Introduction

A study of colonialism in global perspective starts with this journey. Take tram number 44 from Leopold II Square in Brussels to the end of the line, to the leafy suburb of Tervuren through the lush Forêt de Soignes. The final stop leads to the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Belgian King Leopold II (1835–1904), mastermind of the colonization of Central Africa and its 20 million inhabitants, built the ostentatious palace that today houses the museum. “The Congo Free State has nothing to hide and no secrets,” Leopold once proclaimed from this palace, adding, “it is not beholden to anyone except its founder.” Of course, here, he was speaking of himself.

Today, the museum possesses 120,000 ethnographic objects, the world’s largest hoard of Africana. This includes an impressive collection of African masks, one of the great ritual art forms of peoples in the Niger and Congo basins. African dancers don these masks in ceremony to expose and witness hidden truths, and to make ancestral spirits visible. Now these masks and the truths they are meant to reveal lie appropriated and buried in the belly of the Tervuren museum. Also hidden away, as if in a large tomb of secrets, is the history of Belgian colonial war and atrocity, and its ongoing social legacies in Africa and Europe.

Yet, the Tervuren museum inadvertently confesses Belgium’s violent colonial history through a material inventory of thousands of objects purchased or stolen from the Congo. Belgian schoolchildren clatter through the museum’s aisles every week on educational field trips. They may gawk at Stanley’s cap, Leopold’s cane, or a gilded bronze statue from 1922 entitled “Belgium Brings Civilization to the Congo.” Yet the
museum also disguises its history in ways that betray the widespread syndrome of denial and deception characterizing many postcolonial societies today.

Consider this buried truth: many of the “objects” collected from Africa for the Royal Museum were human. Over the course of Belgian colonization of the Congo, the Royal Museum amassed skulls and skeletal remains from Africans starved to death, maimed, or murdered in genocidal colonial wars. Brussels’ Natural History Museum took possession of this perverse ossuary in 1964. And today, the existence of these colonial remains is unknown to almost every living Belgian citizen. Records of the identity, location, and means of acquisition of these African skeletons have officially “gone missing.” Cultural institutions and political bodies actively relegate the existence of these human fragments and their histories to the abyss of the unknown.

In Belgian national discourse, the ongoing historical legacies of colonialism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are equally unacknowledged. Belgian colonial exploitation and intervention has contributed to the legacies of poverty, debt, and political dysfunction in the Congo. Following decades of rabid Belgian colonial extractivism in the early twentieth century, followed by political mismanagement and overweening levels of foreign debt, the Congo is today one of the world’s poorest countries. In 1960, the assassination of the first elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, ruptured the democratically elected Congolese government. European imperialists feared Lumumba’s radical vision of social uplift. Covert Belgian security forces supported by the USA, along with local collaborators, masterminded Lumumba’s assassination. Decades of political instability spilled from this act, compounding the original sin of colonial rule itself. Belgium has never officially apologized for its colonial holocaust in the Congo or for its role in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

Recently, in December 2018, the Tervuren museum was remodeled and updated. Yet, the historical and present-day role of the museum in hoarding the corpses of African people, procured through Belgian colonial genocides, remains as unacknowledged as ever. An estimated 10 million people of the Congo died because of Belgian atrocities. The
scale of this ongoing denial is not unique to the capital city of the European Union. In Paris and Lisbon, for example, no public memorial exists to commemorate the terrorization of societies in the French and Portuguese colonial ambit. In the United States, no national memorial has been built to acknowledge the genocides against Native peoples. In Japan, no museums stand to memorialize Japanese colonialism in Korea. To this day in Germany, no state memorial stands to the genocide of the Nama and Herero people of southern Africa. Britain has no national museum of colonialism to memorialize the histories of British war-mongering and its impact on more than 400 million colonized people across the globe, including nearby in Ireland. Some of the most prestigious universities of the Western world, such as Harvard, Yale, Cambridge, and Oxford, are built on the proceeds of colonialism and slavery, and full exposés are only now coming to light. But on many of these campuses, the crests, statues, and endowed chairs of colonizers still stand. Colonizer societies eagerly and actively forget, forget again, and disavow their colonial histories. Even the material evidence of immense wealth from the colonies crystallized in imperial architectures, and the amassed bones of the colonized in the vaults of most every imperial city, cannot jog the public memory.

