

Critical Approaches to Postcolonialism

Saleem Dhobi, PhD

Assistant Professor of English, Patan Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University

info.motivationfunnel@gmail.com

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/pragya.v13i1.71187>

Abstract

This paper examines distinctive measurements of postcolonialism and analyzes the point of view of postcolonial scholars in a way that the concepts on postcolonialism and colonialism within the modern scholarly dialog can be comprehended. The speculations and approaches to scholarly examination have made the discourse on postcolonialism hot and far from being obviously true as the nations and journalists of the colonized countries have entered into a preface that's expected to be free for basic and imaginative dialogs. The perspective the paper has attempted is exploratory because it includes the basic viewpoints of the researchers such as Che Guevara, Rumina Sethi, Robert Youthful, Arif Dirlik, Amar Acheraiou, Aijaz Ahmad, and Homi Bhabha extending from Europe to Asia. Postcolonial scholars look for the reasons of what happens when two societies collide with each other. Their concern is repercussions of social struggle.

Decolonization may be a preparation of vanishing colonizers from the lands they had colonized at a time and ruled on the local individuals. In spite of the fact that decolonization has wrapped up its course, the scholars lock in the perusers within the clash of civilization as experienced by the colonized and caused by the colonizers within the colonized countries within the post-colonial period. The article lays the streams on the issue i.e. postcolonialism and its unmistakable flow as seen and conceived by the postcolonial scholars. The paper has utilized a topical approach to discuss postcolonialism.

Key Words: Approach, Outlook, Postcolonialism, Colonialism, Colonizer, Hybridity

Introduction

Postcolonialism 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 or still are 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, Asia, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by, but remained outside of, the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition” (Guevara 199-200). The dichotomy between the powerful and the powerful has been represented through the postcolonial literature. In a sense, it advocates the voices of the underprivileged and disadvantaged groups at the global level. Besides, postcolonialism challenges the status of the canonical writers and their literary contributions.

In the same vein, postcolonial theorists investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other. “Rooted in colonial power and prejudice, post colonialism develops from a four-thousand-year 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” (Guevara 200). Postcolonialism lays its foundation on the unequal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized that is much severely inflicted with the dominating effect of the colonial discourse.

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 post colonialism or third-world studies, a term coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy. When India received her independence, the former British colony was divided into two nations, the India Union and Pakistan. This partitioning, what scholars dub the “Great Divide”, led to ethnic conflict of enormous proportions between India, a new member of the British Commonwealth in 1947, and the mostly Muslim state of Pakistan.

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 *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958)” (Guevara 201). In particular, post colonialism gains 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 would soon be heard in both academic and social arenas” (Guevara 201). The publications help channelize the concerns and issues of the deprived communities. Consequently, the debates and discourses among the scholars and societal drivers incrementally move up and the repressed voices get a wider scope.

Discussion

The terms *postcolonial* and *postcolonialism* first appear in scholarly journals in the mid-1980s and as subtitles in texts such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s previously mentioned powerful work and in 1990 in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin’s *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. “By the early and mid-1990s, both terms had become firmly established in academic and popular discourse” (Guevara 201). When spelled without the hyphen (post colonialism), 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” (Guevara 202).

Guevara further extends the horizon of knowledge about post colonialism and its intrinsic features. As he says there are many of post colonialism's adherents who suggest two branches of postcolonialism: The first views post colonialism as a set of diverse methodologies that possess no unitary quality, as argued by Homi K. Bhaba and Arjun P. Murkherjee. The second branch includes those critics such as Edward Said, Barbara Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who view post colonialism as a set of cultural strategies centered in history. The second group believes in postcolonialism. It refers to that period after the colonized countries have gained their independence as opposed to those who regard postcolonialism as referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of colonization to the present moment.

Guevara notes that postcolonial theory is born out of the colonized peoples' frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own identities. While talking about the cultural diversity, it can be said as different cultures that have been subverted, conquered, and often removed from history respond to the conquering culture in diverse ways; no single approach to postcolonial theory and practice is possible or even preferable. Nicholas Harrison asserts in *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003), "Postcolonial theory is not an identifiable 'type' of theory in the same sense as deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis or feminism" (qtd. in Guevara 203). Like numerous critical theorists, Harrison sees no point in taking consensus about what postcolonial studies are.

