

**Sethi, R, *The politics of postcolonialism: Empire, nation and resistance*. London: Pluto Press, ISBN 978-0-7453-2363-3, 2011, 181 pages.**

*The politics of postcolonialism* is a revolutionary book that critically unpacks the relationship between postcolonialism, nationalism and neoliberal globalization by confronting the new imperialism of the United States and its hegemonic institutionalization of postcolonial studies in academia. Postcolonialism denotes the persistence and continuation of colonialism and imperialism, as opposed to “after” colonialism. Its origins are rooted in “third-world” decolonization struggles and national anticolonial freedom movements that represent a way of life “that seeks to encourage radical politics and engagement with popular struggles which includes the study of the history of colonialism as a reminder of anti-imperialist politics” (p.26). Postcolonialism seeks to expose and resist all forms of structural dominance, oppression, marginality, and hegemony, in both the postcolonial and western world, through collective action and praxis.

Rumina Sethi’s book uncovers the rift and contradictions between postcolonialism and postcolonial studies in the academy where the latter remains preoccupied with studying postcolonial/western theory (i.e., Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Bhabha, Spivak) and postcolonial literature with an emphasis on cultural studies (race, class, gender, the nation, hybridity, hyphenations, multiculturalism), while omitting an historical Marxist

analysis which exposes the rapacious impacts of many centuries of ongoing global capitalism. The main proposition in Sethi's book is the call for and urgent need to radically change and politicize the postcolonial studies curricula in universities worldwide by giving due consideration to neoliberal globalization/neocolonialism and the encroachment of MNCs in postcolonial nation-states as the primary focus of analysis. Sethi argues that a Marxist analysis, and the inclusion of "third-world" voices and anti-capitalist resistance movements to the forces of corporate globalization must be incorporated and taken up in postcolonial studies with a view to diminish western hegemony and subjection, restore the transformative origins of postcolonialism, reinstate the emancipatory possibilities of nation-states, sharpen postcolonial sensibilities in the curriculum, decolonize knowledge and educational spaces, and unleash the "real" world.

In Chapter 1, Sethi diligently contours the postcolonial terrain by, defining and tracing the origin's of postcolonialism in "third-world" decolonization movements, to the academic emergence of postcolonial studies in the United States focussed on the "Other" vis-à-vis a cultural studies which obscured contemporary neocolonial/neoliberal projects. Chapter 2 expands on this latter point and exposes globalization's ongoing invasion of the sovereignty of postcolonial nation-states after "independence" given the rise of the United States and the "new world order" and exploitative neocolonial relations instituted through Structural Adjustment

(SAPs) and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). What is significant in the discussion in this chapter is the emphasis on the simultaneous juxtaposing of “third-world” resistance movements to Euro-American hegemony, which have not been engaged in dominant postcolonial studies curricula and pedagogy.

In Chapter 3, Sethi provides a number of case studies from around the world which uncover the vicious impacts of neoliberal globalization on local populations in the “third-world”. For example, in Chiapas, Mexico, which is the “largest producers of avocados, beef, bananas, cocoa, corn, honey and melons, and is abundant in natural resources...its inhabitants and local population are destitute and malnourished...[with]...neither drinking water nor electricity...[and]...[d]eath from poverty and disease is commonplace and education a remote possibility” (p.74). Sethi also juxtaposes a number of anti-globalization movements and political protests by marginalized groups from around the world in response to the intrusions of neoliberalism and related issues of land rights, water projects, mining, deforestation, resource extrapolation, damn constructions, green revolution, genetically engineered seeds, pesticide use, ecological crises, privatization, and the commodification of local resources by MNCs, to name a few. For example, in 2002, the people of Bolivia protested “against decreased spending on health and education” (p.72); in Honduras the people rejected a proposed drinking water law; in Peru people marched against the privatization of electricity; in

Paraguay there were national protests by depressed social classes and peasant movements against neoliberal policies; and in Mexico, she references the Zapatista movement—resistances that the author proposes, eventually led or contributed towards the collapse of 2003 WTO summit at Cancun Mexico.