While many museums bask in the afterglow of imperial glory, few are built to acknowledge the legacies of colonialism. Empires are easily remembered. Colonial histories, on the other hand, are compulsively and continuously forgotten. They remain histories in disguise, actively repressed and masked. Colonial power seeks to disavow its historical contexts and to forget about where it stashed the bodies. Fundamentally, studies of imperialism focus on the infrastructures of incorporation and rule that operate across metropoles and contiguous or overseas “peripheries.” By contrast, the study of colonialism explores the excesses and disruptions arising at the sites of conquest, occupation, and forced displacement, including the varieties of transformative response and resistance.

All empires deploy colonial force on the ground, yet not all forms of colonialism are the outcomes of imperial infrastructure or statecraft. By studying colonialism, we describe and analyze forms of power that operate both within and beyond imperial states. And, importantly, colonial formations are among the most important political entities of our own
times, operating at levels below and above nation-states, and through the
apparatuses of nation-states, too.

Against a backdrop of colonial forgetting and evasion, this book’s
purpose is to engage in a practice of historical recognition and witnessing.
Over the course of these chapters, we will witness colonial histories both
hidden away at the center of empires and beyond them. According to the
Oxford English Dictionary, “to witness” is “to furnish evidence about or to
attest to something.” The act of witnessing suggests an attentive and ethical
mode of seeing and hearing that affirms what is true or real amid cultures
of deception. The act of witnessing opposes the act of denial, and connotes
a willingness to be present to – as opposed to absent or in hiding from –
ethical experiences of understanding. Over the course of the chapters that
follow, we will witness colonial histories that refuse to be masked.

**THE MAT VERSUS THE MAP**

The paragraph-length short story “On Rigor in Science” (1946) by
Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges concerns a map of empire. Borges
tells us that in an unnamed empire long ago, the fever for mapping
became so intense that the empire’s cartographers developed “unmeas-
urably excessive [desmurados] maps,” which overwhelmed the very things
they were supposed to represent. The mapmakers’ fever to define the
boundaries of imperial rule on paper led to maps “whose size was that of
the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it.” Borges tells us
that these imperial maps, yielded from the conquests of an archaic
people, eventually succumbed to ruination. Future generations quickly
perceived their absurdity and uselessness. The excessive and burden-
some maps became tattered, and were claimed and repurposed as shel-
ter for wandering animals and travelers. The maps, Borges suggests,
reveal more about the folly of imperial lords, and the ingenuity of the
lives they dispossessed and displaced, than they ever do about the “rigor”
of empires. The historical study of colonialism informs us about the
grotesque and excessive falsehoods of imperial descriptions of reality,
allowing us to witness the disparate and diverse ways that people, con-
fronted with the conquest of imperial maps, defiantly re-arrange,
reclaim, and recreate their own cultures and embodiments.
This book is not a pursuit in mapping, but an exploration of history’s matting. Jamaican author Erna Brodber, in her 2014 novel *Nothing’s Mat*, helps me explain what I mean. At the center of the novel is the figure of a mat, made of sisal, woven by the narrator’s aunt. The novel is interested in the interwovenness not just of the mat’s history, but also of family history itself. The story spans multiple generations of a Jamaican woman’s family, from the time of Emancipation in the 1830s to the present day. And instead of a map of occurrences, we see an interlocking weave of “recursions and iterations.” History, Brodber suggests, is not linear and chronological, but characterized by an interconnected relationship between different times and different places. Colonial histories are not linear or flat like the Mercator projection, but tangled and folded upon each other.

In the unfurling “mat” of history, interrelations are at play where the threads meet up, loop each other, and interlock. Brodber writes specifically of the generational history of an African Caribbean “fractal” family as it formed in and through the experience of slavery and racial colonial violence. Indebted especially to Erna Brodber’s insight, and to the feminist scholarship of many women of color, I embark on the study of colonialism not as an exercise in mapping, but as an endeavor to trace the complex weave of historical fabric. Over hundreds of years, as colonizers nailed their maps on top of other people’s geographies, the colonized have responded with counteractions to colonial force. The resulting tangling of different peoples’ histories and communities on an increasingly planetary scale provides the bewildering and intricate mat for this book. Historical writing is about narrative construction and involves choosing ways to tell stories. History is a set of choices that provides an interpretation of what socially exists, yet always fails to fully represent what actually exists. Colonialism, I propose, causes the knotting, folding, and meeting of juxtaposed processes, institutions, and practices held together in tension. And so, here, I seek to follow the most consequential loops and stitches of different and juxtaposed threads of global history.

