
 <p><u>Norbert Merkovity</u></p>	 <p><u>11-16 minutes</u></p>	<p>Thing to remember:</p> <p>Critical theory sets out to critique repressive social practices and institutions in today's world.</p>
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Critical Theory

Critical theory incorporates a wide range of approaches all focused on the idea of freeing people from the modern state and economic system – a concept known to critical theorists as emancipation. The idea originates from the work of authors such as Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx who, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, advanced different revolutionary ideas of how the world could be reordered and transformed.

Both Kant and Marx held a strong attachment to the Enlightenment the universalism – the view that there are social and political principles that are apparent to all people, everywhere. In the modern era, both authors became foundational figures for theorists seeking to replace the modern state system by promoting more just global political arrangements such as a federation of free states living in perpetual peace (Kant) or communism as a global social and economic system to replace the unequal capitalist order (Marx).

Critical theory sets out to critique repressive social practices and institutions in today's world and advance emancipation by supporting ideas and practices that meet the universalist principles of justice.

This kind of critique has a transformative dimension in the sense that it aims at changing national societies, international relations and the emerging global society, starting from alternative ideas and practices lingering

in the background of the historical process.

Critical theory has been very influential amongst IR scholars. Critical Theory has its roots in the work of the Frankfurt School, a group of thinkers including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas. Among their key concerns of critical theorists is the emancipation, and in particular, the human capacities and capabilities appealed to in calls for emancipatory action.

Several different understandings of emancipation have emerged from the Critical Theory tradition. The first generation of the Frankfurt School equated emancipation with a reconciliation with nature.

Habermas has argued that emancipatory potential lies in the realm of communication and that radical democracy is the way in which that potential can be unlocked.

Andrew Linklater has developed on critical theory themes to argue in favour of the expansion of the moral boundaries of the political community and has pointed to the European Union as an example of a post-Westphalian institution of governance.

[Robert Cox](#) sets out to challenge realism’s assumptions, namely the study of interstate relations in isolation from other social forces. He stresses the need to see global politics as a collective construction evolving through the complex interplay of state, sub-state and trans-state forces in economic, cultural and ideological spheres. His purpose is to pay attention to the whole range of spheres where change is needed in contemporary global politics. For example, when realism focuses only on great powers and strategic stability, it ends up reinforcing a set of unjust global relations stemming from power and coercion. For this reason, Cox challenges the idea that ‘truth’ is absolute – as in realism’s assertion that there is a timeless logic to international relations, or liberalism’s assertion that the pursuit of global capitalism is positive. Instead, he asserts that ‘theory is always for someone and

for some purpose’ (Cox 1981, 128). Drawing on Gramsci, Cox comes up with a picture of the world political system brought into being by the hegemony and hierarchies of power manufactured in the economic arena. Therefore, power is understood in the context of a set of globalised relations of production demanding the transformation of the nation-state, and depends on the combination of material elements and ideas for acquiring legitimacy (Cox and Jacobsen 1977). Cox explores the economic contradictions spurring change in power relations and guiding transitions towards a fairer world order, even if acknowledging that emancipation is not inevitable.

See the course book for more!

Critical theory ended in numerous theories:

- Frankfurt School
- Neo-Gramscinism
- Feminism
- International Political Economy (IPE)
- etc.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is the critical academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. The formerly colonised territories (states) are in the spotlight.

It sets the focus on:

- colonial forms of power, and
- continuing existence of racism in world politics.

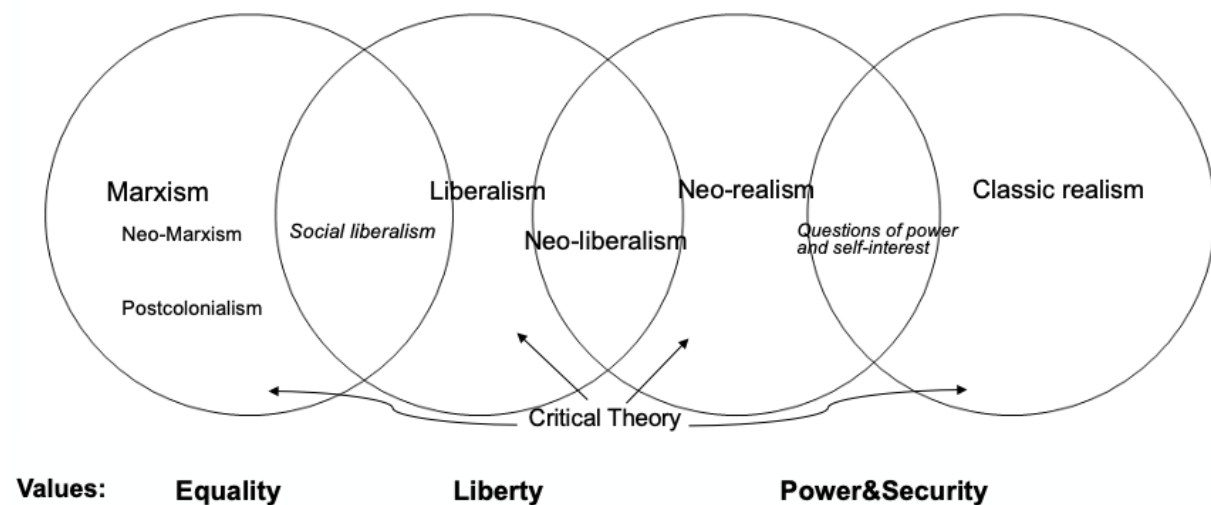
Main topics of postcolonialism are:

- Hierarchies,
- Concentration of power,
- Domination (as power relations),
- Classism and racism,
- North-South gap (the issues like the ‘Third World’),
- Global (social) inequality,

- Islam (as both cultural and religious question: clash of civilizations; see Edward Said),
- Women of colour (feminist postcolonialism).

More on Critical Theory: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0J8u-C_Hoc

Progress



Questions

1. What are the basic aims of *critical theory*?
2. Why do they use universalist principles of justice?
3. Where can we find the roots of critical theory? Who are the main actors?
4. How *Jürgen Habermas* thought about emancipatory potential?
5. Why did *Andrew Linklater* developed on critical theory themes?
6. How *Robert Cox* challenged realism?
7. What are the ‘outputs’ of critical theory? (Which theories could be originated from this?)
8. What is postcolonialism?
9. What is the focus of postcolonialism?
10. What are the main topics in postcolonialism?

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