

CHAPTER 16

Colonialism

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The term *colonialism* refers to a large-scale political and economic system that allows one geopolitical entity (such as a nation-state or city-state) to establish controls beyond its traditional geographic borders in the service of increased profit or power. Because colonialism is a large-scale process that has shaped human settlement across the planet, it has an intimate relationship to matter. In fact, the very idea of “matter”—physical objects making up the universe and its constitutive systems and elements—has developed in tandem with the spread of colonial forms of knowledge and settlement over the past five centuries. Modern colonialism involves the development of sciences that describe the material form of the universe as well as the biology of human, animal, and plant life. These sciences, along with capitalist industries that deploy them, have historically helped spread colonial worldviews that separate inanimate matter, the living biological body, human culture, and the spiritual domain into distinct spheres. Modern colonial states, in turn, aim to reshape matter—the natural landscapes, resources, and human and animal bodies of the colonized territory—in order to sustain the profitability of the colonial system. One of the main justifications for modern colonial projects thus became a claim to a superior materialism, a more efficient and profitable use of nature and labor than that of indigenous societies. Such colonial myths of development serve to mask the widespread violence, hunger, social inequality, and environmental degradation generated by colonial warfare and settlement.

Colonialism is an important term for the feminist study of matter, because it has generated specific understandings of the matter of human bodies as differentiated by a gender binary: a two-body system in which male and female reproduce the species and its social organization. Colonialism’s binary gender system perpetuates stereotypes of women’s bodily inferiority and the exploitation of gendered and sexual labor. The violence of colonial settlement and expansion has often involved large-scale sexual violence; the exploitation of women’s domestic work and intimate labors; the development of laws affecting dress, sexual conduct, and marriage; and popular images of nature as feminine and exploitable. In the process, the gendering of matter has also affected the formulation of stereotypes and inequalities related to racial and national difference as powerful empires have expanded forms of control across the planet.

This chapter explores how colonialism, especially the modern systems of European colonialism and US empire, have proliferated specific conceptions of body and matter and have used such ideas to control and reshape the actual material formations of numerous human societies. It further examines how postcolonial and feminist theories have responded

by rethinking colonial worldviews dividing body from mind and humanity from nature. Overall, the chapter makes clear that colonialism and the capitalist organizations of matter it has generated over the past five centuries constitute the single most important force shaping human societies and the planetary ecologies in which they are embedded. Colonialism is thus central to understanding how contemporary concepts and formations of matter have been shaped by social forces.

COLONIALISM: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

One of the best-known examples of colonialism is the establishment of a vast colonial empire by Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This empire oversaw formal, organized colonial settlements stretching across the British Isles, eastern North America, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, India, Hong Kong, and Australia. It also exercised informal military and economic power in other areas, including Central America, China, and the Pacific Islands. In this system, British state and corporate interests (often located in the empire's financial and political capital of London) developed a worldwide system for controlling the laws, labor, ecology, and social organization of distant lands and for promoting the political and economic interests of the English upper and middle classes. If colonialism is a large-scale system for organizing political and economic power, it is a force grounded in the production of specific colonial settlements and the networks connecting them. The British, for example, established small-scale settlements like the city-state of Hong Kong as well as large-scale colonial governments like the British Raj, which stretched across vast tracts of the Indian subcontinent.

The term *colony* usually refers to an organized settlement that individuals from one location establish outside the borders of their place of origin. Historically, the term first referred to military and agricultural outposts established by Roman citizens in newly conquered lands of the western Roman Empire. However, as the European imperial states (first Spain and Portugal; then the Netherlands, Britain, and France; and later, Germany, Belgium, and Italy) built navies and overseas corporations to expand their influence and trade across continents from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, the idea of colonialism came to refer to all manner of economic and political activity characterizing the overseas networks that European settlers, corporations, and states controlled outside of Europe. In its modern usage, colonialism thus refers to the system by which a state or corporate entity creates a network of settlements and governing outposts in geographically distant lands and establishes forms of political, economic, ecological, and military integration between them.

Public accounts of world history often whitewash the violent and coercive aspects of colonialism. Colonialism is often portrayed as a politically neutral process of population expansion, as the inevitable march of progress, or as the tragic response of settlers to discrimination in their places of origin. As an example of this phenomenon, literary scholar Ania Loomba quotes the definition of colonialism from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “a settlement in a new country . . . a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up.” Loomba notes that this definition

avoids any reference to people other than the colonisers, people who already might have been living in those places where colonies were established. . . . The process of “forming a community” in a new land necessarily meant un-forming or re-forming

the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement, and rebellions. (2004, 7–8)

History textbooks often continue to suggest the heroism and modernity of colonial explorers and downplay the violence of settlement and labor exploitation.