**APPROACH**

This book unfolds in two parts. Part I considers interlocking colonial histories. We explore the differences and interrelations of distinct
historical trajectories across more than five centuries of colonial exploitation. We home in on histories of settler colonial warfare in the Latin and Anglophone Americas; plantation slavery and the Atlantic slave trade; and modern imperial expansion across Asia and resulting coerced labor migrations and territorial occupations. Conversely, the distinctive, unequal, and interlocking histories at the heart of this book also focus on: Indigenous peoples’ sovereign resistances and refusals; the liberation politics of diasporic African peoples; and the contestations of oppressed Asian communities and polities. We focus our attention on these histories because they tether together continents and oceans, and describe the foundations of the modern world order, linking the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia across the earth’s seas. We have tended to study colonialism in silos, through the lens of one empire or one colonial process at a time. This book adopts a relational and comparative approach. The study of colonialism requires our curiosity about how different kinds of histories are “cacophonous,” to use Jodi Byrd’s word, and entangled.11

Part II provides sociological analysis of five different aspects of colonial power and contestation. In this portion, we are concerned with elementary aspects of colonial force, including its technologies and strategies as they unfold over long periods of time. These dimensions of colonial power rouse unruly responses and counteractions among the colonized. We survey disciplinary, pedagogical, financial, spatial, and biopolitical dimensions of colonial power, and consider how the tools and scripts of the colonizers are variously refused, rearranged and repurposed by the agencies of the colonized. The chapters in Part II do not pretend to supply an exhaustive or complete analysis of all aspects of colonial power. Instead, we take a diagnostic approach, describing colonialism’s major discourses, functions, scales of operation, and unfinished outcomes.

Our work here is not only to define and explore colonialism, but also to experiment with a different way of knowing that is appropriate to the task. This different way of knowing must contend with paradox and contradiction, drawing relations between a multiplicity of discordant perspectives. At the same time, this comparative way of knowing must not impose sameness, or “speak for” others’ histories, or flatten out power relations, or obscure the differences among the many sovereign
groups that colonialism catches in its weir. This way requires intellectual humility.\textsuperscript{12}

Studying a woven historical fabric to understand how it is put together demands a way of knowing, called \textit{parallax}. Parallax, or the multiplied perspective, is the awareness that balances the many interrelated, yet different, perspectives on shared social experience.\textsuperscript{13} Parallactic understanding beckons us to radically redistribute our ways of understanding the meanings of being human in the aftermath of centuries of colonialism, given the differential weights and vibrations of distinct legacies of survival and creativity among colonized communities on earth. The study of colonialism and the practice of parallax go together. Through this study, we trace relations among interlocking histories that are formed in and through each other, but are not the same.\textsuperscript{14} This book highlights the intense relationships between peoples, places, ecologies, and things characterizing the emergence of the modern world order from the fifteenth century all the way to our present times.

\section*{RACIAL CAPITALISM AND COLONIALISM}

I frequently refer in this book to “the new colonialism” as the form of colonialism emerging in and through racial capitalism. Allow me to define what I mean. This new colonialism accompanied the rise of capitalist empires from the 1400s onward, shifting into a higher gear by the mid 1700s. There is no consensus about what capitalism is, let alone when it began. This difficulty notwithstanding, I follow the lead of such authors as Andre Gunder Frank and Cedric Robinson in recognizing its historical origins in the 1400s, with drastic changes in transoceanic production developing from large-scale Native genocide in the Americas and the violence of the Transatlantic slave trade.\textsuperscript{15} The historical emergence of capitalism progressed over the following centuries as the mercantile principle of profit-making penetrated deeper and deeper into the realm of human and ecological life.\textsuperscript{16} Colonizers attempted to commodify, extract, and appropriate land and labor surplus from differentially racialized groups. Different forms of colonial coercion and racial differentiation were employed to “cheapen” the price of labor, and to dehumanize laborers in emerging capitalist economies. By the
nineteenth century, the colonial forces of racial capitalism transformed the majority of human beings on earth into slaves, coolies, bonded laborers, or low-paid wage workers.\textsuperscript{17} Racial capitalism did not arise after this new form of colonialism began – it was its animating spirit.

