

# ENG 435: Postcolonial Theory and Literature

Fall 2023

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## LECTURE 1

### Introduction to Postcolonial Theory and Literature

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#### When the hyphen matters: Postcolonial or Post-colonial?

“The hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch” (John McLeod, 5). For example, the prefix ‘post-’ in post-1971 Bangladesh.

But this hyphen-politics deletes the actual history of a location by referring to a particular time and context because it refers to “the period after the colonies become independent” (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1995, xv). The colonial discourse to use the hyphenated term is to reject the concept of comparative study between past and present. ENG 435 aims at looking at pre-colonial world with equal significance that is essential in case of both colonial and post-colonial world.

#### Genealogy of Postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism is the problem child of capitalism and imperialism (John McLeod, 7). The “continental concern” (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*), i.e., “the European ‘voyages of discovery’ in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries” led by European ‘mad’ (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*) people like Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) and Vasco da Gama (1469-1524). Africa, South Asia, America, and Caribbean were the most victims although America returned as a threat for all at the end of the day, and it is due in most part to comparatively weaker Red Indians, i.e., Native Americans who failed to fight against the clever Americans who followed Christopher Columbus, the Satan in Europe. The success of colonization mostly depends on rewriting history that includes renaming anything and everything in a particular context. For example, “two names that America could have received before the arrival of the Europeans were **Zuania (of Caribbean origin) and Abya-Yala** (used by the Kuna people of Panama).”

**Colonialism followed by both capitalism and imperialism is fact a reflection of the inferiority complex the Europeans had** after failing to cope with the expansion of Islam and the achievements of the Muslim around the globe. That’s why, they took three weapons, these being: gun, coin, and the Bible.

“The seizing of ‘foreign’ lands for government and settlement was in part motivated by the desire to create and control markets abroad ... **Colonialism was**

**a lucrative commercial operation.”** (John McLeod, 7) The target locations for the Europeans were South Asia, Africa, America, and Australia.

**South Asia: Great Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States** were the imperialist countries that had colonies in Southeast Asia. Portugal also had a colony in the region but had the least impact.

**Africa:** The principal powers involved in the modern colonisation of Africa are **Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Italy**. In nearly all African countries today, the language used in government and media is the one imposed by a recent colonial power, though most people speak their native African languages.

**America: Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands** established colonies in North America. Each country had different motivations for colonization and expectations about the potential benefits. In case of Canada, in 1604, the first European settlement north of Florida was established by **French explorers Pierre de Monts and Samuel de Champlain**, first on St. Croix Island (in present-day Maine), then at Port-Royal, in Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia). In 1608 Champlain built a fortress at what is now Québec City.

**Caribbean:** The four main colonial powers in the Caribbean were the **Spanish, English, Dutch, and French**. Other countries that held possession of various islands at different times were Portugal, Sweden, and Denmark.

**Australia:** The First Fleet of British ships arrived at Botany Bay in January 1788 to establish a penal colony, the first colony on the Australian mainland. In the century that followed, **the British** established other colonies on the continent, and European explorers ventured into its interior.

**To conclude**, “Colonialism is a particular historical manifestation of imperialism, specific to certain places and times.” (John McLeod, 8)

Colonialism refers to “the ‘esettlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of colonial lands” (Elleke Boehmer, 1995, 2)

So, the definition of colonialism refers to “(a) the emphasis on the settlement of land, (b) the economic relationship at the heart of colonialism, and (c) the unequal relations of power which colonialism constructs.” (John McLeod, 8)

### **What is Postcolonialism?**

Postcolonialism “is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction” ((Bill Ashcroft et al., 1995, 2).

Postcolonial theory “involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race,

gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being.” (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1995, 2)

Postcolonialism covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.” (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1989, 2)

### **Rudyard Kipling on Postcolonialism: "The White Man's Burden" in Focus**

Imperialist Joseph Rudyard Kipling’s (1865-1936) poem entitled "The White Man's Burden" (1899) is a poem about the Philippine–American War (1899–1902) that exhorts the United States to assume colonial control of the Filipino people and their country. Originally written to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria (22 June 1897), the jingoistic poem was replaced with the sombre "Recessional" (1897), also a Kipling poem about empire.

In "The White Man's Burden", Kipling encouraged the American annexation and colonisation of the Philippine Islands, a Pacific Ocean archipelago conquered in the three-month Spanish–American War (1898). As an imperialist poet, Kipling exhorts the American reader and listener to take up the enterprise of empire yet warns about the personal costs faced, endured, and paid in building an empire; nonetheless, American imperialists understood the phrase "the white man's burden" to justify imperial conquest as a civilising mission that is ideologically related to the continental expansion philosophy of manifest destiny of the early 19th century.

"The White Man's Burden" was first published in *The Times* (London) on 4 February 1899, and in *The New York Sun* on 5 February 1899. On 7 February 1899, during senatorial debate to decide if the US should retain control of the Philippine Islands and the ten million Filipinos conquered from the Spanish Empire, Senator Benjamin Tillman read aloud the first, the fourth, and the fifth stanzas of Kipling's seven-stanza poem as arguments against ratification of the Treaty of Paris, and that the US should formally renounce claim of authority over the Philippine Islands.

