



## Postcolonialism

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### What is it?

Postcolonialism might be best thought of as a movement—political and intellectual—that challenges colonial logics and practices (past and present). As a movement, it is concerned with the decolonization of territories, nations, identities, peoples, and social imaginations that are oppressed or violated by various machineries of colonialism (and of nationalism). The term does not really signify a “formal” or “official” movement. Rather, it loosely refers to practices of decolonization and intellectual decolonization, whatever they may be in a given context. The term has become popular in academia—especially in the U.S. and U.K.—since the late 1970s. This period saw the publication of several key essays and works by intellectuals of formerly colonized (or still colonized) nations who had migrated to the West and western universities. Their critical challenge to continuing colonial logics in our everyday cultural, political, social and academic practices resulted in the institutional birth of an area loosely termed ‘postcolonialism.’ In actuality however, postcolonialism is more a movement as described above, and ‘postcolonial studies’ is the intellectual area that engages it.

### Who uses the concept?

One finds the concept broadly used by scholars and intellectuals, although these days one may also find references to this term in popular culture to signify challenges to colonialism in contemporary (or earlier) times. Picked up by scholars in literary, cultural, and feminist studies in the 1980s, the concept only really came into general use in communication, education, political science, psychology, and sociology in the 1990s.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Postcolonial studies invites us to expand the boundaries of what we understand as “intercultural” by pushing us to rethink intercultural relations through geopolitics and global and transnational inequalities. Thus, instead of “inter,” someone taking a postcolonial studies approach is more comfortable using “trans.” While “intercultural dialogue” most often takes an individualized approach (that is focusing primarily on communication between individuals), postcolonial perspectives look at how macro structures of geopolitics are intimately linked to micropractices of colonial ideologies that inform unequal cultural, political, social and intellectual exchanges.

### What work remains?

We need work that examines 21<sup>st</sup> century colonial logics and practices. We also need more work that addresses and theorizes the intersections between postcolonialism and communication. For example, more work is needed on visual culture and popular culture and its role in postcolonial migrations and diasporic spaces.

### Resources

- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Shome, R., & Hegde, R (2002). Postcolonial approaches to communication: Charting the terrain, engaging the intersections. *Communication Theory*, 12(3), 249-270.
- Young, R. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.