Scholars sometimes distinguish between settler colonialism (a system involving the replacement of indigenous populations with settler populations through genocide, forced removal, intermarriage, or a combination of those methods) and mercantile or metropolitan colonialism (a system that leaves the native population in place but attempts to exploit the land and labor to the benefit of the colonizer). Given this distinction, the formation of settler colonies like the United States and Israel (which involved the extermination and forced removal of significant portions of the American Indian and Palestinian populations, respectively) exhibit significant differences from that of colonial India (where the British introduced a new class of colonial officials and traders who attempted to profit from reorganizing and managing Indian land, ecology, and labor). However, because colonial projects often involve a mix of settler violence, displacement of indigenous peoples, reorganization of ecological space, and imposition of new forms of trade and labor, the categorical distinction between these two types of colonialism does not always hold. It is necessary to carefully examine the particular forms of colonial domination that manifest under different empires and historical contexts.

Although world history is full of the stories of empires that expanded to claim or dominate vast lands and peoples—from the Aztecs to the Romans, the Russians to the US Americans today—the systems of modern colonialism marked a turning point in history. These empires evolved beyond forms of direct military conquest, tax authority, and agricultural expansion that were common to earlier forms of conquest. Modern colonialism is as much about forcing the circulation, labor, and movement of peoples and goods as it is about the direct domination of people and land in specific territories. The development of world colonial systems violently marshaled natural resources, human labor, and goods to develop the modern global systems of the nation-state and capitalism. While some scholars argue that capitalism was the original process that produced modern European colonialism, it could equally be argued that the reverse formulation is true: beginning with the transatlantic voyages and land claims of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) in the 1490s, colonialism was the system that allowed early capitalists to expand the material bases (natural resources and unpaid or low-paid labor forces) needed to accumulate profit from the transformation of “nature” into commodities and “humans” into workers on a planetary scale. Colonialism was the enabling condition for the creation of a world capitalist system of nation-states that expanded from its origins in west-central Europe.

European colonial expansion was an inherently violent affair. By laying the groundwork for profitable transoceanic trades in minerals, agricultural commodities, manufactured goods, and enslaved human laborers, colonialism allowed the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, British, French, and Belgian monarchies to enrich themselves and to engage in ever-more intense economic and military competition with one another. This development of colonial trade networks centered on the development of the Atlantic slave trade, in which approximately 12.5 million people from Africa were turned into tradable commodities and forced to work in a variety of industries in the Americas and Europe, most notably in sugar and cotton production (The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database 2013). This number does not include the progeny of transported slaves, whose ability to reproduce new generations of

enslaved people was understood as part of their value for the planter class, who claimed ownership. Although the experience of slavery differed widely depending on the particular work arrangement and legal context, enslaved peoples often experienced loss of control over sexuality and family structures to the white masters, who viewed them as property. Many of the early writings by enslaved men and women focused on the cruelties of slavery, ranging from the commonplace rape of female slaves to the separation of children from parents to the brutal use of physical punishment, murder, and torture to suppress slave rebellion.

As colonial mercantile economies developed, they progressively helped settlers displace indigenous ways of living, including the subsistence practices of American Indian nations that utilized seasonal forms of agriculture or engaged in nomadic hunting. European colonialism began in earnest with Columbus's four voyages on behalf of Spain to the Caribbean (1492 to 1503) and expanded as settler armies and corporations moved inland to conquer lands across the Americas and, later, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. At the height of European competition for colonial land claims in the 1890s, over 84 percent of the earth's landmass had at one time or another been claimed as a possession of a European imperial state (according to David Fieldhouse, cited in Loomba 2004, 3).

Even after the US, French, and Haitian revolutions, from 1776 to 1804, signaled the demise of European monarchies and the decline of the aristocracy, the rise of liberalism and republicanism and the creation of many new independent nation-states did not stop the intense exploitation of peoples and ecosystems that attended colonial expansion. After the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, British and Dutch authorities began a new system of indentured labor that moved hundreds of thousands of Chinese, Indian, and Javanese workers from Asia to the former slave plantations of Caribbean colonies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad. This project explicitly aimed to promote competition between the new immigrants and formerly enslaved groups in order to prevent the black majority populations of the Caribbean from taking control from white planters as they had in Haiti (Lowe 2006, 193–194). Women were paid on lower scales in the indenture system despite the fact that the labor recruiters were given incentives to try to recruit them. When reports emerged suggesting the widespread sexual abuse and murder of women in the system, British officials established strict controls over marriage and sexuality that attempted to enforce Victorian Christian gender norms on Indian women who immigrated (Niranjana 2006, 71–72).

