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## Postcolonial Theory

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ence this through a Hindu vision of cosmic unity, she suffers from spiritual despair. Meanwhile, Miss Quested goes inside a cave and imagines that Aziz has physically assaulted her. A contentious trial follows, during which she becomes confused about her own sense of reality at the caves, and she recants her charge. Throughout Aziz's trial, Fielding supports his innocence, breaking ranks with other Anglo-Indians, whereas Mrs. Moore's support is mystically felt by the Indians, although she herself had left Chandrapore.

In the "Temple" section, Aziz and Godbole are working at a Hindu princely state called Mau, rejecting the indignities of British India. Aziz has had reason to misunderstand Fielding in spite of the latter's loyal friendship. The two meet during the festivities celebrating the birth of Krishna, the god of love; and their misunderstanding is cleared. Their friendship is renewed, but only temporarily, as Aziz says they cannot be friends until every Englishman is driven out. A hundred voices issuing from everywhere say that friendship is not yet possible, and the sky also concurs.

Dealing with issues like the fundamental unfairness of British colonialism, the collisions and collusions of cultures and peoples, and the spiritual desire of humans to connect to something larger than life, *A Passage to India* has always been read as a complex novel. Among Forster's contemporary critics, Hartley sees it as "disturbing," Wright remarks that it deals with a "subject of enormous difficulty," and Priestly describes it as an "honest thing in three dimensions" (Bradbury 47–58). Over the years, criticism has generally focused on its depiction of sociopolitical realities or on its symbolic representation of humanity's spiritual angst, or sometimes on both. While earlier readings have seen the novel as a liberal-humanist's scathing critique of colonialism, some readings in the 1970s and 1980s have seen it as func-

tioning from within the discourse of imperialism even while attempting to question it (Parry 27–43). However, the approach exemplified by John Beer, seeing it as a versatile novel with many interpretive possibilities, best opens up this complex and wonderful text.

Husne Jahan

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## Postcolonial Theory

Colonialism and its aftermath prompt a form of cultural studies that seeks to address questions of identity politics and justice that are the ongoing legacy of empires. Postcolonial theory has its origins in resistance movements, principally at the local, and frequently at nonmetropolitan, levels. Among its early thinkers, three seem of special importance: Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Frantz Fanon. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was a founder of the Communist Party in Italy. In his *Prison Notebooks* (1971), he wrote insightfully about the proletariat, designated by him as subalterns; his thoughts regarding the responsibilities of public intellectuals inspired many, and his notion of hegemony and resistance proved influential. Paulo

Freire (1921–97) was a Brazilian with a special interest in education. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) seeks to restore subjectivity to objectified, oppressed classes in society. Frantz Fanon (1925–61) was a psychiatrist of Caribbean descent who participated in the Algerian independence movement. His two books, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) inspired many anticolonial struggles and investigations of racism's many manifestations.

Other important early influences would include Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, José Carlos Mariátegui, Alejo Carpentier, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, C. L. R. James, Édouard Glissant, and Wilson Harris. The Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, whose essays on the need for decolonizing the minds of those living in former colonies have been very influential, echoes Fanon's work and tempers it with experience from the anglophone world. Social theorists, economists, and anthropologists such as Stuart Hall, Samir Amin, Clifford Geertz, Benedict Anderson, and James Clifford have anchored important areas of investigation, developed in fascinating ways by writers such as Mary Louise Pratt and Tejaswini Niranjana. The names suggest the inescapable fact that postcolonial theory is a worldwide intellectual event, and not the product of any one cultural system.

