

HUM2020: Encountering the Humanities

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Mode: Web

Module: Postcolonial Theory

Weight: 10%

*Assignment: Unlocking Difficult Texts*

*Importance:* This is the first assignment in this module and it is a critical reading. You will be reading postcolonial scholarship and applying postcolonial ideas so it is imperative that you understand what postcolonialism is in order to move through the module.

*Reading:* Jane Hiddleston, "Introduction" in *Understanding Postcolonialism*.

*Description:* In this assignment you are tasked with closely reading a difficult text. While the text may appear difficult, it is designed as an introduction for students who are unfamiliar with postcolonialism, so you can do it! That being said, quickly skimming or highlighting is not enough to understand a text. We must ask questions of the text and we must ensure that we do everything in our own power to understand the author's points. We can do this in a variety of ways but for today's exercise, you will be working with definitions.

If we are unfamiliar with a word or two in any given sentence, we are likely to miss the entire point of the sentence. In many cases, we can use a dictionary to look up the meaning of a word. Note that you may have to look at several different options to figure out which one fits the particular context of your reading. In other times, we may come across jargon. Jargon refers to specialized words that may be unique to a particular discipline and, therefore, may not appear in a dictionary. We may get lucky and find a root word that can help us understand the term or we may have to turn to an expert or other academic readings for an explanation. For example, your text uses the word "fetishization," of which you are unlikely to find a dictionary definition. However, you will find a definition for fetishize and you can make an assumption from there. Other terms may be extremely complex like postcolonialism, colonialism, and postcoloniality. As you will see in your reading, there are several paragraphs explaining the complexity of these terms. A dictionary definition of postcolonialism may be helpful for basic comprehension but when it is the subject of our study, you're going to want to have a deeper understanding of the term. Nevertheless, do not hesitate to look up a word that you do not understand.

*Audience:* For part 1 and part 2, you consider the audience to be yourself and your instructor. For the final part of this assignment, the audience should be for someone unfamiliar with the concept.

*Assessment:* Parts 1 and 2 will be assessed as correct or incorrect. In part 3, you will be assessed on the coherency of your response.

## Part A: Definitions

When reading through any material, you should get in the habit of looking up words using a dictionary. Your ability to comprehend the words an author uses will help you to comprehend the material.

Look up the following words and offer a definition in your own words. Note: if there are multiple definitions list a few in case one does not fit later.

- Multifaceted
- Panoptic
- Subjugation
- Empirical
- Discourse
- Hegemony
- Engendered
- Fetishize
- Epoch
- Promulgation
- Efficacy

## Part B: Explanation

Now, apply that knowledge to these difficult sentences. In your own words, explain what the author is saying without repeating the highlighted word(s).

- “Postcolonialism refers to the wider, **multifaceted** effects and implications of colonial rule.” (1)
- “Postcolonialism frequently offers a challenge to colonialism, but does not constitute a single programme of resistance; indeed, it is considered consequently by some to be rather vague and **panoptic** in its ever more ambitious field of enquiry.” (1)
- “Colonialism should be conceived as the conquest and subsequent control of another country, and involves both the **subjugation** of that country's native peoples and the administration of its government, economy and produce.” (2)
- “The act of colonization is a concrete process of invasion and a practical seizing of control, although it is important for postcolonial studies that this material, **empirical** manifestation of colonization is at the same time backed up by a colonial ideology that stresses cultural supremacy.” (2)
- “Colonialism is from this point of view both a specified political and economic project, and a larger **discourse** of **hegemony** and superiority that is enlisted to drive and support that concrete political act.” (2)
- Overall, it can be agreed that postcolonialism names a set of political, philosophical or conceptual questions **engendered** by the colonial project and its aftermath.” (4)
- “Some critics have argued that post-colonialism is also guilty of this **fetishization** of certain aspects of "Third World" culture, but we might argue in response that postcolonialism is the movement that interrogates this cynical process, whereas

postcoloniality is the broader **epoch** and set of conditions in which such exoticization has come to thrive” (5)

- Postcolonial thought is, on the one hand, seen to interrogate the underlying political structures of colonialism, and the mechanics of its **promulgation** and subsequent dismantling. Postcolonial critique goes on to enquire after the structure and **efficacy** of particular forms of nationalism as they emerged at the time when colonial ideology faltered and declined.” (5)

### Part C: Focused Response

You get into an elevator on the first floor of the library on the main campus of UCF. In your hand, you are holding your freshly-read copy of Jane Hiddleston’s introduction to *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Another student steps into the elevator with you and they press the button for the floor below you. The student notices the title of the reading in your hand and becomes curious. She asks, “What is postcolonialism?”

Your ride is short and there is no chance to carry on the conversation beyond her stop. Answer the student’s question in 150 words or less. Be sure to avoid jargon and succinctly (look it up!) explain the critical elements of postcolonialism.