



Kris Manjapra. *Colonialism in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Illustrations. 290 pp. \$24.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-108-44136-0.

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Racism and Colonialism

Kris Manjapra's *Colonialism in a Global Perspective* is a timely intervention that connects colonial history with its racist legacies. Its main objective is to broaden analysis in the field of colonial history by breaking out of temporal and geographical divisions, such as nation versus region or medieval versus modern. Instead, the book includes linkages between the different forms of colonial power that coexisted with empire but also independently of it. The interlocking of racial with colonial violence connects the stories and sources used in the book. Its global perspective enables it to reflect on colonialism's need to acquire, control, and dominate resources.

Colonialism in a Global Perspective examines three interrelated arguments. First, it illustrates "racial capitalism" as a defining feature of colonialism in all its forms, from the early colonization of the Americas by the Spanish to today's neocolonialism. Manjapra describes racial capitalism as that aspect of colonialism that characterizes, divides, and rules subject populations according to racial characteristics attributed to them. In the most extreme cases, racism and colonialism led to the extermination of entire cultural and ethnic groups. Second, through a description of the major features of colonialism, Manjapra tackles rather

large geographies and time periods to argue that racial capitalism lies at the heart of what he terms the "new colonialism." He defines "new colonialism" as the form of colonialism that was shaped by racial capitalism, beginning in the 1400s and intensifying from the eighteenth century onward. In this new colonialism, racism was key to capitalist practices that resulted in the accumulation of wealth among elite groups at the expense of vulnerable populations. The new colonialism relied on the following: war and violence as a means to enhance profitable undertakings, racial segmentation to dominate society and the economy, and moral deception on all levels.

Third, *Colonialism in a Global Perspective* draws special attention to the colonized and their struggles. For Manjapra, a history of colonialism must also include a counter-history of people's efforts to decolonize themselves. Manjapra uses the "parallax" approach, also known as the multiplied perspective, through which disciplinary, pedagogical, financial, spatial, and biopolitical dimensions of colonial power are examined through how they were contested by the colonized. The struggles of Indigenous, African, and Asian peoples and communities are placed in a relational and comparative approach without blurring the

particularities of each. The book challenges the ways rational choice theory seemingly gives agency to colonized peoples as rational actors having absolute free choice, whereas Manjapra highlights historical evidence of both passive and violent resistance.

Colonialism in a Global Perspective is divided into two main sections: part 1 discusses “interlocking colonial histories,” using the themes of war, settlement, plantation, and port, while part 2, titled “Elementary Aspects of Colonial Power,” explores colonial interventions in the fields of science, education, debt, space, and body. Each chapter includes historical examples and discussions of ethnographic artifacts, along with short narratives. Manjapra’s study is based on two broad approaches: historical narratives and sociological analysis. Source materials include archival documents and such artifacts as glyphs, photographs, drawings, and ethnographic objects, and the book relies on a rich and unconventional mix of secondary literatures. The literature includes colonial histories from the 1400s onward of the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia-Pacific regions. Illustrations of material objects highlight the history of colonialism. Artifacts from the Congo found in the Royal Museum in Belgium, for instance, describe the violence and racism involved in the colonizing process. Manjapra uses such objects as historical maps to highlight how material objects were used to further colonial oppression and also anti-colonial struggles.

Since *Colonialism in a Global Perspective* is so comprehensive, the initial chapters include somewhat hasty and simplified summaries. The chapters on war and settlement trace the history of colonization in the Americas and the process of expanding frontiers through systematic displacement, eradication, and oppression of Native Americans. The imposition of faulty agricultural policies by the colonial state resulted in ecological disruptions, while codification and surveillance of the colonial population disrupted the existing so-

cial fabric. Manjapra draws our attention to lesser-known attempts at assimilation that took place after these types of colonial displacement. In Natick, Massachusetts, for example, Native Americans used a petition-writing campaign to preserve their culture, language, and sovereignty.

Manjapra’s discussion of racial slavery is particularly strong and clear in the sections on plantations and ports, where he examines the exploitative conditions and different forms of physical and mental violence that characterized the life of slaves and indentured laborers. Manjapra complements this grim account with narratives about daily life. Songs, games, teachings, and stories provide insights into how laborers resisted and made their voices heard.

Racism also influenced colonial public health policies, with its assumptions of white superiority and “civilizing mission.” Racist scientific knowledge led to the mishandling of disease outbreaks and caused many preventable deaths. Manjapra argues that racial capitalism was based on two ideologies: “necropolitics,” or the ability of colonial rulers to manipulate health policies that effectively determined who lived and who died (Achille Mbembe); and “biopolitical management,” whereby the colonial administrations oversaw the health and well-being of the colonized (Michel Foucault).

Finally, Manjapra discusses the economic legacy of colonialism. In the nineteenth century, for example, heavy taxation and revenue collection served the financial interests of the colonizers to the detriment of the local economies. Since the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944, structural readjustment programs have caused debt obligations in the Global South to increase significantly. Racial colonialism has thus survived in the economic development programs of private and public international institutions.

The main takeaway from Manjapra’s book is that racism was inherent to colonialism and that legacies of colonialism survive into the present. At

the same time, decolonization struggles also have their legacies in popular mobilizations and progressive politics; social justice movements, such as MeToo or Black Lives Matter, are cases in point. This thought-provoking book questions the success of colonialism, given the sustained backlash and resistance against it; uses a comparison approach to understand empire and its many ruling strategies; shows that racial capitalism survives as a “new colonialism”; and examines how colonialism and racism continue to affect and drive grassroots movements today.

Colonialism in a Global Perspective is a lucid and enjoyable read that covers a large geographic area over a lengthy period. If at times it is unable to avoid a generic view of historical events that tends to flatten contextual particularities, its effective and honest prose nonetheless holds the reader’s attention. Each historical event is framed within the relevant analytical debates. Manjapra’s extensive inclusion of secondary literature helps provide a fresh and frank examination of racist colonialism and its surviving effects, one that is accessible to beginners and specialists alike. Academics will find the book interesting for bringing together and comparing these colonial histories with new evidence and perspectives, while non-specialists will appreciate the author’s linking of history with the present. By challenging studies that provide nation-based accounts, *Colonialism in a Global Perspective* stresses the importance of global history as a unique methodology that brings out evidence of connections and disconnections.

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