At the same time that colonial officials used indentured labor to replace formal slavery, colonial expansion continued unabated in the settler colonies that declared independence from Britain, as the United States, Canada, and Australia fought a series of wars against indigenous peoples in order to establish white rule across their respective continents. This involved ethnic cleansing, displacement, and the concentration of indigenous peoples on reservations. During and after these wars, many native children were removed from their parents and forcibly sent to residential schools in order to assimilate them into white settler society. Suddenly transported to faraway locations, children were placed in gender-segregated schools; compelled to do manual labor; subjected to abuse, malnutrition, and poor sanitary conditions; occasionally forced into arranged marriage; and stripped of indigenous customs and language. Noting that education leaders explicitly saw the schools as a place to remove indigenous cultural traits from children, indigenous activists have since described the system as a form of genocide. Disease and mortality rates were strikingly high in the Canadian system, with a 1907 report claiming that 47 to 75 percent of students recently returned from two residential schools had died (Indigenous Foundations 2009). Geraldine Bob, a student at the Kamloops residential school on Secwepemc land in British Columbia,

described how young girls were forced to do domestic labor in order to keep the school running: “We were just little kids . . . if you can imagine little kids in this school, cleaning the entire school and being forced to do things that are beyond them really. You know, like cleaning the bathrooms, cleaning the tubs, shining the floors.” Another student at a residential school in Manitoba claimed that young girls “were like slaves” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 80).

The rise of a democratic public culture among the upper and middle classes in the United States, Britain, and France beginning in the late eighteenth century was the result of profits generated by the colonization of land in the Americas; the establishment of corporate controls in mercantile colonies in Asia; and the use of enslaved, indentured, or debt-controlled agricultural labor to produce commodities such as sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco, and cotton. Colonial powers developed increasingly complex methods of control that moved from simple territorial occupation and forced labor to complex governmental agendas of “free trade,” colonial education, land allotment, public health, and colonial police and military force. Thus, even as colonial systems claimed to replace authoritarianism with liberal democracy, the expansion of colonial settlement and trade has continued to reproduce inequality and violence based on race, nation, class, and gender. By allowing for the economic expansion of European nation-states and their emerging industrial mode of production, colonialism developed the material basis of global capitalism and the worldwide system of nation-states that became entrenched during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although large geographic portions of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean achieved formal independence from European colonial powers between 1945 and 1981, the systems of nationalism and capitalism that colonialism set in motion continued to create power imbalances that favored the economies and militaries of historic colonial powers. For this reason, many anticolonial activists in the twenty-first century consider decolonization to be an unfinished process blocked by neocolonial economic relations. In fact, even as the United States emphasized its support of decolonizing states during the Cold War, its growing power over the international financial, military, and diplomatic systems reinforced the dependence of these nominally independent states upon Europe and the United States. As such, US empire represents a historical development in the form of colonial power, combining settler colonialism (the establishment of settler societies across the North American landmass and in Caribbean and Pacific Islands); overseas control of hundreds of military bases and wars of occupation, in Vietnam and Iraq; and power over the international systems of finance that ensured trade domination over many former colonies of the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

English colonial writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) thus portrayed in an 1899 poem the 1898 US expansion into the Philippines during the Spanish-American War as a type of historical continuity, with the United States taking on “the white man’s burden” from Britain:

Take up the White Man’s burden,
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile,
to serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

(KIPLING [1899] 1903, 78)

Notably, Kipling’s phrasing suggests that the Anglo-American civilizing mission is a gendered process in which white men expand colonial settlements outward in the hope of materially transforming peoples who, by virtue of their race, are understood to exist outside the sphere of human morality and development (“half-devil and half-child”).