With reference to India, Sethi discusses the historic example of the 1971 Chipko agitation/movement in the Himalayas led by women who prevented deforestation by clinging to trees, and more recently, the Karnataka State Farmers' Association (KRRS) which comprises ten million members who in 1992 protested the establishment of Cargill's (international food producer and marketer) office in Bangalore, the opening of Kentucky Fried Chicken (1995) in India, the Miss World pageant in 1996, and in 1999 Union representatives flew to the WTO headquarters in Geneva to protest the imposition of modified seeds. Through these examples and numerous others, Sethi points out the importance of group alliances in struggles against corporations and the IFIs, and how "[t]hese struggles, which are often local, informal and unorganized, are not only anti-global in nature but also anarchical, that is 'less about seizing state power than about exposing, delegitimizing, and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy from it' (Sethi, 2011, p.75). For Sethi, political movements and localized resistance to neoliberalism and resistance at the level of the nation-state (as in the case of Brazil which decided not to purchase 24 new fighter planes from the United States and spent the

\$750million towards eradicating hunger), should be incorporated in postcolonial studies with the view to make analytical connects between postcolonialism, nationalism and neoliberal globalization. This, she argues, is best accomplished through a Marxist analysis which unpacks the exploitative international division of labour and the spread of a still predominantly Euro-American global capitalism.

Chapter 4 highlights and discusses the current challenges associated with implementing a politically radical “third-world” anti-globalization postcolonial studies curricula in universities given postcolonial studies’ academic development in the United States and a worldwide appropriation and institutionalization focused on cultural studies concepts (hybridity and hyphenated identities) as opposed to necessary interrogations of neoliberalism (global capitalism) which designs, governs, and profits from and at the expense of the “third-world”. The challenge of transforming postcolonial studies is further compounded by the paradoxes in the inclusion of the United States as a ‘postcolonial’ nation-state that has achieved independence from Britain allegedly much like Africa and Asia. The United States completely dismisses its 1492 colonial history and current national identity formation rooted in colonialism wherein people from Europe invaded and “settled” the land—a process that included the extermination of First Nations; the importation of millions of slaves from colonized states for gruelling physical labour (p.87); ongoing warfare and military occupation in “postcolonial” nation-states like Afghanistan and Iraq;

and the design and implementation of neoliberal political economic policies in the “third world”.

This book offers promising radical educational prospects and practices and urgently required material and analysis for a period which amply demonstrates that there is “nothing ‘post’ about postcolonialism” (p.59). By diligently differentiating between “postcolonialism” and “postcolonial studies”, where the former is rooted in “third-world” decolonization struggles and the study of the history of colonialism and western imperialism, while the later focuses on studying cultural concepts (hybridity, representation, multiculturalism, and hyphenated identities), the author provides us with a clearer understanding of how contemporary postcolonial studies has been complicit in the growth and development of neoliberalism, US hegemony, and the spread of capitalism. Sethi suggests that this has been achieved primarily through the deliberate hegemonic distortion of postcolonialism and postcolonial studies vis-à-vis the exclusion of historical and contemporary anti-colonial and anti-capitalist responses, struggles, and movements in the “third-world”, as well as through the ejection of a Marxist analysis.

The strength of this book undeniably lies in the “real” spaces Sethi transports the reader to, bringing “first world privilege and third-world poverty...” (p.86) to the fore. In Chapter 5, Sethi reinforces the necessity to critique globalization in postcolonial studies vis-à-vis the political engagement, resistance, and activism of the “third-world” made visible through a Marxist analysis. Non/academic educators would

greatly benefit from this read given that current approaches to discussing “development” and “globalization” in educational curricula and global pedagogies actively exclude links to colonialism (past and present), global capitalism and “third world” resistance. Educators can utilize this contribution to unmask neoliberal globalization, decolonize the colonial-capitalist knowledge-hegemony, and pry open educational spaces and improve prospects to counter Euro-American capitalism which “is always at the cost of third world prosperity” (p.63).

**Tejwant Chana**  
*University of Alberta, Canada*