

# *Key terms in Post Colonial Theory*

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**COLONIALISM** : The imperialist expansion of Europe into the rest of the world during the last four hundred years in which a dominant imperium or center carried on a relationship of control and influence over its margins or colonies. This relationship tended to extend to social, pedagogical, economic, political, and broadly culturally exchanges often with a hierarchical European settler class and local, educated (compractor) elite class forming layers between the European "mother" nation and the various indigenous peoples who were controlled. Such a system carried within it inherent notions of racial inferiority and exotic otherness.

**POST-COLONIALISM** : Broadly a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is concerned with both how European nations conquered and controlled "Third World"

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cultures and how these groups have since responded to and resisted those encroachments. Post-colonialism, as both a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through three broad .

**STAGES:** an initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy a growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

**AMBIVALENCE:** the ambiguous way in which colonizer and colonized regard one another. The colonizer often regards the colonized as both inferior yet exotically other, while the colonized regards the colonizer as both enviable yet corrupt. In a context of hybridity, this often produces a mixed sense of blessing and curse.

**ALTERITY :** "the state of being other or different"; the political, cultural, linguistic, or religious other. The study of the ways in which one group makes themselves different from others.

**COLONIAL EDUCATION:** the process by which a colonizing power assimilates either a subaltern

native elite or a larger population to its way of thinking and seeing the world.

**DIASPORA:** the voluntary or enforced migration of peoples from their native homelands. Diaspora literature is often concerned with questions of maintaining or altering identity, language, and culture while in another culture or country.

**ESSENTIALISM :** the essence or "whatness" of something. In the context of race, ethnicity, or culture, essentialism suggests the practice of various groups deciding what is and isn't a particular identity. As a practice, essentialism tends to overlook differences within groups often to maintain the status quo or obtain power. Essentialist claims can be used by a colonizing power but also by the colonized as a way of resisting what is claimed about them.

**ETHNICITY:** a fusion of traits that belong to a group—shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviors, experiences, memories, and loyalties. Often deeply related to a person's identity.

**EXOTICISM:** the process by which a cultural practice is made stimulating and exciting in its difference from the colonializer's normal perspective. Ironically, as European groups educated local,

indigenous cultures, schoolchildren often began to see their native lifeways, plants, and animals as exotic and the European counterparts as "normal" or "typical."

**HEGEMONY:** the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all, often not only through means of economic and political control but more subtly through the control of education and media.

**HYBRIDITY:** new transcultural forms that arise from cross-cultural exchange. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, religious, etc. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive in its experience. Note the two related definitions:

**CATALYSIS:** the (specifically New World) experience of several ethnic groups interacting and mixing with each other often in a contentious environment that gives way to new forms of identity and experience.

**CREOLIZATION:** societies that arise from a mixture of ethnic and racial mixing to form a new material, psychological, and spiritual self-definition.

**IDENTITY:** the way in which an individual and/or group defines itself. Identity is important to self-concept, social mores, and national understanding. It often involves both essentialism and othering.

**IDEOLOGY :** "a system of values, beliefs, or ideas shared by some social group and often taken for granted as natural or inherently true" (Bordwell & Thompson 494)

**LANGUAGE:** In the context of colonialism and post-colonialism, language has often become a site for both colonization and resistance. In particular, a return to the original indigenous language is often advocated since the language was suppressed by colonizing forces. The use of European languages is a much debated issue among postcolonial authors.

**ABROGATION:** a refusal to use the language of the colonizer in a correct or standard way.

**APPROPRIATION:** "the process by which the language is made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience."

**MAGICAL REALISM:** the adaptation of Western realist methods of literature in describing the imaginary life of indigenous cultures who experience

the mythical, magical, and supernatural in a decidedly different fashion from Western ones. A weaving together elements we tend to associate with European realism and elements we associate with the fabulous, where these two worlds undergo a "closeness or near merging."

**MAPPING** : the mapping of global space in the context of colonialism was as much prescriptive as it was descriptive. Maps were used to assist in the process of aggression, and they were also used to establish claims. Maps claims the boundaries of a nation, for example.

**METANARRATIVE**: ("grand narratives," "master narratives.") a large cultural story that seeks to explain within its borders all the little, local narratives. A metanarrative claims to be a big truth concerning the world and the way it works. Some charge that all metanarratives are inherently oppressive because they decide whether other narratives are allowed or not.

**MIMICRY**: the means by which the colonized adapt the culture (language, education, clothing, etc.) of the colonizer but always in the process changing it in

important ways. Such an approach always contains it in the ambivalence of hybridity.

**NATION/NATION-STATE:** an aggregation of people organized under a single government. National interest is associated both with a struggle for independent ethnic and cultural identity, and ironically an opposite belief in universal rights, often multicultural, with a basis in geo-economic interests. Thus, the move for national independence is just as often associated with region as it is with ethnicity or culture, and the two are often at odds when new nations are formed.

**ORIENTALISM** : the process (from the late eighteenth century to the present) by which "the Orient" was constructed as an exotic other by European studies and culture. Orientalism is not so much a true study of other cultures as it is broad Western generalization about Oriental, Islamic, and/or Asian cultures that tends to erode and ignore their substantial differences.

**OTHER:** the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group. By declaring someone "Other," persons tend to stress what makes them dissimilar from or

opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images.

**RACE:** the division and classification of human beings by physical and biological characteristics. Race often is used by various groups to either maintain power or to stress solidarity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was often used as a pretext by European colonial powers for slavery and/or the "white man's burden."

**SEMIOTICS:** a system of signs which one knows what something is. Cultural semiotics often provide the means by which a group defines itself or by which a colonializing power attempts to control and assimilate another group.

**SPACE/PLACE:** space represents a geographic locale, one empty in not being designated. Place, on the other hand, is what happens when a space is made or owned. Place involves landscape, language, environment, culture, etc.

**SUBALTERN:** the lower or colonized classes who have little access to their own means of expression and are thus dependent upon the language and methods of the ruling class to express themselves.



**WORLDING:** the process by which a person, family, culture, or people is brought into the dominant Eurocentric/Western global society.

**Thank You**