

Post/Colonial Writing - Introduction

Postcolonialism is itself a slippery term, evolving and transfiguring as it tackles different literary, social, and historical environments. Like many theoretical discourses, the parameters have been defined only retrospectively. Bill Ashcroft et al.'s *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, which first appeared in 1995, brought together key essays from the preceding two decades that had contributed to the formation of the critical arena. This text opted to retain the hyphen, signifying a temporal use of the term 'post': for Ashcroft and his colleagues, 'Post-Colonial Studies' was something that took place after the phenomenon colonialism, a problematic assumption that both disregards the postcolonial tendencies of earlier texts, as well as presuming that colonialism is, in fact, over. If we look to Israel's policies towards Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank, Indonesia's occupation of West Papua, Chinese economic investments in Africa, or the USA's foreign policy, to name just a few examples, we must surely consider that colonialism is an intensely contemporary issue.

Published in the same year, Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995), removed the hyphen and swapped the term 'studies' for 'literature'. This latter move raises questions as to what the target of postcolonialism's critique actually is. Initially arising as a strand of literary theory in the form of discourse analysis through the essential work of Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), and his later *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), postcolonialism first found its voice as a form of literary analysis. It is a testament to the field's importance, versatility and theoretical insight, that it has since migrated through a range of subjects, bridging and blurring disciplinary divides. However, Boehmer's title reminds us of its origins, as well as highlighting the historical breadth with which the field must be concerned if it is to reach the full potentials of its analytical project -- one cannot, after all, have the postcolonial without the colonial.

This point is reiterated by the title of Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), which first introduces the slash that we have chosen to employ here in our 'Post/Colonial Writing' section. By exchanging the 'and' for a form of punctuation, Loomba emphasises the interrelated nature of these two historical periods, suggesting that the textual fabric of each of these dichotomies are, in fact, interwoven into a spatial field of numerous sites of contestation. With Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) and *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), the hyphen was permanently eradicated, as the field acknowledged that it remains useful only as a temporal demarcator, the boundaries of which postcolonialism has always been concerned to transcend.

I have here skimmed the surface of a topic that is defined by its heterogeneity. Within the theory, cultural analysis, and literary criticism, can be found numerous tangents and subdivisions that take their inspiration from postcolonialism's essential and ongoing framework. The post/colonial writers found here in this section, and the commentaries and critiques that accompany them, explore and interrogate the key issues that lie at the heart of postcolonialism: cross-cultural understanding, social justice, and the ongoing development of a global community.

introduction