RACE AND GENDER: COLONIAL NATURES AND THE MIND-BODY SPLIT

The violence of colonialism has always been expressed in the intimate, material terms of controlling bodies, ecologies, and social relations that constitute everyday life. Thus colonialism is a rich topic of study for feminist scholars who wish to understand how gender and sexual power relate to our ideas about the nature of matter and the political and economic forces that organize material inequalities. Although colonial views and uses of nature vary based on context, they have historically tended to justify colonial rule, gender divisions, and the capitalist transformation of land into commodities. Because colonialism involves outsiders appropriating the land, resources, and labor of a place in the service of profit and power, it is always accompanied by forms of violence and coercion that attempt to reshape the material worlds of the indigenous peoples or exterminate them altogether. This violence has a significant gendered dimension aimed at controlling gender roles, sexuality, domestic labor, and reproduction.

For example, the rise of modern capitalism in western Europe was dependent on the production of a shipping economy that, on the one hand, appropriated the natural resources of the tropics and the labor and knowledge of colonized American Indian, African, and Asian peoples and, on the other, exploited the labor of the domestic European peasantry, industrial workers, and unpaid women whose biological reproduction and household work helped sustain the colonial capitalist system. By proposing a binary gender system as the natural basis for dividing men's public, paid labor from women's private, unpaid labor, this system helped define economic pursuits as masculine as opposed to spiritual pursuits and domestic labor, which were seen as feminine. Such divisions were also projected onto the colonial project itself, resulting in the association of races and nations with greater or lesser degrees of masculinity based on a colonial vision of industrial progress. In Bengal, the seat of the colonial government of the British Raj, both British colonizers and anticolonial nationalists accepted the idea that European colonizers were successful in government because of their domination of the masculine realm of industry, whereas colonized Indians mastered the feminized domain of spirituality. As such, in resistance to British colonialism, Indian nationalists could attempt to lay claim to material industry without sacrificing spiritual traditions that women were understood to embody and reproduce. According to Indian colonial historian Partha Chatterjee (1947–), Indian nationalists resolved political contests over women's social status through "a separation of the domain of culture into two spheres—the material and the spiritual" (Chatterjee 1990, 237).

European colonialism allowed settlers, traders, and explorers to encounter areas of the world with which they had little prior familiarity. Thus Europeans often saw colonialism as a neutral project that expanded knowledge of the planet's geophysical, cultural, and biological systems. The view of colonialism as part of the neutral and inevitable march of human progress reflects, in part, the association of colonialism with science. European sciences were energized by the discoveries of distant species and by voyages that expanded Europeans' efforts to understand the physical world, including its biological, astronomical, oceanic, and geologic systems. Colonial travel allowed scientists, including French naturalist Georges Cuvier (1769–1862) and English biologist Charles Darwin (1809–1882), to catalog and name the many species of animal and plant life that Europeans encountered on other continents. This close connection of colonialism and the generation of ideas about nature also involved attributing certain supposedly "natural" characteristics to different races and



Theodor Galle, c. 1580 reproduction of Jan van der Straet's c. 1575 drawing, *America*. This image reflects the association of the colonizer with masculinity and indigenous lands and peoples as feminized. DE AGOSTINI PICTURE LIBRARY / GETTY IMAGES

genders. Modern colonial enterprises often portrayed both European women and the colonized peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as weak, irrational, hypersexual, and subject to the whims of instinct. In his pathbreaking study *Orientalism* (1978), literary scholar Edward Said writes that colonialism's scientific "impulse to classify nature and man into types" transforms the conception of the material world into a hierarchical system that separates colonizer from colonized. For Said, "the typical materiality of an object could be transformed from mere spectacle to a precise measurement of characteristic elements" such that a whole network of associations ties geographic, cultural, and physical difference into a vision of natural and inevitable inequalities between social groups (Said 2003, 119–120).

In this manner, colonial stereotypes commonly advertised that the colonial state had a patriarchal right to govern subject peoples and undeveloped land as well as to appropriate the labor of subject races (Wolfe 2006, 394–395). Colonialism helped entrench a worldview that radically separated mind from body, thought from nature, and human from nonhuman. As such, it was common for the literature, art, and philosophy of colonial societies to use the bodies of animals, faraway landscapes, non-European races, and women to assemble stereotypes about nature that helped justify colonial forms of settlement and technology (Pratt [1992] 2008; Schiebinger 1993). Many forms of colonial writing and art produced by Europeans used the figure of the woman's body to suggest that nature formed the physical and mental landscape of the colonized. For example, Flemish painter Jan van der Straet's (1523–1605) illustration *America* (1575) features Italian colonizer Amerigo Vesputti (1454–1512) awakening an "America," represented as a nude native woman rising from her hammock to greet the famed navigator. Closely associated with a passive and idyllic