Guevara points out that at the center of postcolonial theory exists an inherent tension among three categories of postcolonialists: (a) those who have been academically trained and are living in the West, (b) those who were raised in non-Western cultures but now reside in the West, and (c) those subaltern writers living and writing in non-Western cultures. For example, on the one hand, critics such as Fredric Jameson and Georg M. Gugelberger come from a European and American cultural, literary, and scholarly background. Another group that includes Spivak, Said, and Bhabha were raised in non-Western cultures but has or now reside, study, and write in the West. And still another group includes writers such as Aijaz Ahmad who live and work in subaltern cultures.

Frantz Fanon provides post colonialism with two influential texts: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In these and other works, Fanon uses psychoanalytic theory to examine the condition of blacks under French colonial rule. As a result of colonialism, Fanon asserts that both the colonized (e. g, the *Other*-that is, any person defined as "different from") and the colonizer suffer "psychic warping," oftentimes causing what Fanon describes as "a collapse of the ego." Fanon believes that "as soon as the colonized (the blacks living in Martinique) were forced to speak the language of the colonizer (French), the colonized either accepted or were coerced into accepting the collective consciousness of the French, thereby identifying blackness with evil and sin and whiteness with purity and righteousness" (qtd. in Guevara 203—4). This dichotomy between evil and good constructed and associated with black and white respectively politicizes the skin color and forces the people of two different colors black and white

discriminate with each other. The former feel inferior, whereas the latter seek to dominate the other because of being white although the truth pertaining to the color is constructed.

Guevara asserts that Fanon develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* one of his major concerns: the problem of the “native bourgeoisie” who assume power after the colonial powers have either departed or been driven out. When such a situation occurs, the native proletariat, “the wretched of the earth,” (qtd. in Guevara 204) are left on their own, often in a worse situation than before the conquerors arrived. Edward Wadie Said in *Orientalism* chastises the literary world for not investigating and taking seriously the study of colonization or imperialism. He develops several concepts that are central to postcolonial theory. According to Said, nineteenth-century Europeans tried to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called Orientalism:

the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested so-called Orientals were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. The European conquerors, Said notes, believed that they were accurately describing the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in “the East.” What they failed to realize, argues Said, is that all human knowledge can be viewed only through one’s political, cultural and ideological framework. No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. In effect, what the colonizers were revealing was their unconscious desires for power, wealth, and domination, not the nature of the colonized subjects. (qtd. in Guevara 204)

As there are many perceivers so are the types of perceptions and judgments. The colonizers seem to have been imparting their biased perception through different media of expression such as travelogue, anthropology, geography and sociological and cultural research dissertations. The images of the East as captured by the journalists, researchers and reporters from the West are to be interrogated in respect of their validity and reliability.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said captures the basic thought behind colonization and imperialism, “They’re not like us,’ and for that reason deserve to be ruled” (qtd. in Guevara 205). The colonized, Said maintains, becomes the Other, the not me. Hence, the established binary opposition of “the West”/ “the Other” must be abolished along with its intricate web of racial and religious prejudices. What must be rejected, Said declares, is the vision mentality of writers who want to describe the Orient from a panoramic view. This erroneous view of humanity creates a simplistic interpretation of human experience. It must be replaced by one based on “narrative,” a historical view that emphasizes the variety of human experiences in all cultures. Homi K. Bhabha, one of the leading postcolonial theorists and critics, builds on Said’s concept of the Other and Orientalism. In his works such as *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha emphasizes the concerns of the colonized:

On the one hand, the colonized observe two somewhat distinct views of the world: that of the colonizer (conqueror) and that of himself or herself, the colonized (the one who has been conquered). To what culture does this person belong? Seemingly, neither culture feels like home. This feeling of homelessness, of being caught between two clashing cultures, Bhabha calls unhomeliness, a concept referred to as

double consciousness by some postcolonial theorists. This feeling or perception of abandonment by both cultures causes the colonial subject (the colonized) to become a psychological refugee. Because each psychological refugee uniquely blends his or her two cultures, no two writers who have been colonial subjects will interpret their culture(s) exactly alike. (qtd. in Guevara 205)

Bhabha argues against the tendency to essentialize third-world countries into a homogenous identity. One of Bhabha's major contributions to postcolonial studies is his belief that there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. When two cultures commingle, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture change each of the cultures. Bhabha names this dynamic, interactive, and tension-packed process hybridity. Bhabha himself says that "hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions. As a result, says Bhabha, a feeling of unhomeliness develops in the colonized" (qtd. in Guevara 205-6). The colonized even within their territory feel alienated and homeless. Both their land and mind are captivated by the colonizers. Their cultures and values are looked down upon in a way that they lose the sense of dignity and respect.

