

Through literary texts from the postcolonial world, I try to show that the fine-grained engagement with culture, the mapping of ordinary lives not just as objects but as subjects of history, is often embedded not in the postcolonial notion of “radical difference” but in what I call a radical universalism: a universalism rooted in local realities but also capable of unearthing the needs, conflicts, and desires that stretch across cultures and time. It is a universalism recognized by [Karl] Marx and embraced by the likes of Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and C.L.R. James, a universalism steeped in the spirit of anti-colonialism and hostile to any whiff of exoticism.

I would assert that my rejection of the universal/particular binary enables me to unpack and reject a series of other binaries that arise therefrom. In individual chapters devoted to writings from the early twentieth century through the present day—from India, Sri Lanka, Palestine and Egypt—I argue that the typical oppositions set up by post-colonial theory are artificial and unworthy. Among such oppositions are those between the structural and the experiential, between abstract theorization and concrete manifestation, between collective struggles and individual moral agency. I show that these arguments do not merely

**make theoretical mistakes but also profoundly mischaracterize the works they purport to examine. I further contend that many of the works in question—works presented by postcolonial theory as rejections of all universalizing categories—in fact embody a universalizing ambition.**

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