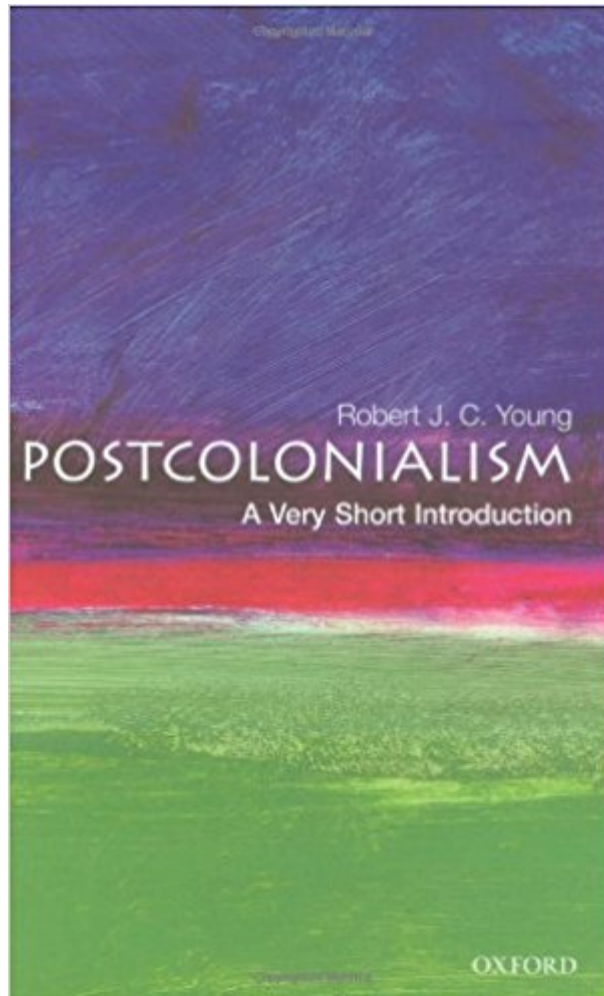




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Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction



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

Robert J. C. Young is Professor of English and Critical Theory at Oxford University and a Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford. Recent publications include *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Culture, Theory and Race* (Routledge, 1995), and *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell, 2001). He is also General Editor of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (Routledge).

This is very good introduction and provides good contextual studies.

Let me reiterate, it's not a bad book. It's great. However, if you are looking for a 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. Young was trying to write where he's looking at the particularities of different "postcolonial" issues and subjects in different parts of the world and the transnational connections that have been forged between them. However, this is dangerous territory for it presupposes that the colonial experiences of far-away places, and of different historical times can be represented by the same set of rules through which we study its phenomena. For example, it's probably true that Che Guevara read Fanon and was influenced by his writings, but Che Guevara's point of view is arguably not one of postcolonialism (Latin America was largely decolonized in the 19th century when most of the countries in the region found independence) but one of neocolonialism - Latin America was at the time (and currently) being exploited by European, Canadian and U.S. American corporations for its resources. Yet the book has what I consider an ingenuous tone and outlook on the questions of postcolonialism which help understand some of the problems, without delving deeply into the theoretical work undertaken by its theorists through the last few decades. Since I was looking for a more theoretically-heavy book, this book was not helpful.

I suggest the person who is looking for such a book to try and find a good introduction elsewhere.

In the introduction, Young states that postcolonial cultural analysis "has been concerned with the elaboration of theoretical structures that contest the dominant western way of seeing things" (p. 4). However, he continues, postcolonialism "is not a theory in the scientific sense" (p. 6). Therefore, Young decides to avoid trying to explain postcolonial theory altogether and instead aim to "generate a creative set of relations" through presenting a "montage" of different times and perspectives (p. 7). For the following 130 pages, Young relates a series of examples where he believes perspectives in the third world have been overlooked as a result of western hegemony. Some of these historical and contemporary examples are indeed very interesting, many however are already well-known to the ordinary reader. Young proposes Raï music, fairtrade, and third world revolutionaries as positive factors in a postcolonial response to political and cultural imperialism. While Young repeatedly present Franz Fanon and Che Guevara as third world heroes, their advocacy for political violence is explained by their "great physical as well as intellectual intensity" (p. 128). In the very last chapter, Young finally introduces one theoretical concept, namely the notion of translation. The message is that postcolonialism teaches that something is always lost in translation; a problem Fanon however, according to Young, somehow found a way to get around. For someone curious about postcolonial theory as a way to question western dichotomies, Young's introduction is a great disappointment. I have read a considerable number of Very Short Introductions, of which this one so far is the least informative.

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