The colonized writer must create a new discourse by "rejecting all the established transcendental signifieds created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth and no metatheory of history exist" (Guevara 206). No doubt how true and valid the colonizers make sure to make their writing about the colonized, it seems almost impossible. The perception and vintage point of the colonizer differ in the course of looking at objects around being in the colonized country due to having the sense of superiority complex. "Colonialism is not a thing of the past, but continues today-howbeit in subtler and less open ways-as a form of oppression and as such, must be opposed" (Guevara 206). The colonial mission is to oppress the people of the colonized country. Their treatment with the native people is dominating and exploitative in nature. Sometimes exploitation is subtle that the commoners fail to perceive. But there is oppression in every strategic deal of the colonizer. Guevara makes it sure that one must oppose this colonial mission that is tagged with oppression in the guise of caviling people of the remote and uncivilized countries.

Postcolonialism undertakes literature written by the colonized in colonized countries. Its aim is to examine what has been missing from literary analyses by highlighting the interest of the colonized and the destructive forces of the colonizer's hegemony as forced on the colonized. As such, postcolonialism becomes, like deconstruction, more of a reading strategy than a codified school of literary criticism. In its methodology, it gives authority and presence to "the Other," the people who have become the separate ones and who stand apart from the dominant, colonizing culture. And its goal is to win back a place in history for the colonized, enabling all readers to value the many different kinds of cultures and peoples who inhabit the earth. "Whether the postcolonial critic embraces the tenets of feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, or any other theoretical framework, such a critic

emphasizes each person's humanity and right to personal freedom" (Guevara 210). Thus postcolonialism must seek to empower those who have been stripped of power, dignity, and self-worth, maintain some critics, rather than continually marginalizing the colonized through discourse that can be understood by only the culturally elite. Amar Aheraiou mentions in his book, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* the dominating impact of the colonial nation over the colonized country:

The tremendous cultural influence exerted by Persia on ancient Greece after Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great is a good illustration. Broadly speaking, being in the position of power and domination, colonizing nations have both the means and the ambition to impact deeply upon indigenous cultural, political, and socio-economic structures. This is hardly surprising, given imperialism's impulse to attain cultural hegemony while imposing on the colonized its political and economic domination. In order to achieve cultural domination, colonizers across history adopted various methods, which often combined exclusionary and inclusionary practices, modes of coercion and collaboration, negation and incorporation of difference. (17-18)

Within colonial politics, inclusive practices usually consist of integrating a section of the colonized population, the aristocracy or elite, into colonial culture and institutions. The exclusionary practices, on the other hand, involve the political, social, and economic marginalization of the majority of the natives alongside downgrading the colonized languages and customs. Denying the majority of the colonized peoples political participation and basic social and economic rights is a defining feature of imperial domination, modern and ancient alike. The colonized have the sense of inferiority complex. To have won the white people's scholarship is a marker of rationality and intellect. The Nigerians are having psychological tussle regarding the trifle achievement for instance scholarship to study in the Western university. The colonized feel proud of being awarded with the scholarship as they take their education system less advanced than theirs. Though it is a kind of imperial domination, nobody generally seems to suspect the cheap generosity and liberalism extended by the imperialists through different illuminating acts.

This political and socio-economic marginalization generally goes hand in hand with the cultural alienation and narcissistic debasement of the colonized. Amar Aheraiou supports this point, "In both French and British empires, for instance, the native cultures were usually systematically marginalized and debased" (18). An evidence of this colonial marginalizing practice can be seen in the occlusion and exclusion of the native languages and literatures from the colonial educational curricula. These colonial exclusions are premised on various considerations; some of these are strictly economic and political, others have a cultural and ideological basis. In this latter case the marginalization of the colonized cultures, languages, and, more broadly, the native systems of producing knowledge may be said widely to proceed from European cultural arrogance and racial prejudice; both feed on myths of supremacy which disqualify the native cultures and languages as worthy instruments of knowledge and civilization. The native culture and languages are indeed the tremendous

sources of knowledge; they are generally debased and ignored even by the people of the colonized nation in the postcolonial situation.

