Colonialism

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Glossary

Appropriation  Within the context of colonial logics, refers to forms of large-scale taking possession of the material or cultural resources of colonized people by colonial subjects with little or no compensation. Colonial appropriations are frequently ideologically masked, socially normalized, legally condoned, and/or historically erased by the colonizers.

Colonialism  Writ large refers to some combination of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic invasion and subsequent domination of a group of people or groups of people by another group of people.

Decolonization  Defies simple explanation within colonial, anti-colonial, and neocolonial contexts and geographies. Broadly, decolonization signifies the ceaseless—everyday, systematized, and “disordered”—struggle to overcome the facets, structures, infrastructures, and traces of colonization. According to Frantz Fanon, decolonization is thus a complex but “permanent motivation” felt by all those subjected to colonial logics. Within the mainstream, decolonization refers to the historical moment and processes of independence in a formerly colonized country.

Dispossession  A central feature of European colonialism, denotes the stripping of a group of people or a person of their lands, territories, or other possessions, often by force.

Eurocentrism  A term coined by the Pan-African Egyptian political economist Samir Amin, refers to the cultivation of a worldview centered upon European (or Western) norms and ideas. Eurocentric ideas, which are otherwise regional and particular to Europe, are imposed upon the rest of the world under the guise of “universal.” This habit of equating “the universal” with Euro-American thought is intellectually tenable because it occurs within a wider global political and knowledge economy dominated by Euro-America.

European colonialism (circa late 1400)  Are particularized and changing political-economic-social-religious systems of European political, economic, social, and educational domination that generated and benefited from Eurocentric racialized and racist logics. European colonialisms are distinct from other colonialisms because of their immense geographical range, Eurocentric logics, ideologies and observances of racial hierarchies and segregation, centering of appropriation by dispossession, and structural and cultural persistency within post-colonial epochs.

Imagined geographies  A term coined by the Palestinian literary scholar Edward Said in Orientalism, is a concept central to postcolonial thought, including postcolonial geographies. Said interrogated the ways in which “orientalism,” or the study of what European scholars called the “Orient,” were constructs of the European imaginary. Imagined geographies then refers to the ways in which knowledges of local, regional, and/or national geographies (the people, place, and landscapes within them) are invented through discursive practices and largely accepted as accurate within Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies. Taken as accurate, they inform social thought, actions, and behaviors—thus becoming real.

Othering  Is an active rhetorical practice in which dominant people (i.e., the “Self”) malign, demonize, and stigmatize communities of people as “Others” through cultural productions (language, media, publications, popular culture); political discourse and action; and the management and containment of knowledge (including the policing of expertise and regulation of education). Othering is a form of dehumanization, against which the Self arises as most wholly human, noble, and valued.

Post-colonial  Refers to the epoch following political, juridical, or direct independence of a formerly colonized country. The term signals that a country has observed decolonization and independence, although its usage does not presume that decolonization or independence affected a total break with all structural, economic, political, social, or cultural aspects of colonization.

Postcolonialism or postcolonial studies  Is a body of thought that critically evaluates colonialism, colonial legacies, and imperialism, frequently with a focus on representations and discourses.

Settler colonialism  Is a protracted form of direct colonization, often European colonialism, that is territorially, geographically, and temporally continuous. Like other European colonialisms, settler colonialism is deeply racialized and racist. Settler colonialism, according to the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolf and other scholars, is understood as a “failed invasion,” i.e., a lasting failure of the colonial desire to eliminate native people.

European Colonialism(s)

Colonialism refers to the combination of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic domination of one group of people or groups of people by another (external) group of people. European colonialism refers to the various formulas of territorial domination effected by European powers upon non-European people (indeed, upon much of the world), from the late 1400s to the mid- to late 1900s. These European countries included Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France,
Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. At various points in modern history, European powers colonized, in some form, most of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, Oceania, the Middle East and the Arctic (excluding Antarctica). As with any large-scale, multidimensional, and socially holistic phenomenon, there is incomplete transferability of the characteristics of one form of European colonialism upon another. Heterogeneous material practices and imaginaries emerge(d) from and within European colonial systems. These colonialisms are extensive, porous, and dissimilar imagined and material (re)orderings of the world. Frictions and power struggles between European powers as well as colonial subjects for the control over territory, markets, labor, and ideology shaped the patterns of European colonialism.

Interdisciplinary scholars working within colonial studies demonstrate the disunities, ambiguities, and incoherence of European colonialisms, including how they were practiced and experienced distinctly according to historical context, local geographies, colonial policy, precolonial sociopolitics, and more. As such, these epochal terms are problematic. The “precolonial,” for example, was never absolute nor static and some scholars have argued these are inappropriate frames for understanding the rich range of human history. The Nigerian political philosopher Olufemi Tawo writes of the limitations of the dominant historical imposition of precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial upon African societies as explanatory categories. He argues that the preeminence given to these epochal structures works to essentialize African societies, reduce appreciation for people’s agency, and misrepresent the dynamism of culture.

Colonial domination, law, appropriation, and containment were distinct and dynamic over time in each respective colonial territory, but European colonialisms shared various broad tendencies. Chief among them were (a) the initial penetration and restructuring of colonial markets, territories, and cultures by concessionary companies and Christian missionary work; (b) “accumulation by dispossession,” or colonial enrichment through legalized territorial domination, natural resource extraction, forced labor, and tax administration (later to be replaced by colonial debt burdens and subsequent economic restructuring); and (c) racialized, patriarchal, and heteronormative logics and shared white supremacy that afforded ideological foundations for European colonialism.

The Colonial Encounter

The labor of early colonial projects was outsourced to European missionaries, explorers, and corporate entities. Their publications and rhetoric communicated initial exaggerations, misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and/or apprehensions about Indigenous non-European people. Concessionary companies precluded formalized colonial domination in Africa, the Americas, and Asia by conducting the geographical explorations, trade arrangements, and enslavements that created the basis for economies of extractivism. British, Belgian, French, Dutch, Danish, German, Portuguese, and Scottish private concessionary companies implemented systems of forced labor and “trade by force” via the widespread appropriation of land and resources. This establishment of “extractive states” predated formal colonial projects (circa 1400–1800) across the African continent, often within monopolistic frameworks that outlawed foreign investment through strict regulations from the various monarchies and colonial heartlands.