The disparate investigations of these authors began to coalesce with the creation of the Subaltern Studies Project, under the direction of Ranajit Guha. Drawing its inspiration from these writers and others, including Michel Foucault and E. P. Thompson, the Subaltern Studies Project is a group of revisionist historians who attempt to write history from the point of view of those who had been forgotten: all oppressed groups without a voice or sense of agency. Most active from 1986 to 1995, much of their work, a "history from below," can be seen as one of recovery, a re-

discovery of voices that were always there but seldom attended to—in colonial documents, in oral discourse, in popular memory. One of the group's members, Dipesh Chakrabarty, notes that the peasant was already part of the political equation but was written out of its decisions. Insights such as these lead the group to consider cultural production as a potential neocolonialism. Among its other members are Gyanendra Pandey, Gautam Bhadra, David Hardiman, Shahid Amin, Partha Chatterjee, Arvind Das, Sumit Sarkar, Asok Sen, and Veena Das. Part of the project of the group is a critique of the elitism of nationalisms that perpetuate the silence of subalterns and their communities. The group has had imitators elsewhere, as in the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, which was active from 1992 to 2000.

Though not a member of this group, the political psychologist Ashis Nandy, through his association with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, explores similar territory. This group was founded in 1963 by Rajini Kothari and seeks to oppose the hegemony of Western discourse. Nandy is equally critical of India itself, portraying its middle class as a neocolonial elite. In *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983) and *The Savage Freud* (1995), he details his criticism of the ongoing Western imposition of a global consciousness that levels other modes of cultural expression.

Postcolonial theory came into its own as a revisionist project of the early 1990s, dominated until recently by Indian intellectuals and informed by a second trinity: Edward Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. Edward Said (1935– ) was born in Jerusalem of Lebanese and Palestinian heritage. His family was wealthy, and he was raised a Christian and educated at Princeton and Harvard with degrees in history and literature; his dissertation was on Joseph Conrad. Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak (1942– ) was born in Calcutta and educated at Cornell and Cambridge. Her dissertation at Cornell was on William Butler Yeats, under the direction of Paul de Man. Homi K. Bhabha (1949– ), a Parsee born in Bombay and educated at Oxford, is the nephew of the first director of India's nuclear program. He currently teaches American literature at Harvard. Even this brief listing suggests their privileged backgrounds and their training in European humanism, but also demonstrates the hybridized nature of their careers and cultural knowledge. Not too surprisingly, their life experiences also point the direction of their research interests.

In their writings these theorists emphasize issues arising from hybridity, exile, cosmopolitanism, and diasporic perspectives. Said, whose *Orientalism* (1978) set the terms for all further discussion of postcolonial theory, focuses attention on objectification by the West, identity politics (using the plight of the Palestinians as a case in point), and on the autonomous intellectual who finds him/herself in between nation states. Spivak, who translated Jacques Derrida into English and is consequently influenced by poststructuralism, explores issues of alterity and agency, asking who is served when differences are defined. She publicized in North America the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, thereby helping determine the vocabulary of postcolonial theory and solidifying its signature issues. Bhabha draws some ideas from psychoanalytic theory and rejects the notions of binary identities, discussing instead migrant sensibilities and the consequent necessity for performances of one's identity as a cultural mix. Given the subject matter of their graduate educations, it is not surprising that these three and others like them especially privileged literary studies in their initial forays into what is now termed *postcolonial theory*, including, for example, the politics of transla-

tion, the choice of a language in which to compose, and the politics of travel literature.

One of the earliest expressions of postcolonial theory was the analysis of colonial discourse, the various conduits used by London, Paris, and the other imperial capitals to define a binary system of civilized world and savage jungle. In this cosmology, the world of the colonizer is seen as central, and that of India, Africa, and so on, as peripheral. The former is the location of high culture, the source of modernity, science, rationality; the latter is a seething darkness, ever threatening to pull all humanity back into superstition and chaos. Given this philosophy, the mandate to treat the rest of the world as something less than fully human seems inevitable, and colonization is presented as a God-given duty purportedly serving the colonized at least as fully as it enriches the colonizer.