The African countries are rich in natural resources and minerals. They need to be properly utilized and consumed for the right purposes. They should be exploited for the further prosperity of the African countries. Poverty can be alleviated and dependency can be lowered. But the colonized who have been made to depend upon the foreign imports despise the native products and methods of healing which keep them to suffer the imperial domination the Nigerians in this concern hardly understand. That native cultures and civilizations have been consistently marginalized and devalued by colonial powers is an irrefutable historical fact. Amar Acheraïou adds here that, “It is, nevertheless, important to remark that the deliberate marginalization of the dominated cultures by no means suggests that imperial cultures were unaffected by native cultures” (17-18). Despite the innumerable endeavors by the colonizers not to get affected by the dominated cultures, they fail to retain their purity and originality.

To elaborate further on the cultural, political, and ideological interactions and métissage within Ptolemaic Egypt, it is crucial to observe that the process of hybridization emerging from these colonial encounters is ambivalent and profoundly unbalanced. For example, bilingualism, the living proof of hybrid cultural and linguistic identity, is more common among the Egyptian elite than among the Greeks. Amar Acheraïou states that “only a small number of Greeks learned the Egyptian languages and dialects, while most of the elite in Egypt had to assimilate Greek language and culture in order to achieve social promotion” (21). It is the elites who take more benefits from the lessons and social practices left and taught about how to rule and dominate by the colonizers.

Robert Young glosses the concept of hybridity and describes saying that hybridity works simultaneously in two ways: “organically”, hegemonizing, creating new spaces, structures, scenes, and “intentionally”, diasporizing, intervening as a form of subversion, translation, transformation” (25). Young, here, recycles and adapts Bakhtin’s notion of ‘organic’ and ‘intentional’ hybridity to emphasize the double consciousness entailed in the process of hybridization. In this regard Amar Acheraïou in *Questioning Hybridity, Post colonialism and Globalization*, comments, “Robert Young rehearses Bhabha’s views of hybridity as a vehicle of subversion, translation, and transformation, without, however, telling us how this transformative potential of hybridity translates into concrete geopolitical terms” (102). Young does not seem to have defined hybridity in a critical way. Rather he has simply restated what Bhabha already said. Amar Acheraïou thus defines hybridity:

métissage in its manifold expressions (cultural, biological, administrative, and technological) is a fundamental agent of development and progress for all civilizations, I cannot but support this immemorial practice. Moreover, because I firmly believe that hybridity could and should be utilized to fight racial hatred and ‘intolerance’; that it can and ought to be used as a means to achieve a race-blind planetary solidarity... (103)

Both politically and ideologically, postcolonial conceptualizations of hybridity are indeterminate, open-ended to the extent that their agency can be employed in the service of hegemonic power structures as well as anti-hegemonic modalities. Thus hybridity proves both positive and negative to the colonized. Aijaz Ahmad blames postcolonial scholars, specifically Bhabha, for developing a theory of postcoloniality that is completely disconnected from the material colonial context and post-independence realities of the former colonies. This is no doubt a serious discrepancy, since colonialism and post-independence are after all what postcolonialism is supposed to focus on in the first place. Ahmad writes: “Between postcoloniality as it exists in a former colony like India, and postcoloniality as the condition of discourse by such critics as Bhabha, there would appear to be a considerable gap” (10). Ahmad is right in highlighting the postcolonial scholars’ detachment from the concrete daily preoccupations of millions of peoples in the former colonies. We may even state that in the postcolonial discourse on hybridity and, more specifically, in its emphasis on Diaspora as its very embodiment, looms a strategy of displacement, if not usurpation. Marwan M. Kraidy in his paper on “Hybridity in Cultural Globalization” quotes Werbner (1997) who summarizes this point of view when she writes:

All cultures are always hybrid. . . . Hybridity is meaningless as a description of ‘culture,’ because this ‘museumizes’ culture as a ‘thing.’ . . . Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid . . . since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds. (15)