nature in contrast to the Christian cross, clothing, and advanced technologies (ships, weapons, compass) of the masculine colonizer, the figure of America both invites the wondrous commodities of the colonizer into the so-called New World and stages the transoceanic encounter of colonization as an inevitable march of progress. This colonial fantasy that the masculine colonizer would seduce the feminized and primitive native with the wondrous material objects of colonial modernity was betrayed by the brutal facts of sexual violence in the process of settlement. The journals of Columbus, which detail early European travels to the Caribbean occurring in the same time frame as Vespucci's voyages, openly detail the rape and enslavement of native women by Columbus and other men on his ships.

In contrast, native artists and writers foreground alternative maps of indigenous life and territories that preexisted colonial settlement and that resist gendered visions of the land as a site of conquest. Chickasaw literary scholar Jodi Byrd (2011) uses the Chickasaw story of eastward migration into northern Mississippi as a story to counter British colonial explorer James Cook's (1728–1779) westward expeditions that helped to astronomically map the transit of Venus (2011, xvi). When Cook was murdered following a dispute between his ship's crew and a group of Hawaiians at Kealakekua Bay, European authors and artists widely speculated on the brutality of the Hawaiians, helping to advance a colonial discourse on the "savagery" of the natives (Domercq 2009). In response, Byrd foregrounds the Chickasaw migration story depicting twin brothers, Chikasah and Chatah, who are led to a new homeland with the help of a sacred pole in the earth, a white dog, and observation of the Milky Way. Drawing upon this story that explains how Chikasaw and Choctaw communities separated through migration, Byrd emphasizes how the nation's indigenous forms of navigation understood humans as part of a broader lifeworld that did not separate humans from spirits and animals who aided their navigation. In the process, Byrd argues for the importance of alternative visions of the material world in understanding the continuing legacies of colonial conceptions of distinctions between nature and culture.

Despite continuous indigenous resistance, colonialism generated new ideas that attempted to justify the material violence of conquest, environmental destruction, and labor exploitation as expressions of universal "freedoms," particularly in liberal political philosophies that asserted that European "civilization" liberated colonized peoples by making rational use of their lands and labor (Lowe 2006). Although Enlightenment thinkers like British philosopher and physician John Locke (1632–1704), Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume (1711–1776), German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) are still regarded as key philosophers of human freedom and democracy, their writings suggest that women and non-European races exist in a lower sphere of natural development separated from the heights of reason achieved by European man. Locke ([1689] 1963), who invested in British slave-trading schemes, justified taking Native American territory by claiming a natural right for those who made what he viewed as productive agricultural use of land. This reflected a dismissal of traditional forms of sustainable land use—such as the use of common land for subsistence by individuals in England or the intentional creation of fallow plots in North American indigenous agriculture—that were widespread in England and the colonies prior to the rise of the large plantation.

Why do colonial powers intensify human inequalities even though they proclaim that colonialism is a defense of universal human freedom? This contradiction is often masked, because the logic of colonialism invokes a dualism that separates humans from their material environments. French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) is famous for suggesting a

radical separation of body and mind and the particular importance of the mind in creating our sense of reality. Elevating reason over the material force of nature, Descartes declared that thought could be conceived as the basis of human existence. Enlightenment thinkers built on this Cartesian dualism of body and mind, extending it to radically separate thinking “man” from unthinking “nature.” Distinguishing European man’s presumed capacity for mental reason from the supposedly animalistic nature-bound bodily impulses of women and the colonized, Enlightenment thinkers created a powerful justification for colonial expansion and the exploitation of labor and environment. These liberal political philosophies continue to underpin imperial control of land and labor within the international system of nation-states.

Because liberal political philosophy influenced some early traditions of feminist thought and politics, the activist traditions that challenged liberalism’s abstract and incomplete vision of freedom have progressively abandoned the individualist focus of liberal feminism in the United States and Britain, which from the 1950s to the 1970s often stressed achieving formal legal equality and accepted the principles of colonial sovereignty and capitalist labor. Anticolonial, socialist, critical race, ecological, and queer theorists have all added important insights to radical feminist discourses that attempt to offer a systematic critique of how colonialism, capitalism, and their related liberal philosophies reproduce forms of violence and exclusion.