European concessionary companies strategically established the tenor for the cultures, power, territories, and oppressions of state-led colonialism. This included the British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish establishment of hundreds of European slave forts and slaving routes across Africa’s Atlantic coast. Before his assassination in June 1980, the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney documented the disruption and replacement of precolonial trade networks in his seminal work, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. This text provides one of the most comprehensive rebuttals of the opinion that colonial rule “modernized” or “improved” infrastructure” in the colonies. Rodney documents the organic social and economic progress made within Africa up to the 15th Century, which ceased and stagnated precisely because of European slavery of much of West and Central Africa alongside the destabilization of preexisting intra-African trade networks by European explorers. The active halting of progress within Africa simultaneously contributed to European capitalist development. This is a process recognized in political economy as “uneven geographical development.”

Alongside the often-belligerent forms of extraction and force carried out by private companies, European Christian missionary activities and energies were directed at the “civilizing mission” through the spiritual conversion of Indigenous people. These “civilizing” activities were central to European avowals to benevolent colonialism, or the arguments that colonialism was pursued to the mutual interest and benefit of colonizers and colonial subjects. Euro-American Christian missionaries were involved in the everyday activities of working at health clinics. Beyond preaching the gospel, they also opened and then directed formal primary schools that compelled colonial cultural norms in the name of religious salvation and intellectual development. While missionary activities varied greatly and are far more manifold than can be outlined here, they often had a deleterious impact on Indigenous knowledge systems through the marginalization, dismissal, destruction, or criminalization of non-Western belief systems, educational systems, and ontologies.

Colonized people had diverse modes of adaptation, acquiescence, reinterpretation, and refusal of colonial epistemes and structures. The South African anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, British anthropologist J. D. Y. Peel, Nigerian historians Toyin Falola and Waibinte E. Wariboko, and other scholars working within missionary and colonial studies document the modifications and ambiguities of Christian and evangelical epistemes through these colonial encounters. In their 1997 book, Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, the Comaroffs trace the dialectical facets of exchanges between British evangelists and Southern Tswana, arguing that the “collision” of these two groups resulted in the emergence of hybrid practices and identities for both. Focusing on everyday encounters and practices allowed for a nuanced view of colonialism, not as
a simple or one-sided venture of domination but as a dialectical encounter that changed everyone involved. Elaborating the agencies within everyday colonial encounters is important in revealing the complexities and ambiguities of domination.

Many critical thinkers argue that it is precisely in the everyday that the strategic banality of colonial violence is revealed. The Martinican anti-colonial psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon too examined some of the ways in which the colonizer was transformed by the colonial encounter. For Fanon, the colonist was socially distorted and pathologically sickened. In his 1952 work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, and again in his 1961 book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he exposes the psychiatric “decay” of French colonists in Algeria. In one study, the normalization of torture impels a colonial police officer to abuse and torture his own wife and children. Among the colonized, Fanon notes depression, suicide, self-harm, anxiety, insomnia, blurred sensory perception, ulcers, amenorrhea, premature graying of the hair and other psychophysical and embodied conditions that result from the normalization of violence in colonial Algeria. Within this critical analysis, epistemic (or knowledge) disappearances are forms of violence.

**Control Over Land, Labor, and Imagined Geographies**

European colonialisms were complex and varied economic, political, and sociocultural structures and projects of and for European enrichment. Mosotho feminist political theorist Patricia McFadden traces postcolonial *statecraft as plunder* to earlier colonial structures crafted to permit the plundering of land, labors, and bodies. Urban geographer Nasser Abourahme argues that colonial dispossession was a legalized robbery or even *lawmaking robbery*. The British geographer David Harvey draws upon Karl Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation, by which we mean the “original” extraction of value from social-biological life, to argue that forms of crude appropriation (simply, theft or taking) endure in the form of *accumulation as dispossession*. In European colonialism, capital was accumulated by the colonialist and colonized minority through the dispossession of the colonized majority. Dispossession took the forms of territorial domination, natural resource extraction, and forced labor.

**Territorial Domination and Land Dispossession**

Social scientists and historians of colonial studies emphasize the centrality of European appropriations of land and analyze the particular discursive-material projects of territory-making effected by European colonial administrators. Many African societies experienced an intensification of European territorial domination and exploitation following the European “Scramble for Africa” and the Berlin Conference in 1884, in which Western European powers met to arrange the territorial domination of the African continent in a manner cordial for Europeans. This amounted to the forced and arbitrary amalgamation of previously distinct boundaries of African regions; the boundaries drawn by colonial authorities were indiscriminate and brought together diverse societies within the authority of a united colonial nation-state. This exercise in forced cartography initiated the formal period of modern European colonization. Sometimes called the high imperial period, this period lasted from 1884 to approximately 1990. South Africa is one of a number of exceptions to this timeline, where firm and violent racial segregation persisted in legal form until the abolition of apartheid in 1994. The Western Sahara, which remains colonized by Morocco, is another exception.

European colonizers, who deemed forms of plunder and dispossession legal, enforced their colonial operations through the imposition of juridical structures. The Ugandan political scientist and anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani, in his 1996 work *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, argues that the European mission in Africa was united by two adjacent dominations: the rule of value (i.e., the market) and the rule of law (i.e., the civil society), and that both of these endeavors were “incomplete” at the moment of decolonization. Mamdani’s work further explains the ways in which European colonizers “marshaled” Indigenous culture through the promotion and demotion of certain “customary” practices. Of particular significance was the British recognition of the importance of the subcontracting of colonial violence to Native Authorities in the name of customary culture. Such tactics by colonizers are grouped under a set of practices called “divide and rule,” or the instrumentalization, exacerbation, or invention of internal tensions and conflict between colonized subjects and people for the purposes of their supraexploitation by the colonizers. Native landlords or Indigenous chiefs from India to Kenya were frequently hand-selected to oversee cultivation and land usage at the community level. Ghanaian feminist and agrarian scholar Dzodzi Tsikata and researcher and former Program Officer with Women’s Rights and Citizenship Program in Canada Pamela Golah trace the ways in which colonial land tenure systems continue to enable dispossession, particularly for women in postcolonial societies.

