refuses to acknowledge the coloniser’s position and authority, is placed in a position of in-betweenness: between ‘adopted’ Englishness and ‘original’ Indianness. Mimicry that results in this dualism of ‘deference and disobedience’ is what Bhabha sees as resistance. This hybridity creates a ‘third space’, a space of relations between colonizer and colonized. The third space in the space where the subject begins to articulate resistance. The ‘subject’, for Bhabha, is thus the split, decentred, unstable and resistant one.