BLACK AND POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST INTERSECTIONS

The roots of the feminist critique of colonial views of matter, including racial and gender stereotypes about the human body, emerge in the anticolonial and New Left social movements of the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s black and postcolonial feminist scholars developed a robust discussion of the links between race, gender, and colonialism. In the United States, writings by the Combahee River Collective ([1979] 1997) and by black feminist theorists Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Angela Y. Davis (1981), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) analyzed race in feminist movements and focused on experiences of black women to theorize how race, class, and gender produce complex entanglements of domination. Using the metaphor of a traffic intersection, Crenshaw (1989) suggests that the standpoint of black women could not be understood via universalizing models of either race or gender oppression.

Opposing a Cartesian separation of mind and body and scientific hierarchies that naturalized social order, intersectional theorists emphasized the relation between the matter of the body and social discourses and inequalities. Bodies, in this view, do not exist as simple biological expressions of race or sex but are created within an intersecting grid of social power that reproduces race and gender inequality. Integrating Marxist and critical race theories into feminist analysis, the intersection metaphor was utilized by a new generation of feminists across the globe attempting to grapple with the complexity and materiality of domination.

As intersectional approaches challenged contemporaneous feminist discourses in the United States that attempted to universalize women’s experience, intersectional theories used race to bridge experiences of women of color with those of women experiencing colonial and neocolonial domination. This development was evident in a debate between two prominent feminists, Mary Daly and Audre Lorde, who attempted to understand how patriarchy creates the “ecologies,” or material worlds, that women inhabit. In the process, feminists debated how the gendered body was forged through capitalist and colonialist domination of mind,

body, and nature. In *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), Daly describes the material world of patriarchy—the social structure that perpetuates male domination of society through the appropriation of women’s labors, bodies, and desires—through a metaphor of colonization: “Patriarchy appears to be ‘everywhere.’ Even outer space and the future have been colonized. . . . Nor does this colonization exist simply ‘outside’ women’s minds, securely fastened into institutions we can physically leave behind. Rather, it is also internalized, festering inside women’s heads, even feminist heads” ([1978] 1990, 1). Although Lorde’s 1979 letter to Daly calls *Gyn/Ecology* an “important” and “provoking” book, it launched a fiery critique of Daly’s reduction of colonialism to a metaphor and of the exclusion of African myths and histories from Daly’s vision of women’s universal empowerment. Lorde suggests that lumping together all women into a single category of oppression perpetuates the silencing and stereotyping of women of color. Describing to Daly her experience reading the sections of *Gyn/Ecology* dealing with the practices of forced genital cutting of African women, Lorde claims:

It was obvious that you were dealing with noneuropean women, but only as victims and preyers-upon each other. . . . Your inclusion of African genital mutilation was an important and necessary piece in any consideration of female ecology, and too little has been written about it. To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. ([1979] 2007, 67)

Lorde’s critique of Daly reflects a persistent challenge to feminist attempts to synthesize how gender power is embedded in both ideas and the material world. In figuring different types of oppression as discrete and parallel, theorists may at times use one structure of violence metaphorically to make sense of another. Daly’s metaphor of colonization, according to Lorde, actually entrenches colonial ways of thinking about African underdevelopment that make African women into inevitable victims of patriarchy rather than understanding their history, agency, and political struggles as embedded in their own material contexts of life.

Lorde’s point was echoed by postcolonial feminists who were born in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and who took up teaching positions in North American and British universities after the 1980s. In a classic essay, Chandra Talpade Mohanty expresses concern that a universal model of gender power worked to obscure or even reinforce colonial power that created inequalities between First and Third Worlds, erasing important differences between women in different social contexts: “Colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a discursive or political repression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (1994, 196). This means that in some Western feminist discourse, the “Third World woman” has been envisioned “as a singular, monolithic subject” whose particular relationships to power relations are obscured (196). The feminist dream of a worldwide liberation of woman from man is thus based on a colonial vision that assumes that the entire world can be incorporated into a single sphere of social activism, despite the fact that women in different social and geographic contexts struggle against different, even contradictory, forces of domination.

This has especially been the case in contexts in which the physical bodies of women have become the material site for the articulation of racial differentiation. In her 1987 essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers echoes Lorde’s concern over the ways African women’s genitals have turned into a kind of object representing the universal vulnerability of woman. Spillers argues that the material of “black flesh” became a significant object that postslavery US racial theories used to pathologize black women. Reflecting later on “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Spillers notes that she saw

“black people being treated as a kind of raw material” in white feminist discourse, a source for “inspiration” but not for theorizing power (Weheliye 2014, 39). Spillers’s interest in theorizing how the “flesh” of black bodies itself becomes a material for theories and formations of the human connects the worlds of feminist discourse to a physical ecology of the body in which social processes work to manage relations of life and death.