On the issue of colonial land appropriation, Fanon asserts that the *most essential value for a colonized people is land*. Control of land was crucial to European colonial projects. The French colonies, for example, were commonly referred to as the *pré carré* (backyard) and the *chasse gardée* (private hunting preserve) of the French state and their affiliating corporations. Land inhabited by Aboriginal people in colonial Australia was deemed *terra nullius* or empty land. Contradictory imaginaries emerged to rationalize the absent-presence of native people. Under European colonial administrative control, land tenure systems were reorganized so that all land was deemed colonial land on which colonial subjects were mere occupants. They could be, and frequently were, dispossessed of land in the name of capitalist development and state progress.

In settler colonialism, the colonizers appropriate land for the purposes of occupation as well as, like in other European colonial forms, for the purposes of capital accumulation. Colonial settlements are imposed through racialized rhetoric of permanence that demand large-scale displacements and resettlements of Indigenous people. The Canadian historian Allan Greer and others describe the ways in which colonialism transformed entire geographies, not just through the construction of fences, the clearing of forests, the maintenance of survey lines that demarcated private property, but also through new forms of and enclosure in the Americas (the
so-called “New World”). By declaring mountain and forest areas to be part of a commons (to be shared by all inhabitants), European colonialists were laying claim to the collective resources (fish, game, timber, and wild flora) found in those areas. At the same time, European colonialists used these “commons” for the grazing (frequently overgrazing) of privately owned cattle and livestock, practices which contributed to the degradation of the natural environment. Greer argues that the imposition of this European “commons” in the settler colony was a central feature of colonial dispossession, one which often preceded formal settlement. In the article, “Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America,” Greer characterizes the great “enclosure movement” as a “multi-species assault on the native commons” as European colonialism was advanced first by European-owned livestock grazing across the continent, “bringing in its wake a colonial enclosure movement that left virtually no room for Indian people.”

The varied and rapid shifts in land use under European colonialism had environmental consequences, including biodiversity loss, deforestation, and sometimes climate change. There was a marked cooling (0.15 °C) of the earth's temperature due to the steep decline in population during the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas in the 15th Century. Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis document the climactic shifts that resulted from the “Great Dying.” Ninety percent of the Indigenous population, or 56 million people, died between 1492 and 1600 as a result of disease, land loss, malnutrition, and more. This massive loss of human life triggered a reduction in land use and subsequent reforestation of 55.8 mega hectares, prompting a marked carbon dioxide uptake. Across Oceania, Asia, and Africa, the imposition of monocropping and plantation farming by European colonizers resulted in considerable biodiversity loss and new land use tensions, as communities were forced from land for colonial projects. Colonial administrators frequently engaged in the targeted destruction of native agriculture and water sources to quell anti-colonial resistance. French and Spanish colonialists poisoned wells, killed livestock, and destroyed gueltas (or drainage canals) in their efforts to suppress Sahrawian resistance, under the leadership of Cheikh Ainin, in the Sahara. Colonial trophy hunting threatened, and sometimes caused the extinction of, large fauna.

**Extraction and Forced Labor**

From the early 1500s, enslaved people were forcibly transported to the Americas and the Caribbean (the so-called "New World") via the Middle Passage, an often-lethal voyage in the hulls of ships with little food and water and no sanitation. Approximately 12.5 million Africans were taken captive and enslaved between 1444 and 1867. An estimated 40% of enslaved Africans were forced to labor on Brazilian sugarcane plantations. Transatlantic slavery arose as a racist colonial practice in response to the killing, deaths, and genocides of Indigenous people of the Americas and Caribbean, who could no longer labor or be forced to labor for European companies. Black feminist theorist and cultural geographer Katherine McKitterick works within the domains of black geographies and plantation geographies to articulate the importance of a “black sense of place” that recognizes the violent conditions of bondage but focuses on the black creativities and cartographies that emerge in place.

Following the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean and Americas, forced labor, in various forms, remained at the foundation of European colonial domination and exploitation. Unpaid and unfree colonial labor was differently regulated. Sometimes each able-bodied subject was coerced to deliver a quota of goods biweekly under guarded surveillance and threat of violence. This was so with the forced rubber tapping and ivory extraction in Belgian colonialism in the Congo Free State (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Congo-Kinshasa) between 1895 and 1908. This is a period in which the American historian Adam Hochschild, in *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, estimates that 10 million people—half of the population of the DRC—died as a result of direct and auxiliary conditions of forced labor. Failure to deliver the biweekly quota of rubber resulted in ones imprisonment or the imprisonment of family members. Beyond imprisonment, workers were subject to considerable forms of physical violence for the delivery of inadequate kilos of rubber, including beating, lashing with *la chicotte* (a heavy leather whip), burning to death, and dismemberment, particularly the cutting off of hands.

In other European colonial systems, subjects were forced to work a certain number of days per year or per agricultural season. This was the case with the *corvée*, or unpaid labor, in lieu of taxes in the French-colonized regions of Central and West Africa. The French colonial *prestation en travail*, or obliged labor, in the Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) meant subjects were forced to work in cotton plantations a certain number of days per week. In other European colonial regimes, people were made to devote the crops from a certain proportion of their tilled land, as was the case in Dutch colonialism in Java.

Colonizers often contrived extensive systems of forced, often migrant, labor when they undertook large infrastructural projects, including the clearing of forests or the construction of dams and railroads. In Angola and Mozambique, the Portuguese operated a system known as *chibalo*, or forced migrant labor. Such was also the case of the French colonial Congo-Ocean Railway, a 512-km (318-mile) railroad connecting Brazzaville with Pointe-Noire in the French colony of Equatorial Africa (what is now the Republic of the Congo, known also as Congo-Brazzaville or the Congo). The British explorer and geographer, Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904), whom the King of Belgium employed to chart the territory of the Congo, had urged the British and later the French to build a grand central African railway in 1882 as the foundation for a “preeminent” colonial administrative system. The French embarked on the project years later. During the 12-year construction period, an estimated 20,000 unfree workers, most of them forced from nearby French colonies (including Chad and the Central African Republic), died. The causes of death varied from industrial accidents to what epidemiologists now refer to as “extreme wasting,” or severe weight loss, muscle wastage, and deterioration of the brain. *Terre d’Ébène*, written in 1929 by the French journalist Albert Londres, provides a scathing critique of the project. In it, he writes that the Congo-Ocean Railway—which had been touted by colonialists as an “altruistic” and “civilizing” project—had “as many deaths as railroad ties.”
Coercive labor systems enriched colonialists and private concessionary companies while contributing to the decline in the well-being of colonial subjects in immeasurable ways. Forced labor monopolized time and energy away from the cultivation of food and, hence, intensified the rate at which other labor needed to be conducted. When people were unable to farm, shepherd, fish, hunt, or gather because they were occupied with unpaid labor, food yields were reduced. This in turn increased the likelihood of famine and malnutrition.

