



Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction

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Postcolonial Theory is a critical introduction to the burgeoning field of postcolonial studies. Leela Gandhi is the first to clearly map out this field in terms of its wider philosophical and intellectual context, drawing important connections between postcolonial theory and poststructuralism, postmodernism, marxism and feminism. She assesses the contribution of major theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, and also points to postcolonialism's relationship to earlier thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi.

Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction Details

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Jessica says

Great reference book for a snapshot of post-colonial theory but getting a bit dated now - written in 1998.

kasia says

The best kind of critical introduction: well-written, easy to read, but thorough and not dumbed down at all, and with really interesting insights and critiques. She is spot-on in her criticisms, but simultaneously very much committed to the ideals at the heart of postcolonial studies and doesn't dismiss it despite being aware of some major problems underlying the entire enterprise. It's incredibly refreshing - it gives someone like me, who is skeptical of some of the underlying premises, space to espouse the ideals without simply forgetting my reservations. A must-read for anyone who engages with postcolonial theory, I think.

Chuckie Palmer-Patel says

This is a really dense book and does a good job of mapping out connections between different ideas within a wider context of theoretical movements.

It is NOT an introductory text.

The language that the author uses assumes that you are already familiar with the concepts she is discussing. Phrases such as "as x famously argues", followed by a long quote from critic makes it obvious that the reader should already be familiar with both the critic and the quote.

BUT, if the reader IS familiar with all of the critics/theory that Gandhi discusses, then this is a good text to see the relationships between them and to navigate how the theories developed within poststructuralist/postmodernist/Marxist/feminist schools of thought.

lilly says

Super readable, dense, and brief introduction to many things postcolonial. You probably wouldn't read this unless you were a nerd with inclinations towards the literary / historical or an academic.

Rachel Leia Devadason says

Really really good. I knew nothing about postcolonial theory before this book, and now have a clear picture of the intellectual context of postcolonial studies, the differing schools of thought within it, and its proposed legacy in and outside academic spheres!

Very importantly, this book helped me put things in perspective before going to study in Britain. What made it particularly enjoyable, apart from enlightening, was Leela Gandhi's poetic writing style, and

her penchant for quoting widely from seemingly unrelated sources, which make her text a net of diverse voices and ideas.

Megan says

Leela Gandhi's book works as an excellent summary/introduction to postcolonial theory in large part because, rather than assuming the reader is familiar with the entire body of critical theory that came before, Gandhi provides a succinct and comprehensible account of the thinkers and themes influencing postcolonial theory. In this way, it also works as a short review/introduction to poststructuralism. Her prose is fluid and clear, making what could have been a difficult and dense book instead quite enjoyable.

Behzad Sadeghi says

A good introduction.

What made this one different from Sardar's Orientalism was the fact that it deals with major philosophers and teases out connections between their philosophy and colonialist and imperialist thinking in totally unexpected ways.

Two things, however, were sort of annoying to me. First, the fact that this book will make you believe that EVERYONE (with very few exceptions) is in on the orientalist project.

And second, you can't help feeling, after reading it, that there is no way out!

June says

a very good reader of postcolonial theory

Heather Clitheroe says

Interesting review of post-colonial theory that pulls together quite a lot of theory (and some history, too). Very dense text, though - it takes some time to get through it, though you'll find that it's a worthwhile resource. The bibliography is outstanding.

Lucy says

A great and eminently readable introduction to Post-Colonial Theory. She touches on all sorts of topics within the study and (at least for me) cemented how fascinating and important a study it is.

Sankar Raj says

A small but good introduction to post colonial theory

Jennifer Marie says

A good overview

Matt says

A clear and systematic introduction/ survey of this field as it stood in 1997. Ghandi frequently draws in quotations and paraphrases of the major critics, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha among others. The sections on the theoretical background of postcolonial studies in Marxist and poststructuralist theory are models of clarity (no really!) that draw upon major figures such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Jameson. Ghandi offers a remarkable synthesis that sets out general issues and axioms and the uses particular examples to illustrate them. The book gives a lot of attention to the 'real-life' issues attendant upon colonialism and its aftermath. Still, the centrality of literature and literary readings to postcolonial theory is made clear and explicitly commented on. The biggest knock on this book is that in the two decades since its publication, a lot has happened in the field, but the founding figures remain important and this book will help you understand them and begin to pursue your own entrance into their writings.

Caveat lector: this is still a theory book and the level of abstraction and density of the prose can still be somewhat challenging. I entered this book with a decent background in critical theory, feminism, and poststructuralism. I rarely struggled to understand what the author was trying to say. Others, e.g. the majority of the one- and two-star reviewers, may not feel the same way. This is a challenging topic that Ghandi makes comprehensible, even moreso than some of the writers whom she describes and draws quotes from.

Jim Angstadt says

Bailed. Muddy topics. Meandering.

Lilli says

3.5 point

An overall good introduction having the merit of not circulating around too much, but highlighting the connections and problematical points of the past and recent post-colonial studies. The two chapters about humanities seemed overwhelming in comparison of the other chapters.

Some critics to justify my rating:

- you have to have a solid background in feminist and post-structuralist studies to fully understand their importance and place in the chapters, and to fully understand what role Derrida, Foucault or Hegel occupy;
- the book states a few French post-colonial thinkers, but doesn't explain why including some and excluding others, and it overlooks other nations' post-colonial thinkers such as the Dutch, the Spanish, or thinkers from Uganda, Japan etc. part of the post-colonial history (which is a general deficiency with American/English critical introductions);

- it lacks a deeper analysis of what effect migrations, colonized citizens' schooling or publishers played in the development of post-colonial thinking.