Such politicized linkages of gender and sexuality have historically been subject to differences based on national contexts and colonial formations. If Spillers worried that US state racism was reflected in the characterization of black society as matrilineal—as a failure of patriarchy—discourses on Indian women reflected a situation in which colonialism was posited as the solution to what white writers viewed as the oppression of women by ancient religious superstitions. Take, for example, the controversy over the 1927 book *Mother India*, published by American women’s advocate Katherine Mayo (1867–1940) and distributed widely across five continents. Mayo, a Christian who wrote sympathetically of the work of missionaries in India, argued that child marriage and women’s illiteracy represented the backward cultural practices of Hindus, who required colonial rule in order to materially and culturally advance into the modern age. Mayo displayed an image of an Indian woman and child prominently across the title page of the book, suggesting that the British colonial regime was needed in order to expand protections for Hindu women and children against the violence of caste, illiteracy, and religious domination as well as from the ecologies of dirt, disease, and physical violence that she saw as endemic to the subcontinent. Although many Indian reformers agreed that Mayo had aired important social problems, they attributed much of the responsibility to another source: the British Raj, the colonial government that ruled in part by dividing Indians along caste and religious lines and by promoting Victorian notions of woman’s modesty and domesticity.

Engaging with the problem of how gender, reproduction, and sexuality are shaped by both indigenous cultural practices and forms of colonial exploitation across different geographic spaces, postcolonial feminists contributed important insights about how liberalisms that purport to liberate women, in fact, tend to extend new forms of patriarchal domination across colonial space. Like Lorde, postcolonial feminists were attuned to the specific social and historical contexts of patriarchy rather than viewing it as a universal system. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994), colonial prohibitions against widow sacrifice in India were not simply a straightforward exercise in humanitarianism but a reflection of a colonial fantasy of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (92). M. Jacqui Alexander traces how



Frontispiece from Katherine Mayo's Mother India, 1927. Mayo's book utilized depictions of women's hardships in India to encourage and applaud the role of colonial missionaries in reforming Indian society. PROJECT GUTENBERG

colonial legal control of sexuality sets the ground for recently independent Caribbean nations to reproduce heterosexism as a site for distinguishing national culture. Given how gender and sexuality shape political psychology of the colonial civilizing mission and its aftermath—even after some colonies attained national independence—postcolonial feminists explored, in the words of Deniz Kandiyoti (1988), how women end up “bargaining with patriarchy,” or establishing space and agency within the constraints of different patterns of gender power. From this vantage, postcolonial feminism developed a complex analysis of how transborder social and economic phenomena affected the lives of colonized women as well as the broader forces that produce human society.

POSTCOLONIAL ECOLOGIES

These important insights of black and postcolonial feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s are often viewed as distinct from the ideas of ecological feminists and feminist science studies scholars, who are conventionally understood to be more directly “materialist” in their discussion of human relationships to technology, economy, and the natural world. Despite this apparent division, both intersectional and ecological feminist methods foreground how modern colonial understandings of women and femininity are grounded in instrumental views of nature and the human body—in a Cartesian materialism.

One of the most important advances of feminist theories of the 1980s was a systematic critique of the binary gender system, removing sex from the domain of nature and understanding the body itself as a product of social forces. Judith Butler (1990) famously theorized that gender is performative in the ways it constitutes sex; sex is not the “real” material basis of gender but already an effect of gender’s ability to naturalize our understanding of the body’s material form. By undermining the scientific construction of sex as the body’s material site of gender differentiation, feminist science studies and ecological feminist approaches to nature and matter helped launch queer theories that undermined the binary distinctions between male/female and straight/gay identities.

Since colonialism imposed Euro-American understandings of gender and sexuality on other societies, it often masked the complexity of different gender formations and figured indigenous polygamy, homosexuality, and public nudity as sites of moral failure that required reform. Thus nonbinary gender systems (for example, those that include third genders like the Indian *hijra*, ~~male-to-female transgender individuals~~) often faced intensified discrimination under colonial rule, and British and other colonial powers established colonial laws to prohibit homosexuality across their empires (see Bacchetta 1999, 159).