**Colonial Imaginaries: Racist, Patriarchal, and Heteronormative**

In the face of the reworking of ecological relations in colonial societies as well as anti-colonial resistance and critique, European imagined geographies held that colonization was or could be advantageous for colonized people and places. These racist and racializing imagined geographies were central to the rationalization of colonial exploitation. Imagined geographies, a term coined by the Palestinian philosopher Edward Said in *Orientalism*, is a central concept within postcolonial thought, including postcolonial geographies. Imagined geographies refers to the ways in which knowledges of local, regional, and/or national geographies (the people, place, and landscapes within them) are *invented* through a set of discursive practices and taken as accurate within a Eurocentric knowledge hierarchy. Taken as accurate, they inform social thought, actions, and behaviors—thus becoming real.

European expansion in the High Middle Ages—from the colonization of Ireland, to the Crusades, to the Norman expeditions—had cultivated what British historian Robert Bartlett terms a *mentality of conquest*. In this mentality of conquest, the use of force and might were accompanied by a rhetoric of conquered populations as barbaric, backward, and culturally subordinate. For example, in Ireland—Britain’s first colony in the 1500s—Irish-Gaelic people were Othered through an imagined geography of barbarism, backwardness, and incivility. *Othering* is an active rhetorical practice in which dominant people in power malign, demonize, and stigmatize communities of people through: cultural productions (language, media, publications, popular culture); political discourse and action; and the management and containment of knowledge (including the policing of expertise and regulation of education). The simultaneous fears and anxieties of rebellion, alongside the mentality of conquest, manifested as animosity for internal minorities within Europe, among them nonbelievers, pagans, wanderers, and the underclass. This mentality of conquest set the tone for the series of European geographical “discoveries” of the mid-1400s and 1500s.

Decolonial scholars appraise the mentality of conquest. The Puerto Rican decolonial sociologist and political economist Ramón Grosfoguel argues that there is an essential link between the European Enlightenment tradition of philosophical reasoning as “I think, therefore I am” and “I conquer, therefore I am.” This link, he argues, is the common *logic of elimination*: the elimination of people (genocide) and the elimination of knowledge (epistemicide). This order of power and knowledge was the foundation for the modern/colonial world. Certain modes of knowledge and ways of knowing enable certain modes of rule and power. Chicana cultural feminist and queer theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa maintains that the colonial objectification and thingification (following Césaire) of people is the “root of all violence.” Othering and objectification, she argues, rhetorically disguises the systematic violent results of colonial actions as merely inadvertent or accidental. For Martinican poet and anti-colonial philosopher Aimé Césaire, the colonizer was compelled to create false narratives and self-deceit to justify active colonization. In *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (published in 1950), Césaire calls this the colonial “collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents [the native’s] problems … to better legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them.” The “reinvention” of the identity of the colonized, effected through the destruction of history and rereading of colonial social worlds, rendered colonial subjects into *objects* of reference for the colonizers: commodities to be exploited, for Césaire, mere “things.” The thingification of colonial subjects occurred alongside the valorization of the colonial mission, as part of what the French termed *la mission civilisatrice*.

Following Nigerian historian E. A. Ayandele, white supremacy was constitutive of colonial epistemic logic, rather than being additive to it. In *Race and the Colonizing Mission: Their Implications for the Framing of Blackness and African Personhood 1800–1960*, Waibinte E. Wariboko outlines the ways in which white supremacy, anti-blackness, and anti-Indigenous racisms were integral to the European “civilizing mission.” Racialized Othering and imagined geographies long predated the term *race*, which emerged in the 1800s as a means of classifying the natural world. By the late 1800s, racial hierarchies had become pseudoscientifically viable and politically powerful. This occurred at the same time as European imperialists intensified their colonization of the African continent.

The emergence of racial hierarchies and racism alongside colonial expansion were fundamental features of European modernity and capitalism. European colonialism permeated and shifted non-Western and Indigenous social relations by altering communal relations, including gender identities. The Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónke Oyewumi illustrates that for the Yorùbás of present-day Benin, Nigeria, and Togo, gender was not a structuring principle of precolonial society, rather it became one after the imposition of patriarchal colonialism. The Nigerian poet and anthropologist Ife Amadiume similarly charts the supple gendered identities of precolonial West Africa in her 1987 text, *Male Daughters and Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African society*. The Argentinian decolonial feminist philosopher María Lugones refers to the constitutive relations between patriarchy and European colonialism as the “coloniality of gender.” The colonial imposition of binary and patriarchal man–woman categorizations resulted in institutional, legal, political, and economic subordinations of women that often did not correspond to preexisting relations.

**Anti-Colonial Resistance**

The colonial project was not impermeable, and colonial power was not complete. Nigerian historians Toyin Falola and Waibinte E. Wariboko document the wide range of first or opening “encounters” between African people and European explorers and invaders,

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which ranged from hesitation to hostility. Wariboko’s historiography of the Eastern Niger Delta in the late 19th Century highlights the multiple motivations and preexisting social institutions that prompted the Elem Kalabari people to “collaborate” with British corporate and colonial agents at precisely the same time their neighbors, the Bonny, Opobo, and Nembe-Brass, resisted and opposed them. In *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, Falola examines the ways in which violence, in its varied forms (damage, control, and humiliation) are the basic elements of violence identified by Falola), mediated colonial encounters and sustained colonial rule. At the same time, Falola contends that colonial administrators acknowledged the limitations of total force as a means of social control, not as “an act of magnanimity but [as] a basic exercise of common sense.” Drawing on the work of Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, Falola recognizes a seeming paradox in colonial domination through violence: the economic incentive to avoid totalizing violence (and thereby ensure sufficient volumes of labor) alongside the sociopolitical drive to control and suppress Indigenous freedoms, rights, epistemes, and spiritualities. For Fanon, the logics of colonial domination and violence, alongside the capitalist incentive to foster consumers in the colonies and the post-WWII devastation of Western Europe, set the path for inevitable decolonization.

