

Postcolonial Approaches to Global Politics

1. INTRODUCTION: What is this theory about?

The Main Idea

Postcolonialism is a theory that examines International Relations through the lens of history, specifically the history of Colonialism.

It asks very important questions:

- Why did Western countries invade and control places like Afghanistan, Africa, and Asia for so long?
- Why does the West think its way of government (democracy) is the "best" and only way?
- Why is the world still unequal today?

What does "Postcolonial" mean?

- It DOES NOT mean "after colonialism is finished."
- It means: "We are living in the time after formal colonies ended, but the effects, ideas, and power structures of colonialism are still here."
- It argues that we cannot understand today's world without understanding 500 years of European colonization.

2. ORIGINS AND KEY THINKERS

Where did it come from?

- It started in the 1980s and 90s as part of "Post-positivist" theories. These theories say: "We cannot be 100% objective because our culture and history affect what we see and think."

Important Intellectuals:

- W.E.B. Du Bois
- Edward Said
- Frantz Fanon
- These people experienced colonialism and wrote about how the West looked down on other cultures.

3. WHAT IS COLONIALISM?

Definition:

Colonialism is when a powerful foreign country takes control of another land and its people.

History:

- Started around the 15th century (Spain and Portugal).
- Grew bigger with Britain, France, and Holland.
- Peak time: "Scramble for Africa" in the late 1800s, where Europe divided Africa into pieces.
- By 1914, 80% of the whole world was controlled by Europe.

What happened after?

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- World Wars I and II weakened Europe.
- Countries fought for freedom (Decolonization).
- BUT: Postcolonial scholars say that even though countries are now independent, the borders were drawn by Europeans, and they often didn't care about the tribes or religions inside. That is why there is still conflict today!

4. THE BIG PROBLEM: EUROCENTRISM

What is Eurocentrism?

This is the belief that Europe/the West is the center of the world.

How it works in IR theories:

- Mainstream theories (like Realism and Liberalism) pretend they are neutral and scientific.
- But Postcolonialism says: NO. White men in Europe invented these theories at a time when colonialism was strongest (around 1919).
- They tell a story that says: "Science, Democracy, Progress, and States all came from Europe."
- "Europe was advanced, and everyone else was backwards."
- "The modern world system started in Europe (Treaty of Westphalia 1648) and spread out to save the rest of the world."

Postcolonialism says this is FALSE:

- They say Europe became rich and powerful because it stole resources and exploited colonies.
- They also point out that ideas of democracy and progress existed in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East long before modern Europe.

5. CRITIQUE OF KEY CONCEPTS

Postcolonialists attack words that we think are "normal" because they were made by Europeans to control people.

 The Concept of the "State."

- Mainstream IR says: "A State is an organization that has a monopoly on violence (only the government can use force)."
- Postcolonial view: This is a European invention! It was designed to control people and land.
- Example: Yemen- In Yemen, groups like Al-Qaeda are sometimes mixed with the government and tribes.

- The West says: "The State is weak because it cannot control everything!"
- But Postcolonialists say: "In their culture, power is shared differently. You cannot force the European model on them and say they are failing."

 International Law

- They say International Law was made by colonizers.
- In the past, Europeans used law to steal land and property from natives.

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- Today, they use the law to take resources (like in Iraq after the invasion). They privatize resources so Western companies can take them.

6. IS THE WORLD STILL COLONIAL?

YES! This is called Neo-Colonialism.

Even though flags changed and countries are independent, the power structure is the same. The West still dominates the Global South.

How do they do it now?

Before, they used guns and soldiers. Now they use ideas and institutions:

"Development"

- The idea says: "You poor countries need to follow our path to become rich like us."
- Postcolonialism says: This is just the modern version of "The White Man's Burden" (the old idea that white people have a duty to civilize others).
- It makes non-Western countries feel like they are "defective" or "not good enough" until they copy the West.

"Good Governance."

- This means: "You must run your country exactly like us."
- It is used to judge other countries and justify Western intervention if they don't follow the rules.

Institutions (IMF, World Bank, UN)

- These look like neutral helpers, but they are controlled by the West.
- Example: South America Debt- Countries borrowed money.
- When they couldn't pay, the IMF forced them to cut spending, sell their companies, and open their markets.
- This helped Western investors but hurt the local people. This is a form of control.

7. EXAMPLES FROM THE BOOK

China and History

- China acts tough today.
- Postcolonialism explains this not just as power hunger, but because of Historical Humiliation.
- In the 19th century, Britain sold Opium to China and forced them to sign unfair treaties.
- China remembers this, and it shapes its foreign policy today.

Movie: Blood Diamond

- The movie is set in Sierra Leone.
- Postcolonial analysis: Sierra Leone was created by Britain. They put different enemy tribes inside one border.
- When the British left, there was chaos and civil war because the "State" was artificial.
- The resources (diamonds) are still taken by Western companies and elites.

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- Critique of the movie: Even though it is a good movie, the hero is still a white man (Leonardo DiCaprio) who saves the black man. This still shows the colonial mindset: "Only white people can save you."

8. SUMMARY FOR RECITATION

If the teacher asks: What is Postcolonialism?

"Postcolonialism is a theory that says we cannot understand International Relations without looking at the history of colonialism. It argues that the world is still shaped by European imperialism. It criticizes mainstream theories for being 'Eurocentric', meaning they see everything from a Western perspective and ignore the history of exploitation."

If the teacher asks: What is Eurocentrism?

"Eurocentrism is the belief that Europe is the center of progress and civilization. It tells a story that all good things, like democracy and states, came from Europe, and other countries are just copying them. Postcolonialism says this is wrong because Europe got rich by colonizing others, and knowledge existed everywhere else too."

If the teacher asks: What is Neo-colonialism?

"Neo-colonialism means that even though countries are independent now, the West still controls them. Before they used soldiers, now they use ideas like 'Development', 'Good Governance', and institutions like the IMF and World Bank to keep power and take resources."