Feminist work on science and nature has emphasized parallels and interrelations between patriarchy and humans’ domination of nature. Although early ecological feminists did not always center colonialism in such accounts of domination, colonialism’s control of women’s bodies was related to forms of domination of land and ecosystems that were central to colonization and industrial expansion. Even as settlers and traders viewed their colonial projects as forms of progress for the colonized, they reshaped the material worlds of the colonized in ways that increased death and suffering. For example, environmental historians argue that diseases brought by European settlers to the rest of the world from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries resulted in massive epidemics among native peoples. Exacerbated by the simultaneous effects of war, forced removal, famine, and brutal labor regimes, disease was a significant contributor to the estimated 90 percent decline in population in the two centuries that followed Columbus’s voyages (Arnold 1988; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

Colonialism reshaped the relationships between humans and other species, including animals, plants, and microbes. As indigenous forms of land use were displaced, colonialism often developed large-scale systems of agriculture that resulted in the introduction of non-native species of plants and animals, which, in turn, competed with native species and altered preexisting ecological balances (Crosby 1972). Another important outcome of colonial rule was the spread of famine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In colonial sites as far separated as Brazil, Ireland, and India, new land arrangements, mass agriculture, war, and taxation schemes increased food prices and produced moments of scarcity worsened by climatic conditions and policies that favored corporations, colonial states, and large landholders over peasants and the poor (Davis 2000). Such processes encouraged the mass migration of large segments of the world's peasantry away from their traditional lands and into factories and cities.

Prominent ecological feminists from around the world, including Françoise d'Eaubonne (1978), Daly ([1978] 1990), Val Plumwood (1993), Vandana Shiva (1999), and Greta Gaard (1998), and feminist science studies scholars, including Sandra Harding (1986), Donna Haraway (1989, 1997), Alondra Nelson (2016), and Elizabeth Grosz (2011), developed important understandings of how human bodies and societies are embedded in ecological and technological processes that cannot be fully controlled by human actors. As such, they posited science, technology, and environment as important topics for feminist study.

At times, such writings also reflected a tension between humanist invocations of women's voices or standpoints (which were crucial to black feminist articulations of intersecting oppressions) and posthumanist approaches to understanding the world-making power of nonhuman species, environmental forces, and technologies. Recognizing that narratives of women's lived social experience represent both material "facts" and conceptual "fictions," Haraway proposes that the myth of the cyborg—a figure who crosses distinctions between human and animal, organism and machine, and physical and virtual worlds—reveals an expansion of objects of inquiry for feminist practice: "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (1991, 149). For Haraway, it is impossible to disentangle gender power from a capitalism that integrates women into new forms of technologically mediated forms of labor, communication, and reproduction. Viewing the transgressive potential of technology alongside its intensifying forms of oppression (evident in the exploitation of women in sweatshops and in the proliferation of modern warfare), Haraway argues that it is necessary to understand how colonialism and capitalism produce complex linkages between bodies, environments, and technologies that open up new sites of feminist politics.

Such approaches helped develop methods in feminist thought that dispense with Cartesian distinctions between human and nature. These approaches are less concerned with the "standpoint" of a particular identity and attempt to grasp how the material lifeworld is produced through complex interrelation between human social forms and the broader worlds of nonhuman objects. While there remains significant tension over this move away from human subjects and discourse and toward nonhuman matter, a new generation of feminist scholars is addressing issues such as climate change, human-animal intimacies, and reproductive technologies as vital topics of study for understanding how gender power manifests in complex entanglements of human and nonhuman worlds.

More work needs to be done to bring together these diverse traditions and methods of feminist thought. Despite their different topics of study and approaches to matter,

intersectional, postcolonial, and ecological feminists and feminist science scholars all take on important challenges to the Cartesian worldviews that colonialism has used to distinguish genders, races, and species and to naturalize systems of inequality.

Summary

Colonialism is arguably the single most important force integrating different indigenous societies into the world systems of capitalism and the nation-state. As such, it is an important topic for women's, gender, and sexuality studies, as colonialism has involved new ways of managing bodies and environments across the globe. Despite the gendered violence and inequalities generated by 500 years of Euro-American colonial expansion, feminists have attempted to grasp colonialism's racial, colonial, and ecological legacies. In the process, they have developed new methods for explaining how gender influences ideas and formations of matter. Feminists have battled against Cartesian divisions of mind/body, male/female, human/animal, and organism/machine, working to overturn the colonial ways of thinking that underpin many forms of violence and inequality.

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