Anti-colonial movements and the rectionary colonial violence and repression they triggered have often been erased, dismissed, or misremembered by what Fanon calls colonialism’s *bete-deurs*. Nonetheless, resistance was pervasive. Anti-colonial resistance emerged alongside exploration and conquest, and it continued throughout the European high imperial period. Just as colonial power was not monolithic, resistance to colonialism took many forms. Everyday resistances included sabotage, theft, withdrawal or marooning, and minor refusals to cooperate. Colonialists frequently responded to nonviolent resistance with violence, triggering and impelling anti-colonial wars, such as those fought by the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), also known as the *Maquis* of Cameroon and the Mau Mau in Kenya.

In Cameroon, periodic and near-constant resistance to French colonialists escalated to guerrilla warfare in the late 1940s. Members of a nonviolent, anti-colonial movement led by a party of mostly school teachers and trade unionists, the UPC, asserted their desire for full independence from France. French colonizers responded with bloody repression. During what is referred to as *la periode du trouble* (period of trouble) from 1948 to 1961, French troops and their auxiliary soldiers from neighboring countries occupied, razed, and raided the Western (dominantly Bamiléké) regions of Cameroon. What followed was a guerrilla war and the massacre of thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands of people. The French and their proxy army hunted, tortured, and killed presumed anti-colonial *Maquisards* and their sympathizers. Among those assassinated was the UPC General Secretary Ruben Um Nyobé, who was the first African leader to appeal for independence at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York City in 1952. Cameroonian historian Walter Gam Ngwi traces Um Nyobé’s assassination along with his mother-in-law on September 13, 1958, by the French colonial Army. After his death, his body was dragged through the streets of Bounyeybel and displayed publicly, as was the style of French colonialists to display the bodies of their victims. Felix Moumie, Um Nyobé’s second-in-command, was poisoned in Geneva on November 3, 1960, allegedly by an agent of the French secret service (the SDECE). Finally, Ernest Ouandie was publicly executed by firing squad in Bafoussam by French-backed postcolonial forces on February 15, 1971. The colonial and postcolonial suppression of the UPC is cataloged by Cameroonian historian Mongo Beti in *Main Base sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d’une Décolonisation* as well as by Cameroonian journalists and scholars Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue, and Jacob Tatsitsa in *La Guerre du Cameroun: L’Invention de la Françafrique*.

In Kenya, the Mau Mau embarked upon what was the most prolonged uprising in British colonial Africa. In response to a number of social and ecological pressures in the 1940s and 1950s, including colonial confiscations of land and restrictive policies implemented to force Kenyans into wage labor, people collectivized under the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA, also known as the Mau Mau) to express their grievances. Colonial land and labor policies created an underclass of squatters, numbered at 100,000 by the early 1920s. Like in Cameroon, the Mau Mau struggle built upon and followed previous movements against British occupation and rule. The British colonialists interpreted Kenyan anti-colonial violence as a form of mental and social illness and responded with force. Colonialists underwent a system of mass detentions, holding thousands of Kenyans in concentration and work camps. Like in Cameroon, death tolls were not taken by colonial administrators, and the figures, especially of citizen killings, remain disputed. In *Histories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*, British historian David Anderson estimates that more than 20,000 Mau Mau militants were killed by the British colonizers.

Anti-colonial struggle and conflict like that in Algeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Viet Nam, and elsewhere threatened the stability of Western European colonialism in the post-WWII and early Cold War period. In this geopolitical context, colonialists recognized their interests in pursuing what Fanon describes as decolonizing in a “friendly fashion.” By which he meant, granting independence to many of the colonies while working to hand-select leaders who might have more sympathy for departing colonizers. By channeling independence and anti-colonial movements in receptive and pro-colonialist directions, colonialists were able to maintain profitable relations, economic concessions, and political influence in their postcolonies.

**Postcolonial and Marxist Analyses of European Colonialisms**

The double and simultaneous features of European colonialism—as simultaneously imaginary/discursive and material projects—fostered rich debates within the interdisciplinary domains of colonial studies. Broadly, these perspectives have centered on the tensions between postcolonial thinkers, drawing upon the traditions of deconstruction and postmodernism, and political economists and others influenced by Marxist thought.
Postcolonial studies emerged within anti-colonial thought alongside decolonization from the 1950s in response to Eurocentric interpretations of colonialism and imperialism. For postcolonial thinkers, the emphasis has been on critiquing the discursive cultures of colonialism and recovering particular, contextualized subaltern or colonized perspectives, voices, and epistemes. Postcolonial work has importantly demonstrated the distinctions between colonial experiences by race, gender, class, sexuality, and more. Postcolonial scholars, inspired by Edward Said, the French social theorist Michel Foucault, and others, understand power and power relations as perpetually negotiated through and in the discursive practices of knowledge making. This includes how people are classified, categorized, and disciplined. Postcolonial thinkers have critiqued Marxist scholars for the comparative lack of attention to race, racism, and the role of slavery and colonization in the very emergence of capitalism. For Nkrumah and other postcolonial scholars as persistently Eurocentric in the understanding of causality and change, although Marxism has a long and rich tradition of internal dispute regarding stagism.

Of central importance for Marxist scholars are the processes and functions of class formation at the global scale for understanding the material expansion of capitalism and its varied and uneven manifestations over time, space, and scale. Power relations are established through the control of private property and the transformation of humans into exploitable beings via labor-power. Postcolonial theory is critiqued by some Marxists for the relative lack of attention to material violence, historical patterns, and avoidance of the political issues of causalidad and global capitalism. In *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Indian sociologist Vivek Chibber argues that postcolonial theory inadvertently reestablishes East–West and North–South divides by offering a vision of the world in which each is so dissimilar as to be incompatible for projects of collaboration or mutual comprehension.

Critical scholarship in the 1990s pushed such conversations in new directions, bridging understandings and emphasizing the simultaneity of ideological and material exploitation, including within cultural materialism. South African sociologist Zine Magubane’s 2004 work, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, echoing work of Cornel West draws from Marxist studies and postcolonial studies to offer productive insights of colonialism as base-superstructure and ideological oppression. Feminist political ecologies of colonial relations similarly attend to patterns of material exploitation alongside critical interrogations of rhetoric and discourse in power struggles and domination.

**Colonialism in the Present**

Social scientists, including human geographers, have attended to the nuances of “colonial durability” and coloniality in the present. That is to say, the ways in which, following postcolonial thinkers, colonialism did not “end” with decolonization in the 1940s, 1960s, or thereafter, but has persisted in amended form. There is substantial consensus in the critical humanities and social sciences that colonialism, in some form(s), endures and that the influences of colonialism continue to structure and inform culture, relations, territoriality, geography, politics, and economics.

