

ESSAY

The promises and pitfalls of decolonial thinking

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The craze that once prevailed in academia over postcolonialism no longer seems to hover around there anymore. It is not that the questions it once raised have all been resolved; the school of decolonial thinking has somewhat taken over the academic 'glamour' that postcolonialism once held. Over the last few decades, decoloniality has re-engaged the colonial question with renewed intellectual interests. It has emerged as a dynamic critical tool that aims to unsettle the colonial hierarchies of knowledge and reestablish native and indigenous epistemologies.

Although both postcolonial and decolonial modes of thought are concerned with the lingering effects of Anglo-European colonialism, the two differ in terms of objectives and ambitions. Whereas postcoloniality primarily presents a critique of Anglo-European colonialism and the colonial modernity imposed on the colonised world, decoloniality besides critiquing colonial legacies aims at recuperating the epistemologies and world-making practices suppressed, distorted, and marginalised by colonialism. Decoloniality's goal is to reclaim and reestablish different native-indigenous modes of knowing and being, and legacies of care and creative world-making that predate colonial modernity. Decentering the Eurocentric universality, decoloniality aims to make a pluriversal and intersubjective world. It champions relationality that connects local histories and embodied knowledge across geopolitical locations and contests the authoritative totalising drive of Eurocentricity.

Genealogically and philosophically, the idea of decoloniality has a distinct epistemological focus. It generally posits that modern civilisation and the current capitalist-imperialist world system is a definitive epistemic creation—the creation and hegemonic continuation of Eurocentric epistemology. Here, Eurocentrism is understood as the cultural expression of Eurocentricity that puts Europe at the centre of human history and superiorises

White European civilisation (and White North America as an extension) while inferiorising others. In decolonial thinking, epistemological decolonisation precedes material and political decolonisation, and ontology is thought to be created and articulated within the domain of epistemology. Decoloniality thus primarily focuses on unlearning the knowledge and assumptions that facilitate the continuation of colonial domination and relearning the histories and world views outside the Western geography of knowledge. Decolonial vision entails rewriting human history from multiple perspectives and recreating a pluriversal world to accommodate multiple world systems, ways of being and becoming, and ecologies of knowledge. Its political ambition is to dismantle the current Eurocentric political hegemony by abolishing

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the universalising authoritativeness of the Eurocentric epistemological system. However, decolonial thinking does not sweepingly negate or reject the Western knowledge system but situates it as a constituent part of the pluriversal world-making.

Speaking of literature specifically, the scope of decoloniality entails reclaiming and reestablishing the native and indigenous forms, styles, and genres of writing and narratives marginalised by their Eurocentric counterparts. The pre-colonial and



organic forms of art and literature have been rendered as 'underdeveloped' or often categorised as 'folk' forms by the aesthetic parameters of the Western canon. Besides retrieving the literature embedded in people's organic reality, decoloniality envisions flattening the hierarchy between colonial European languages and local languages.

The ambitions of decolonial thinking are optimistic, no doubt. Colonialism as a system violently distorted native and indigenous ways of knowing and being, inferiorised cultures, displaced people from their lands, alienated them from the surrounding nature and environment, and deprived them of self-autonomy. People of the colonised world still carry on colonialism's burdens and legacies in their patterns of thinking and imagination, cultural and aesthetic being, economic and political life, and the administrative, penal, and education systems. Decolonial thinking aims to remove the traces of domination to create a pluriversal world connected in relationality by local ways of knowing and being. However, the epistemological primacy over the political and the material limits its scope and makes it an exclusively academic phenomenon bereft of significant progressive

political implications.

The epistemic preoccupation of decolonial thinking has kept it mostly restricted within academia. Western academia itself is a hegemonic system that upholds Eurocentric epistemological supremacy and academia all around the world is colonised by its specific ecology. Decolonial thinking is mostly practised within the conventions and logic of Western academia. It complies with the dominant practices like specific writing styles, citation guidelines, and publishing logic that make Western academia and its publication culture a hegemonic system. As long as decolonial thinking remains subsumed within this hegemonic system, can it succeed in dismantling the Eurocentric epistemological hegemony? Or is it destined to remain an anecdotal reference to the history of Western academia that gives it some sense of redemption?

The overemphasis on the epistemic revolution has also distanced decolonial thinking from mainstream progressive politics. The way theories and intellectual movements like Marxism and feminism influenced progressive politics worldwide, decoloniality has not yet shown that

kind of scope or ambition. Even most decolonial indigenous movements like the Zapatista uprising in Mexico and indigenous movements for reparative justice and autonomy in the Americas spring from the organic reality of resisting the oppressive dynamics, not as political translations of academic thoughts. Rather, decolonial thinkers theorise those movements retrospectively and write books afterward. Its poor translation in the realm of politics has already enabled the far-right and exclusionary forms of identity politics to weaponise decolonial rhetoric in many parts of the world.

Even the term 'decolonisation' in decolonial thinking carries a different connotation than it was used in the works of the likes of Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. For Fanon, decolonisation entailed a simultaneity of political, social, economic, epistemological, and cultural liberation. The drive for simultaneous decolonisation on multiple fronts was embedded in direct political action, not narrowed down to the primacy of epistemic liberation. Decoloniality's epistemological bias also turns the question away from the material. Any epistemology or system of knowledge

is mediated by the dominant material condition of a society. Western epistemology is mediated by global capitalism and its production and market logic. Thus the question surfaces—can epistemic freedom be achieved without radical structural transformation of the global capitalist system? And how can it be achieved if not politically?