Since all cultures are always hybrid, then hybridity is conceptually disposable. Werbner further writes that “Too much hybridity . . . leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racist oppression unresolved” (20). Van der Veer puts it this way, “the hybridity celebrated in Cultural Studies has little revolutionary potential since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace” (104). The use of hybridity has thus been criticized as politically suspicious because it allegedly lends legitimacy to a corporate rhetoric that frames cultural mixture as a market to be taken by capital, and at the same time elides accusations of economic domination and assorted forms of imperialism. Arif Dirlik in *Critical Inquiry* speaks in the line of critiquing the postcolonial writers who basically limit their study of the colonial discourse just by associating with the hybridity as third space in Bhabha’s terms. Dirlik in his paper, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism” reveals his stance:

My goal in the discussion below is twofold: to review the term post-colonial, and the various intellectual and cultural positions associated with it, in the context of contemporary transformations in global relationships, and to examine the reconsiderations of problems of domination and hegemony as well as of received critical practices that these transformations require. Postcolonial is the most recent entrant to achieve prominent visibility in the ranks of those “post” marked words (seminal among them, postmodernism) that serve as signposts in(to) contemporary cultural criticism. (329)

The goal, indeed, is no less than to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other binarisms" that are allegedly a legacy of colonial (ist) ways of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency. The appeals of post-coloniality seem to cut across national, regional, and even political boundaries, which on the surface at least seems to substantiate its claims to globalism. It is not any reflection on the abilities of postcolonial critics to suggest that they and the critical orientations that they represent have acquired a respectability dependent on the conceptual needs of the social, political, and cultural problems thrown up by this new world situation. Some of prominent spokespersons of the colonized cultures of the world are Rumina Sethi whose popularity is due to her text, *The Politics of Postcolonialism* and Benita Parry who is a materialist critic and is renowned for her text, *Postcolonial Studies*. Rumina Sethi in *The Politics of Postcolonialism* states:

Postcolonial identities cannot be recuperated by recounting cases of ambivalence or the simultaneous presence of sameness and difference, but by emphasizing historically specific acts of resistance. These 'acts' could be those of movements resisting colonial powers, of national integration movements, or acts of resistance to new imperial controls over recklessly globalizing economies. Postcolonial studies, by addressing representations of alterity and the ambivalent relations between centre and periphery tends to lose its historical-material reality and begins to reproduce itself in purely theoretical terms. (8)

To resist the new imperial controls is a must in the postcolonial nation. The case of hybridity or the presence of similarities and differences cannot help recover the postcolonial identities. Rather they can be gotten back by the acts of resistance. The very resistance can be in different forms. It can be the national integration movements against new imperial controls in the name of globalization which is often done by controlling the economic resources of the native country.

Conclusion

The paper has investigated that postcolonial scholars investigate what happens when two diverse civilizations strife with each other and who is engaged and who is made frail within the exceptionally course. Postcolonialism embraces writing by the colonized in colonized nations. It looks at what has been lost from scholarly examinations with the uncommon center on the interface of the colonized and the devastating powers of the colonizer's mastery as forced on the colonized. The concept of othering rises from the collision wherein the predominant is alluded to 'us' and the second rate is portrayed as 'other'. This division separates society and leads them to proceed the battle for presence. The colonized nations have been the center of the postcolonial writing and examination of the scholarly works

from the postcolonial point of view has gotten to be the prime viewpoint of postcolonialism. The flow of postcolonialism run from political, social, financial and ideological contrasts to scholarly preparations decide the status of the colonizers and the colonized. The inquiry about has found that the postcolonial scholars can be categorized into two bunches based on the methodologies and viewpoints. The primary gather comprises of Homi K. Bhaba and Arjun P. Murkherjee. The moment department incorporates Edward Said, Barbara Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who see post colonialism as a set of social methodologies as based within the history of scholarly criticism. The extraordinary views and ideas of these scholars have enhanced postcolonialism as a hypothetical canvas.

Works Cited

- Acheraiou, Amar. *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Class, Nations, Literatures*. Verso, 1992.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Capitalism in the Age of Global Capitalism". *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, 1994, pp. 328—56.
- Guevara, Che. "Postcolonialism". A Speech to the United Nations, December 11, 1964.
- Kraidy, Marwan M. "Hybridity in Cultural Globalization". *Annenberg School for Communication*. University of Pennsylvania, 2002.
- Sethi, Rumina. *The Politics of Postcolonialism: Empire, Nation and Resistance*. Pluto Press, 2011.
- Young, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Routledge, 1995.