Colonialism in the present signals the 61 countries in the world that are recognized by the United Nations as colonies or territories. Aruba, Cayman Islands, Guam, Guadeloupe, New Caledonia, St. Helena, and more are either non-fully-self-governing states, self-governing dependencies, or remain governed by colonial powers. In an international nation-state system directed by the interests of hegemonic states, postcolonial territories (particularly archipelagos and small island states) sometimes negotiate partial sovereignty as a means to seek economic redress or support, rather than full political independence from their former colonizers. Colonialism in the present can also refer to the formal occupation of one country by another. As geographer Derek Gregory argues in *The Colonial Present*, modern colonialism abounds in the United States’ and Britain’s present imperial strategies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. Colonialism in the present also refers to those less immediately visible residues, practices, logics, and arrangements of colonialism. To these ends, colonialism remains a term useful for understanding the maintenance of racial hierarchies, masculinist and patriarchal relations, geographical divisions, and economic inequalities.

As such, colonialism is not a historical artifact but a persistent force in the contemporary world. Critical social theorists Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein argue that settler colonialism in particular might be better understood as a continuous process of dispossession rather than an episode or historical epoch. In this, they draw inspiration from the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolf’s arguments about settler colonialism as a *protracted structure of failed invasion*. In such a framing, settler colonialism is an ongoing elaboration of racialized elimination that is not yet concluded. This argument is significant because it reframes internal debates and frictions between scholars of critical colonial studies who have sometimes been concerned with the examination of typologies of colonialism in isolation from other forms.

**Neocolonialism**

The economic and political consistencies between the colonial and postcolonial periods have been highlighted in the form of the state and the organization of state power. The “miscarriages” of decolonization to deliver transformed economic relations, political sovereignty, and social well-being were recognized by many critical scholars and politicians immediately following formal decolonization.

Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, published *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* in 1965, just 8 years after Ghana became an independent country in 1957. In it, he coined the term “neocolonialism.” For Nkrumah and other postcolonial
African presidents (including DRC’s first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, and Gabon’s first president, Léon M’ba), neocolonialism signals the continued domination of African societies by European finance, multinational corporations, extractive interests, and legal systems. Nkrumah’s critique focused on the lack of political independence and sovereignty for postcolonial nation-states. Nigerian political economist Claude Ake explains that African postcolonies maintained forms of colonial governance that were largely capricious, habitually violent, and permanently hostile. In most postcolonial societies, the former colonizers maintained some level of market preference, political influence, military presence, and/or cultural and educational hegemony. People and politicians who refused neocolonial political structures and economic relations with Europe were isolated, threatened, ideologically sabotaged, or assassinated during the postcolonial and Cold War period.

Decolonization, then, was often (but not always) critiqued as a superficial transfer of power that fostered internal colonialism while the racialized global economy remained largely unchanged. Among those unchanged features, as Mamdani and others have argued, were the propensity to preserve the sovereignty of (colonial) law rather than the sovereignty of people and the maintenance of political impunity. Formal decolonization rehabilitated the outward form of dispossession and exploitation while many of its core dimensions endured. In particular, the political economy of extraction remained a primary logic of accumulation in the post-colonial and neoliberal period. Some have argued that the scale and ecological destructions of extraction or “neoextraction” have intensified in the postcolonial and neoliberal period. Amplifications of dispossession and extraction occurred in the aftermath of the Cold War, a time of considerable decline of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal designs. For the postcolonies, the implementation of neoliberal policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s triggered new forms of poverty, declines in real wages, and intensified competition for land.

“Colonial Duress,” Recursions, and Boomerangs

Alongside critiques of the superficiality of decolonization by those working within traditions of political economy, postcolonial scholars carried out direct critiques and deconstructions of persistent colonial power. Albert Memmi, in Decolonization and the Decolonized, writes of the protraction of oppression at a social and individual level. Working in the domains of postcolonial anthropology, Laura Ann Stoler describes “colonial duress” as the recursive inequities and arrangements of colonial logics, which reemerge in reworked form. Among these looping or circular colonial recursions are sets of colonial apprehensions about the Other, such as immigration and the fear of a declining white populace. Repetitions of technologies such as walling, policing, bordering, and the camp are symptoms of “colonial duress.” Colonial ideological recursions include white nationalism and secularism. For Stoler, the cyclical and iterative materialization of these apprehensions, technologies, and ideologies reveal an ongoing colonial presence rather than mere legacy (or holdover).

Cameroonian critical theorist Achille Mbembe coined the term “necropolitics” to describe the particular form of postcolonial governance that can be traced to colonial logics. This is a governance that dominates and controls through the provision of death and death-making, as opposed to Foucault’s biopolitics, in which governance is practiced through the discursive, calculative, and administrative aspects of the domains over life. For Mbembe and others, the postcolony continues to be a place of corporate capture, predation, and extraction.

Postcolonial geographers have also looked at the so-called “boomerang” (or ricochet) effects of colonial practices, particularly violence, across space and time. Césaire traces the choc en retour or boomerang (i.e., the reverse shock) of European colonialism. The violent technologies of surveillance, territorial control, and sociocultural domination, he argues, are first tested and refined in the colonies before “returning home” to the metropole of the empire (this argument is rearticulated by Abourahme). The Jamaican-British cultural materialist Stuart Hall, similarly, argues that the perception that colonialism and empire happened “over there” (or that it is spatially separate from the core or Western European mainland) is incorrect. Rather, the postcolonial method requires a flexible but precise examination of the cultural translations or transculturations of colonialism across and between the colony and the metropole. Intellectual projects, such as the work of Indian postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, to “provincialize” Europe discredit illusions that Euro-American “modernity” was organic, singular, or universal. Rather, European modernity and transitions to capitalism are particularized histories bounded by place and time.