The university-centred practice of decolonial thinking will not transform the existing global order overnight. And decolonial thinkers do not make that claim either. A tenet of decoloniality is the idea of *longue durée*—the longer period during which social processes and structures unfold, develop, and evolve. Decoloniality considers both the process of colonisation and decolonisation as processes unfolding over the *longue durée*. A decolonised future is thus projected to be achieved through the cumulative effects of small acts of unlearning and relearning, questioning power and hierarchies, fostering practices of care, and building bridges of solidarity across geopolitical locations over a longer period. However, emphasising the *longue durée*, decoloniality should not overlook the possibility and necessity of revolutionary political and material transformation of the society.

Decolonial thinking as it exists today has its promises and pitfalls. Its promises will not be materialised if decolonisation remains an academic metaphor. Besides confronting Eurocentric epistemology it needs to address more overtly how global capitalism materially determines ways of knowing and being in the contemporary world. Decoloniality should have simultaneous engagement in the front of material/economic, political, cultural, and epistemological and have an interpenetrating rapport with mainstream progressive politics and movements of social justice worldwide if it no longer wants to remain an academic footnote.

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THE SHELF

5 mystery thriller books to look out for at and after Boi Mela

With the 2024 Amar Ekushey Boi Mela nearing its end, here are some books you can look for at the fair if you happen to visit on the last day, and even once it wraps up for the year.



NUR-E-JANNAT ALIF

PROBESH NISHED

Koyes Sami
Anuj Prokashon, 2024

Sanjana has killed her husband. She had not meant to kill him, but the odds never seem to be in her favour. Desperately trying to grasp the reality of her situation, she flees the crime scene, leaving her family, friends and life behind. On her way to seek refuge in a faraway land, Sanjana stumbles upon a reclusive holiday destination, Tinni's Resort. She needed a place to rest her head, and this rundown hotel was an ideal spot from the prying eyes of society. But the resort has secrets of its own, and soon Sanjana learns about the murder of a girl named Nargis, right where she was now. As the night progresses and a sinister silhouette of



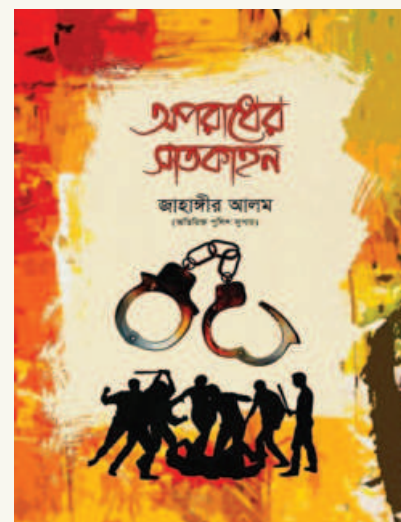
KOSMOJAHİ
Mohammad Nazim Uddin
Batighar Prokashoni, 2024

Partly based on true events, *Kosmojahi* is as vague as its title ensues. But one thing is for certain, this 'Kosmojahi', whatever it is, has caused a murder. The murder of an American tourist at Cox's Bazar. *Kosmojahi* is intricately woven in the events leading up to this grisly scenario and Inspector Garib-e-Newaz is determined to reach its end. This novel by Mohammad Nazim Uddin has created a buzz among readers with its name alone, so be sure to pick it up, if you too are interested in finding out the identity of *Kosmojahi*.



MRITUBARI
Mostaque Ahamed
Anindya Prokash, 2024

A paranormal thriller, *Mritubari* by Mostaque Ahamed follows the story of Miraz and Disha. Their relationship started most unconventionally, with Disha seeking shelter at Miraz's residence on a stormy evening. Out of genuine compassion, Miraz agrees to let her stay, unaware of what looms ahead of him. As their relationship advances, he discovers that Disha is coveted by Kalababa, a spectral entity from the underworld. Kalababa demands Disha's presence in the realm of death, where one must either pledge allegiance and partake in a blood ritual or face demise. With few returning from such encounters, Miraz endeavours to rescue Disha, but finds himself ensnared by Kalababa's



OPORADHER SHATKAHON
Jahangir Alam
Merit Fair Prokashon, 2024

Written by an actual police officer by profession, *Oporadher Shatkahon* by Jahangir Alam brings about a unique perspective in the traditional genre of mystery thrillers. This story collection is entirely inspired by events and cases he has solved himself, taking on a refreshing tone in his narration. The author is honest in his recount. He candidly acknowledges the realities of police work and the challenges inherent in solving crimes. While the names and places used in it are fictional, it still remains a number one option for true crime fiends.

RATRIHORON
Muhammad Zahid Hossain
Anuj Prokashon, 2024



The second instalment in the 'Kastigo' series, *Ratrihoron* centres on the chronicles of OC Himadri. The small town of Alipur is reeling from a string of horrific murders targeting middle-class schoolgirls. News reports reveal that these girls have been raped and brutally killed. Not only that, forensic reports reveal that pounds of flesh from their stomachs have been replaced. The brutality of these acts raises disturbing questions, and it is up to Himadri to put a stop to this massacre.

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