“The alleged duty of white colonizers to care for nonwhite Indigenous subjects in their colonial possessions.”

“The white burden” is a phrase that was used mainly in the 19th century to express the idea, now considered offensive, that European countries had a duty to control countries and organizations in parts of the world with less money, education or technology than Europe.

### **Edward Said on Postcolonialism: *Orientalism* in Focus**

“**They** cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” --- Karl Marx

**The East** is a career.” --- Benjamin Disraeli

**Firstly, Orientalism** is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.” (Edward Said, 1995, 1)

**Secondly,** Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." (Edward Said, 1995, 2)

**Thirdly,** historically and materially, Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” (Edward Said, 1995, 3)

**Orientalism** is in fact an intellectual response to the practice of postcolonialism.

**The West vs. the East: The Orient** is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. (Edward Said, 1995, 1)

### **Oriental Studies and Oriental Awareness**

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (Edward Said, 1995, 2)

both geo-graphical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities — such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other. (Edward Said, 1995, 5)

### **Franz Fanon on Postcolonialism**

“Fanon argued that the native develops a sense of 'self' as defined by the 'colonial master' through representation and discourse, while the coloniser develops a sense of superiority.”

### **Homi K Bhabha on Postcolonialism**

“Homi K Bhabha's writings in postcolonial hypothesis owe much to post colonialism. According to Bhabha, one should consider expansionism to be clear mistreatment, control, and viciousness just additionally as a time of unpredictable and shifted social contact and collaboration.”

“Cultural interaction is most visibly reflected in migrant literature created in a so-called “third space”. The theory of Homi K. Bhabha is based on the existence of such space where cultural borders open up to each other, and creation of a new hybrid culture that combines their features and atones their differences.”

### **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on Postcolonialism**

The subaltern cannot speak. They do not have the voice. “The subaltern is still represented and the woman is still under the “protection” of imperialism. Spivak closes without closure. **The Subaltern cannot speak.**”

She is interested in seeing how truth is constructed rather than in exposing error. Fundamental to Spivak's theory is the concept of Subaltern. The 'Subaltern' is a military term which means 'of lower rank'. She borrowed this term from Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Spivak asserts that the subaltern subject is heterogeneous and, by examining the mechanisms of the supposed 'recovery' of their voice, instead an ongoing displacement and effacement is revealed. The key subject position disentangled by Spivak is that of the female subaltern and the practice of sati or widow immolation.

### **What is Postcolonial Literature?**

Postcolonial texts belong to four models in terms of their content: (a) ‘national’ or regional models dealing with particular national or regional culture, (b) race-based models dealing with people of particular colour, (c) comparative models dealing with dealing with homogeneity and heterogeneity across two or more postcolonial literatures, i.e., contexts, and (d) more comprehensive comparative models dealing with hybridity and syncreticity, i.e., the state of single being/form resulted from multiple formations.

### **The Branches Postcolonial Theory and Literature Covers:**

Comparative Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial Humanities

Postcolonial Applied Humanities

Postcolonial Digital Humanities

Postcolonial Health/Medical Humanities

## Key Concepts, Major Theories, and Conceptual Vocabularies

Key Terms / Concepts (-ism < -ity < -isation)	Key Issues & Theories: Conceptual Vocabularies
Colonialism	Imperialism
Postcolonialism	Colony
Decolonialism	~Colonial Relationship
Neo-colonialism	~Colonial Desire
Recolonialism	~Colonial Discourse
	~Colonial Reading
	~Colonial Realities: Myths, Facts, and History
	~Colonial Voice and/vs. Silence
	~Colonial Innocence/Ignorance
	~Colonial Experience/Colonial Awareness
	~Colonial Minds, Intellectuals, and Their Writing
	Commonwealth and the Politics of Support
	The ‘englishes’ and Their ‘english literatures’: Banglish, Hinglish, Caribbean English etc.
	The Binarisms of ~Colonial Discourses
	Binary Opposition:
	Colonized vs. Colonizer
	Civilization vs. Primitivism
	The Natives vs. The Outsiders
	The Black vs. The White
	National Culture vs. Foreign Culture
	Hegemony vs. Resistance
	Diaspora: Place, Displacement, and (De/Re)formation (“the relationship between self and place” ((Bill Ashcroft et al., 1989, 8))
	Representation:
	Third World
	Orientalism
	Hybridity: Language, Culture, and Identity
	Race, Class, Gender, Economies
	‘Other’ Culture and Politics: The Subaltern and Their Marginality
	Opposition, Domination, and Discrimination
	Subject and Subjectivity
	Knowledge and Power (“foundations of imperial authority” (Bill Ashcroft et al., 1995, 1))
	Discord and Conflict
	Antiquity, Taste, and Value

Colonization was not bad if it could aim only at sharing its light with people in darkness. Very unfortunately, colonization itself disbelieves it.