Writers such as Said point out the broad generalizations that are employed by supposedly objective colonial proponents in their analysis of subject peoples, resulting in the infantilizing of entire peoples and the stripping away of individuality. More recently, analysts of colonial discourse have themselves been criticized as unwittingly generalizing the colonizer and the colonized alike, ignoring countertrends in some nineteenth-century documentation, and underplaying subaltern agency and resistance to the colonial juggernaut. A persistent issue that dogs prominent theorists is the authenticity of their voices, variously remote from indigenous agents.

Bhabha's contribution to colonial discourse analysis includes his discussion of mimicry, whereby England and other colonial powers trained a class of colonized peoples to serve the colonizer's interests while apparently remaining fully within the local culture. They accomplished this through the implied and sometimes explicit message, spread by the educational

systems they established throughout the empire as well as by some Christian missionaries, that to adopt British manners and culture was an advance over one's own culture. In any event, such personal transformation was generally a step toward greater economic security. This resulted in a comprador class, left behind after decolonization as a neocolonial elite that kept the colonial institutions running, much as if nothing had changed.

At the heart of the various forms of postcolonial theory, therefore, is a determination that political modernity must be rethought through non-European eyes, using more than European philosophy to do so. This goal sets up an implied contest between the exoticizing that lines up under Said's concept of orientalism, and the search for a common humanity across cultures that is condemned or praised as universalism. The idea of an *essential* identity of any one culture or people remains contentious, used by various subaltern groups as a rallying cry for political representation, but condemned by others as a romanticized tribalism that flies in the face of the increasing hybridity of individual identities. This tension leads postcolonial theorists to consider questions such as these: if nations are lowering their borders, can their citizens be far behind in erasing their identifying characteristics? In other words, is a postcolonial identity becoming, through the forces of globalization, the hegemonic imposition of an inevitable Western, and increasingly American, cultural overlay? Can any ethnic or national grouping meaningfully resist what many postcolonial theorists condemn as neocolonialization? Those who answer in the negative frequently are among those who argue that there is no meaningful *post* in postcolonial theory—that is, that the legal maneuver of independence from imperial powers is only technical, a form without substance. Overlaying it are economic and other cultural forces that are as determinative as ever.

Much early postcolonial theorizing had to do with questions of nation-building, but Paul Gilroy's work on various issues having to do with the Caribbean has helped shift the focus from national identity to the importance of diasporas across the globe; these concerns have been further sparked by the many novelists currently writing about homelands they left many years ago. Increasingly, in the United States, expected postcolonial theorizing combines with border theory and issues arising from multiculturalism to produce a hybridized field that seeks to include that nation's many ethnic literatures into a broadened notion of what determines a condition of postcoloniality. The field is now less biased toward literary analysis and theory than it once was, and increasingly comparative and interdisciplinary; the social sciences contend for the lion's share of relevant topics for investigation. Consequently, areas such as film studies, gender and sexuality studies, historiography, epistemology, and the politics and sociology of representation, architecture, and even science and technology as they enable globalization, are also increasingly coming to the fore. As the field develops, it is moving from colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies, accommodating itself to an often contentious dialogue with advocates of globalization.

Elements of postcolonial theory have become so variously applied, in fact, that its prevalence can dilute its earlier claims to radical revisionism in the service of justice. Critics of the postcolonial movement, if it may be so designated, point to the problematic nature of its colonization by Western intellectuals (or those now living in the West). As Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and others point out, what began as a set of radical writings intended to change society has become a vehicle for academic promotion and high salaries for some, the latest chic chatter for the intellectual elite.

Recent theorists, such as Arjun Appadurai, Inderpal Grewal, Asha Varadharajan, Gauri Viswanathan, Chandra Mohanty, and Keya Ganguly, take these criticisms to heart and seek to reassert central postcolonial issues in new ways, introducing feminism and queer theory, theorizing globalization, and studying diasporic groups in the United States and elsewhere. Sisir Kumar Das and others are bringing increasing attention to writers like Mahasweta Devi who, by choosing to write in languages other than those of the colonizer, arguably stake a claim for a decentering of postcolonial theorizing.

*John C. Hawley*

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