The Colonial Matrix of Power

During the 1990s, Latin American scholars cultivated another way of understanding and challenging the phenomenon of colonialism in the post-colonial moment. This new paradigm of critical thought was the decolonial turn. For decolonial thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano, Catherine Walsh, and Walter Mignolo, coloniality is understood as the “other side” of modernity, or its constitutive formula. Coloniality marks the combined social, political, economic, epistemic, and territorial dominations of Western Europe since the so-called colonial encounter, or the initial moments of contact between European explorers and conquerors and the Indigenous people of the world. For decolonial scholars working within Latin American history, this definitive moment was 1492, when Christopher Columbus landed on the island of what is now Barbados. This landing ushered the establishment of a global “colonial matrix of power” in which the modern world is the colonial world. For decolonial scholars, there is no “modernity”—no technological advancements, no industrial capitalism, no conspicuous consumption—without coloniality.
For the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, the “coloniality of power” refers to the intersection of varying forms of colonial hegemony—the production of knowledge, economic inequality, gender relations, racializations—as coproducers of a matrix of colonial power, or coloniality. In this, Euro-America has been the geostrategic, epistemic, and sociopolitical base of colonial capitalism for 550 years. Argentine theorist Walter Mignolo expresses this relationship as a compound expression: modernity/coloniality. Coloniality and modernity are constitutive of one another. “Modern” Euro-America—the wealth, material artifacts, consumptive habits, biosocial appetites, imagined geographies, racial anxieties, techniques of control, and more—exists because the colony existed, the modern postcolony exists, and a colonial matrix of power persists. This world ordering is referred to as “global coloniality” or the “colonial matrix of power.” This is what the argentine and Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel calls the capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system.

The colonial matrix of power operates as a hegemonic ordering logic that configures economies, relations, and epistemes but in ways that often go unsaid, unacknowledged, and unrecognized. For this reason, decolonial scholars have been interested in understanding the epistemological functions of global coloniality, as it is through the structuring of epistemes and the declaration of modernity-as-universally-valid that coloniality is concealed. The Mexican sociologist Rolando Vázquez calls this effacement of coloniality by modernity “the denial of the denial.” Coloniality operates rhetorically through a double negative that disposesses and excludes the “Other” and then invalidates, negates, and disavows that very dispossession and exclusion.

**Decolonization in the Present**

Struggles against persistent forms of colonization, neocolonization, imperialism, and coloniality have continued and fluctuated in recent years. A variety of arrayed and interconnected movements to decolonize coloniality/modernity and settler colonialism have gained strength against cognitive and epistemic colonization. Among these movements is the movement to decolonize the university. Scholars and academics build from a critical toolkit of decolonization to unsettle the ongoing material-and-epistemic work of coloniality of being.

**Decolonizing the University**

Collective and individual projects aimed at challenging the epistemic authority and privilege of Euro-normative frames and “mastery” within the university have reemerged with gusto at the turn of the 21st Century. These reinvigorations have been prompted, in part, by the international visibility of anti-racist movements. Among them are #BlackLivesMatter—a movement that is itself a reflection of critical anti-racist scholarship on the production of bodies and communities as “disposable”—and transnational and national anti-colonial and anti-racist student movements. For example, the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements were similarly connected to, and predated by, intellectual work on the university as: colonial instrument; technique of racialized domination; and exclusionary space for the production of the “expert” knowledge. Mbembe calls this moment of epistemic decolonization the end of the age of innocence.

Such a context is critical for understanding the present state of decolonial work in human geography and, by extension, conversations on coloniality and the colonial present. A cornerstone of this epistemic orientation is the recognition that knowledge is not innocent. Knowledge is political. There is no unproblematic or natural or inherent scholarship. Entries in encyclopedias, for example, are generated somewhere, by some body. Struggles pushed forward by Indigenous people, anti-racist activists, and decolonial theorists have combined to assert a pressure to decolonize knowledge, pedagogy, and educational institutions. A significant imperative of late 20th- and early 21st-Century decolonization was the struggle against what Kenyan scholar and author Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls “colonization of the mind” or mental colonization. In Decolonising the Mind, wa Thiong’o is particularly critical of the ongoing dominance of colonial languages in postcolonial societies and their role in influencing thought, community relations, and perceptions of self. Colonial cultural dominance affects a physical as well as epistemic trauma. It is what he calls an “open wound.” This is partially because colonial imagined geographies become real in the social world, including through the epistemic framing and informing of action. Othering has deleterious psychological impacts on the people. Before being beaten to death by apartheid police in September 1977, South African intellectual and activist, Steve Biko, similarly asserted that “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

Geographers critique the discipline’s history of complicity within colonial projects, including how early geographers worked in the service of colonial agendas as well as how geography continues to be imprecated within colonial projects. The Eurocentric lenses of the discipline reinforced binary schisms. These binary opposites defined the relationships between the so-called natural and social worlds. British-Jamaican political geographer Patricia O. Daley examines the necessity of actively critiquing and challenging the ways in which the discipline is oriented toward pursuits of “discovery” in the Global South that reproduce colonial inequalities.

Calls to recognize coloniality within the university and work toward its decolonization have given rise to critiques and changes within epistemologies, conferencing, disciplinarity, curriculum, expression, iconography/campus landscapes, institutional culture, methodology, pedagogy, publications, praxis, research, and more. For Grosfoguel, the future of the uni-versity—that is, the 18th-Century university modeled on Euro-American racist/sexist epistemes, which are deemed universal and hegemonic—is as a pluriversity. In a pluri-versity, knowledge creation serves the needs of holistic well-being beyond coloniality. The priorities for knowledge creation, as outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in Decolonizing Methodologies, include self-determination, healing, decolonization, transformation, and mobilization. Working within the current uni-versity, scholar-decolonizers engage in “epistemic disobedience”
to challenge, eradicate, and move beyond colonial hierarchies and epistemes. Mignolo explains that epistemic disobedience are those manners and practices of thinking/knowing that are not contained within, informed by, or amenable to modernity/coloniality. Decolonization remains a useful tool for action and critique. Yet, it is not a project without critique, including external dismissals and more generative internal criticism.

**Critiques and Co-optation(s)**

Decolonization, Fanon writes, is a project of chaos. Internally, the logistical and empirical practices and articulations of decolonization remain contested and uncertain within the social sciences, including within geography. Scholars have been open and adamant about the potential impasses of decolonization. These logistical, disciplinary, and cultural ambiguities present challenges to the transformation of scholarly canons, the realization of substantive and structural decolonization within the university as opposed to mere shifts in content, as well as the opening up of pluriversals to wider audiences. While there are important and nuanced scholarships that critique various expressions of coloniality—including internal critique of the colonial roots of geography, the relations between geography and militarism, and the reproduction of heteronormative, racialized, and patriarchal norms within certain geographic scholarship—decolonization remains unfinished.

