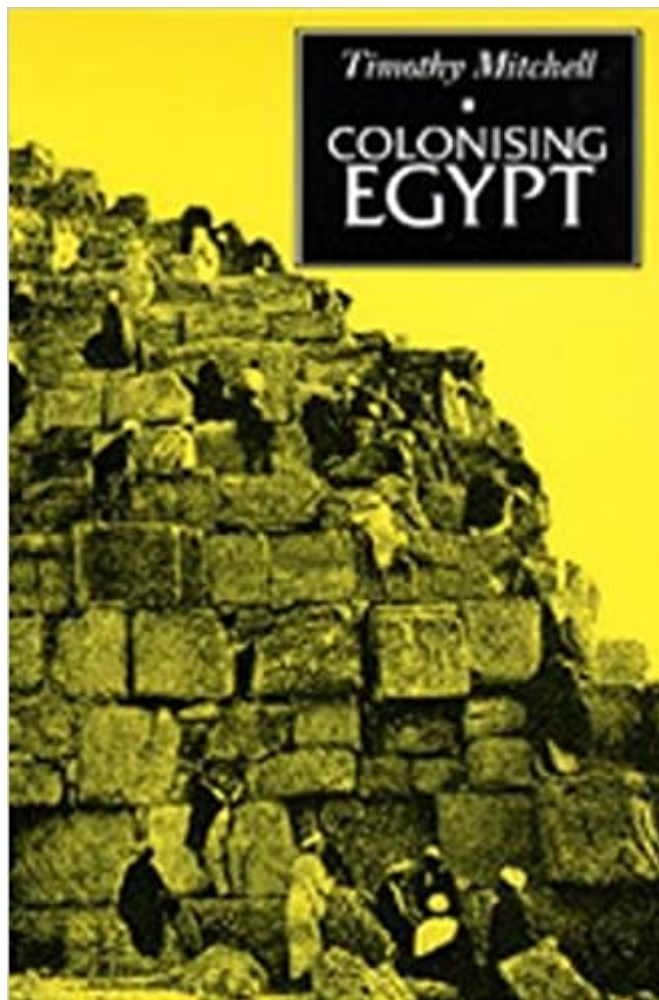


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Colonising Egypt



Synopsis

Extending deconstructive theory to historical and political analysis, Timothy Mitchell examines the peculiarity of Western conceptions of order and truth through a re-reading of Europe's colonial encounter with nineteenth-century Egypt.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Colonising Egypt focuses on the intellectual and political impact of Europe on 19th century Egypt and argues for a critical repositioning of the study of colonial history. Drawing on the methodologies of contemporary European intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, Mitchell relocates the significance of these theories within a global context."--Barbara Harlow, "Middle East Report

Timothy Mitchell is Professor, Department of Middle East and Asian Studies, Columbia University.

Found Mitchell's constant citations a bit distracting and his application of Foucault and Heidegger a bit clunky. Some of the connections are there and importantly made, but others are a tad overwrought, increasing the clunkiness of the text overall. I would say that this book is worth reading, but only if you have already read Heidegger, Foucault, and Said can you really grasp the full weight of the claims and enter into a conversation with the text.

Mitchell describes the specific methods of control inherent in colonialism—particularly

Western colonialism in Egypt. He describes a

“world-as-exhibition” phenomenon, which took place as perceptions of the world began to divide things into binaries. Using this division, the colonial empires employed methods of military control, architecture and public education, which made it possible for the first time to speak of ‘capturing the bodies’ of a population. In the tradition of Michel Foucault, Mitchell demonstrates the emergence of a political power that sought not only to capture the individual body but also to colonise it and maintain a continuous presence. The colonizing power, in effect, was a power that seemed to construct its object as something divided into two separate concerns, body and mind. This division, Mitchell argues, was a specific and tactical goal of colonial power over subject people. Mitchell’s work on power, while drawing heavily on Foucault, was groundbreaking in the field as he applied it to colonialism in Egypt and capitalist modernity, specifically. His work examines how power operates in the presence of binary worldviews and more importantly, what that means to people in colonized societies. Mitchell offers original and innovative ideas using clear and insightful language. While his book uses Egypt as his case study, the impact of his argument has vastly further reaching implications. It proves not only useful for the student of the region, but for any student of anything, anywhere.

Mitchell’s writing, as stated in the reviews, takes the scholarship begun by Heidegger and continued by Derrida and Foucault and applies it to his critique of 19th century colonialism. The ideas of deconstruction and its fight to overturn both complete objectivity and the hope of “overcoming the system” lead Mitchell to demonstrate that the West and its objectivity is rooted in as much subjectivity as any other cultural perspective. It is this Western rationale that brought European colonialists to impose their values and hierarchies onto the Oriental system, bringing the power structures of Foucault’s discourses to the fore. Whatever conclusion you come to take from the book, and Mitchell’s arguments are exceptionally convincing, you will certainly not leave its pages with the same mindset you entered.

This is an excellent critical work that powerfully engages how the Western colonising project unfolds, and it utilizes Egypt as its main centerpiece. Mitchell is a master when it comes to observing how divergent mindsets prevent the West and East from understanding one another. His use of Foucauldian and Derridian paradigms for describing the experience of modern power in Egypt and process of mutual discovery are amazing, entertaining and insightful. As a Western student

living in the Middle East, this work compelled me to question my own mindset, lifestyle, and perceptions. This is a very important book that I would recommend to any intellectual who desires to understand colonialism and/or relate to Egypt and the Middle East.

This book can be a hard read, but it is brilliant. Of interest to anyone who wants to learn about colonialism, Egypt, and Middle Eastern history in general.

I have read only the sample available through the Kindle store. I have already noticed several misspelled words. The book sounds fascinating but these typos preclude my purchase of it at this time.

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