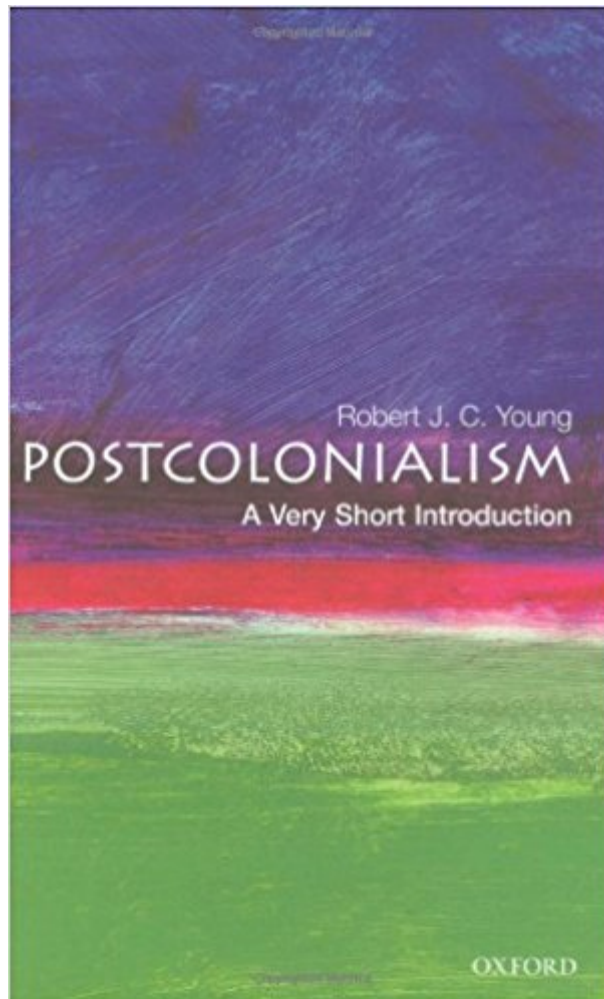


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Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Postcolonialism explores the political, social, and cultural effects of decolonization, continuing the anti-colonial challenge to western dominance. This lively and innovative account of both the history and key debates of postcolonialism discusses its importance as an historical condition, and as a means of changing the way we think about the world. Key concepts and issues are considered, with reference to particular cultural and historical examples, such as the status of aboriginal people, cultural nomadism, Western feminism, the innovative fiction of Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie, and the postcolonial cities of London, Bombay and Cairo. The work of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Gayatri Spivak are woven into the discussion, making this fascinating subject relevant and accessible to a wider audience.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

In the introduction the author tells us that "Postcolonialism is about turning the world upside down and looking at it from a different perspective, that is, from the perspective of the disenfranchised people, a majority of whom come from the developing world" (2). The author then proceeds to show us the world from "their" eyes. His approach is unconventional; he presents "a montage" in which

we see the bombing of Baghdad from an Iraqi's perspective, the plight of the homeless peasants in Brazil, the rape and torture of Algerians by the French in colonial Algeria, the forced unveilings of Muslim women under the American imposed Shah in Iran, the displacement of 200,000 Adivasi villagers because of the World Bank sponsored construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, the CIA's overthrow of Patrice Lumumba, the president of the newly liberated Congo, and mass starvation in countries with surpluses of food. These slices of the lives and struggles of the disenfranchised peoples make the reader feel their pain and suffering. We experience the injustices of the world and view the imposition of Western culture and values as a form of violence and oppression; we come to understand the Third World's ambivalent, if not hostile, feelings toward the West. This may seem radical since the Western world prefers to ignore the harsh realities that exist in developing nations and within its own societies. The prosperous are taught that current systems (political and economic) promise equality, justice and prosperity for all and that our interventions overseas have been of a benevolent nature. Thus, by showing another perspective, a perspective in which all these ideas are turned upside down, may strike the uninitiated as subversive. But, that's precisely the point.

Let me reiterate, it's not a bad book. It's great. However, if you are looking for an actual introduction to the particular topic of Postcolonialism that summarizes for you the key theorists in the field, and makes connections between the leading theories and points of view, this book is not for you. And that's why the book was not for me - and in my opinion does not belong to this series either. Having read four other books in this series (Globalization, Spanish Literature, Modern Latin American Literature and Colonial Latin American Literature), I would say that my expectations were misled for this particular title. I am, in fact, familiar with some of the key theorists in the field of postcolonial studies but I guess I was looking for a summary that would help me put some of the authors I have read (or I am somewhat familiar with) together, and find some others I am unfamiliar about so that I can make my own little map of the field. And this book did not help me much. However, I think this would be a great resource to undergraduate classes on "postcolonialism" - if the book is framed correctly, and not precisely like an introduction to "postcolonialism" as a theoretical framework, but as a small example of a "postcolonial" point of view enunciated through some case studies that include some historical background and creative ways of posing the subject. I think one of the connecting threads of this book as a whole is a look at "postcolonial issues" through the lens of transnationalism and globalization - almost all of the chapters try to make the point of a "globalized postcolonial" point of view - though this is not clearly enunciated. It almost

seems as if this were the seed of a larger book Prof.

Unlike other books I've read in the Oxford series, this one makes no pretense to being an academic study. In fact, it's one of the most one-sided books I've ever read all the way through. But it gets 5 stars from me because it's an articulate exposition of postcolonial thinking. It presents information and opinions that we just don't get in the mass media in the U.S. For instance, a recent US president made much of Saddam Hussein's use of poison gas against the Kurds in the 80s, but Prof Young notes that Winston Churchill, as British Colonial Secretary, used poison gas against the Kurds in the 1920s. If you want to understand why the legacy of colonialism generates such high feelings overseas, this book can help you get the picture. A valid criticism of the book is that it's a mishmash of topics. The downside to this is that you're not going to get a grand theory into which everything falls. The upside is that you get a better feel for the diversity of the various situations in the "Third World". Some topics, like Algerian rai music, seem to get a surprising number of pages devoted to them, but it's often beneficial to dig deeper into selected topics along with a more cursory overview of the rest. There are an awful lot of references to Frantz Fanon. And Che Guevara is mentioned often also. I can think of some other people, like Ho Chi Minh, who could have just as well been included in a book like this. But, it's a "very short introduction", so understandable that the author talked about his favorite people. There's a very good section on feminism here. The author particularly notes that feminism isn't just some part of postcolonialism but that the postcolonial movement itself probably would not exist without the grassroots activities of women.

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