Tensions emerge within unfinished projects. Such tensions have led some scholars to a dismissal of moves to decolonize the university as superficial or fashionable. The latter sees decolonization of the mind as little more than the newest form of academic self-promotion. This includes the possible instrumentalization of anti-racist and anti-colonial knowledge projects by hegemonic actors as well as the limitations of framing our project as a “decolonizing” one, rather than, for example, as projects to Indigenize, feminize, or queer the university.

Hegemonic academic actors have sometimes, as with earlier decolonizing and emancipatory struggles, co-opted the call to “decolonize the university.” On the heels of large and often corporate academic associations convening conferences under the auspices of “decolonizing” and strident critique of such projects (such as James Esson, Patricia Noxolo, Richard Baxter, Patricia Daley, and Margaret Byron’s interrogation of the 2017 RGS-IBG chair’s theme of “decolonizing knowledges”), appropriations have been laid out through normative and established hierarchies. Such projects frequently fail challenge deeper inequalities in the arrangements of power and privilege sustained through the uneven organization of “academic knowledge” globally. Considerable critique has emerged in recent years against efforts to mainstream decolonization, including the ways in which mainstreaming risks overwhelming or subverting calls for reparations and racial justice. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue against the deployment of decolonizing rhetoric in recent years in their seminal article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor.” While many “decolonizing” projects are important within broader conceptions of social justice, they may forestall conversations about land repatriation within settler colonialism society. Calls to “decolonize” various aspects of life might better resemble what Tuck and Yang call “settler moves to innocence,” by which they mean the colonial tendency to appropriate the language and efforts of “decolonizing” in self-celebratory manners that whitewash and efface settler colonialism in the present. A more radical decolonizing politics center material life and colonial extractions, including the appropriations of land and destructions of environments and livelihoods.

Decolonizing projects come under external backlash and dismissal, as well. Recent public dismissals of Indigenous scholarship as unscientific or untrue have coincided with the “prank” publishing of “feminist” and “queer” articles that would demean entire schools of critical thought under the auspices of “academic grievance studies” or PC-culture. The calls for objectivity, balance, or equality for “all views” can be mechanisms for dismissing the perspectives of marginalized and racialized people in the reactionary and declarative scholarship of empire.

**Colonial Apologists and Defenders in the Present**

A small number of scholars argue some combination of the following: (a) colonialism improved the infrastructure, economic, legal and/or political systems in colonized societies and that, therefore, the benefits of colonialism outweighed the negative consequences; (b) the violence of colonialism is “overstated” in colonial studies or that colonial violence is somehow defensible because of precolonial Indigenous violence; and (c) some postcolonial societies would or should welcome recolonization today. Scholars who maintain one or more of these perspectives are known as “colonial apologists.” Although relatively small in number, colonial apologists frequently hold positions of privilege and power in the world’s leading institutions.

The varied ideas propagated by colonial apologists are grounded in speculative forms of blindness that themselves emerge from the imagined geographies of colonial racisms and the coloniality of being. It is for this reason that Vázquez refers to the dismissals of coloniality, or racist-colonial capitalism, as *the denial of the denial*. The incapability to perceive or acknowledge structures of racism and violence is sometimes analyzed as a form of agnotology, or an active production of ignorance. The British urban geographer Tom Slater underscores the significance of agnotology as a conceptual tool that allows political geographers to discern the strategic fostering of ignorance through misinformation. Overstating the quantity or strength of colonial apologist arguments, in the guise of allowing all perspectives to be heard, can risk “bewildering” (as Fanon writes) the some 80 years of critical scholarship that documents the varied traumas, destructions, and violence of European colonialism.

At the center of colonial apology are contestations of the relationship between colonialism and violence. Colonial apologists sometimes point to the financial investments in imperial defense and colonial armies as an indicator that colonialism was “subsidized” by taxpayers in the homeland. In such a view, colonialism was a benevolent project of modernization. Rudyard Kipling’s
Transcending Coloniality and Epistemic Justice

Scholars pursue creative and novel ways to challenge, resist, or blend epistemes in the long struggle to decolonize. Motivated to push the conversation beyond critique, scholars like the Zimbabwean decolonial philosopher Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue that decolonial options offer pluriversal and alternative epistemes for understanding and thinking about our social and natural worlds. Scholars reconsider and reassert the importance of recognizing and/or recovering ways of knowing the world that have escaped, endured, and/or resisted colonization by Eurocentric ontologies and epistemes. Present-day decolonial studies seek to move beyond critique to the conduct of active, politically, and ethically oriented scholarship.

Decoloniality is a praxis that encourages an acknowledgment of identity as a mode of identities-in-politics, not identity-politics, and as a way to avoid oversimplification or nostalgia. Indigenous approaches emphasize an ability to work collectively without claims to expertise or mastery. Decolonial notions of the pluriverse posit possibilities of coexistence and coentanglement of multiple worlds and ways of being in the world. Calls for convivial and decolonial knowledge otherwise demand that intellectuals, and people more broadly, move away from binary imaginaries. These efforts seek to imagine “other ways” of expression, knowledge, shared and collective thinking, and creative processes. Beginning from the perspective of decolonial options means that those taken-for-granted scholarly lexicons in the social sciences—gender, nation-state, territory, landscape, the normative individual, culture, and more—are unsettled as analytical frames. Decolonial options are more than supplementary components to be merely added upon preexisting terms and frames: To take this project seriously, a new vocabulary, a decolonial language, will be indispensable.

See Also: Black Geographies; Borderlands; Brain Drain; Capital & Space; Carceral Geography; Core–Periphery Models; Development; Economic Geography; Empire; Encyclopaedia of Human Geography; Epistemology; Exploration; External Debt; Feminist Economic Geography; First World; Genocide; Ghetto; Global North/South; History of Geography; Ideology; Imperialistic Geographies; Land Rights; Marxist Geography; Masculinism; Migration, Forced; Modernization Theory; Natural Resources; Neoliberalism; Philosophy: Developmentalism; Post Development; Poverty; Privilege; Segregation; Self–Other; Soft Power; Structural Adjustment; Superpower; Uneven Development; Violence and Peace; Violence.

Further Reading


Relevant Websites

Critical Social Theory: https://globalsocialtheory.org.