

**Title—Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent**

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Categories: (Anti)Colonialism, Resistance, Migration, Politics, Metropolitan Culture

Place: British Empire

Time: 1850-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Gopal aims to craft a study of anticolonial resistance across the British Empire. She calls for a reconsideration of the foundational mythologies that continue to inform British perceptions of the empire, especially the assumption that the colonized were affected by the British but this was not a mutual exchange. The British were not immune to the injustices perpetuated by their elites on dark-skinned foreigners. Gopal also calls for a deeper analysis into the growth of rights and privileges during the colonial period. Paternalistic policymakers did not simply bestow rights and privileges on colonized populations who had supposedly matured under their political tutelage; she claims that the growth of rights was, in part, the result of anticolonial resistance from colonized people. She argues that anticolonial radicals had a substantial influence on metropolitan debates within Britain during the colonial period. Gopal claims that metropolitan critics of empire were influenced by those who led, supported, or were merely sympathetic to the anticolonial movements across the empire. To do so, Gopal focuses on specific individuals who were central to various anticolonial resistance movements—she underscores the impact of these various individuals upon colonial events.

The book is organized roughly chronologically. Her study is focused on specific individuals, including Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Communist MP Shapurji Saklatvala. Gopal crafts a discourse analysis that focuses on the expression of particular anticolonial sentiments. She begins with a chapter focused on the British reactions to the Indian uprising of 1857. She traces how her interlocutors challenges the European provenance of values, such as justice and equality, drawing instead on alternative cultural resources and social practices to press their demands. Asian and African insurgents pushed the boundary of what it meant to be human in a global frame, rather than simply staking a claim in an assumed shared humanity, one that left racialized hierarchies intact. Gopal argues that anticolonial politics radicalized liberalism itself. The moments of crisis and rebellion, as well as their violent suppression, exposed the rhetorical contradictions and selective forgetting on which the myth of empire's essential benevolence rested.

Gopal challenges the mainstream discourse that claims anti-imperial resistance was a product of the liberal imperialist project. She demonstrates how enslaved and colonized people were the agents of their own resistance and freedom; the thoughts and actions of anticolonial rebels also shaped British discourse on liberation. Her book is a story of a world in which dissidents of all stripes learned from and shaped on another's politics, bridging rather than suppressing difference through imaginative labor. She concludes by highlighting the need to build an archive of dissidence, opposition, and criticism in relation to the British Empire.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Metropolitan critics of empire were influenced by those who led, supported, or were merely sympathetic to the anticolonial movements across the empire
- Anticolonial politics reworked and radicalized liberalism itself
- Imperialism continues to be the context in which global solidarities are constituted or sought after