Scholarship on racial capitalism over the past fifty years is rooted in the Black Radical Tradition, and has general significance for the study of the modern world order. According to this tradition of social thought, the historical roots of capitalism intimately intertwine with racialized appropriations and the deadly treatment of oppressed racialized groups. These “primitive accumulations” have been constitutive of capitalist activity ever since the 1400s.\textsuperscript{18} Scholars who contribute to the study of racial capitalism show that racialization is infrastructural to capitalism, with legacies that persist into our own time.\textsuperscript{19} The analytic of racial capitalism disrupts historicist narratives of linear transition through time, and draws attention to intertemporalities, residues, and excesses of historical violence that derange the relationship between past, present, and future. Studies of racial capitalism also challenge the economism at the heart of classical Marxism.\textsuperscript{20} Capital expropriates surplus value from labor not in universally uniform or homogeneous ways, but according to a highly differentiated racial division of productive forces. The production of economies, states, and citizenries in the modern world has the ongoing dispossession of racialized peoples as its condition. Degradation and destruction of racialized communities serve as the basis of value production for those dominant groups who claim to monopolize the category of “the human.”\textsuperscript{21} From the perspective of racial capitalism, the making of incarcerated, dispossessed, and disposable subjects is a necessary condition for the dominant social order.\textsuperscript{22} The exercise of racialized violence is not extra-economic or episodic, but constitutive of how the modern capitalist world works.

The new colonialism, that is, colonial force arising through the history of racial capitalism, was more violent and more invasive than any other form of colonialism that the world had previously known. Vast amounts of Native lands were confiscated through genocidal wars. More African people were kidnapped, trafficked, and incarcerated under slavery than ever before or ever after (more than 60 million people over the course of
500 years). Almost 90 percent of all peasants and rural people worldwide eventually had their lands expropriated from them. Almost 98 percent of the globe’s territory gradually experienced some degree of long-term colonial occupation. Wealth disparities developed that eventually allotted 10 percent of people on earth (mostly living in Europe, North America, and other European settler states) ownership of 85 percent of the world’s wealth. Centuries of new colonialism permanently changed life and economies on a worldwide scale.

RACIAL CAPITALIST DRIVES

The new colonialism we track in this book is animated by the basic drives of racial capitalism:

Capitalist war, fueled by principles of profit maximization, is the violent drive to subject peoples, including their lands, ways of life, and economic and cultural systems, to the accumulationist urges of dominant groups. Capitalist war arises from strategies to produce new value through destruction, and to hide away and disregard the debris and damage caused by such destructive force. This kind of war pursues the ever deeper penetration of the mercantile principle into the realm of life.

Racializing rule is the drive to impose the dominator’s order on the rebellious and unruly domain of colonized social and ecological life. This drive involves the ongoing and anxious compulsion of colonizers to sequester, categorize, contain, arrange, commodify, and manage colonized peoples and communities. Racialization allocates safety and quality of life to dominant and “normed” social groups by consigning selected groups of people to direct experiences of, or enhanced vulnerability to, neglect, exploitation, social abuse, and premature death.

Moral deception names the psychological impulse of colonizers to disguise and disavow their warring acts and legacies with alibis of cure, safety, civility, health, enlightenment, development, and progress. The colonial force animated by racial capitalism is not just practiced with guns, swords, and pen and paper, but also with smoke and mirrors.

Transformative resistance is the inherent impulse of contradiction and transformation that operates from within systems of racial capitalist oppression, always opening up instabilities and interruptions that exceed the objectives of rule. Histories of colonialism always exceed the terms imposed by colonial forces. As colonial rule arises, the colonizers invent new strategies of control and domination as the fretful counter-response to ongoing acts of resistance and freedom among the colonized.
The poet Derek Walcott saw the “rancor of hatred” hiding in the apparently pastoral dreams of colonizers. Furthermore, amidst the supposed peace and quiet of colonial regimes, he perceived the “silent screams” of all the people held on the edges of the ruling order. In the United States, for example, Black families are almost three times more likely to live below the poverty line – and Latino families almost twice as likely – than White families. In Britain, Black and Asian migrants are almost twice as likely to end up in prison as White Britons. In France, where the state claims to be “color-blind” and does not collect race-based data, French persons whose families experienced French colonialism are three times more likely than White French people to be unemployed, while French children of color are five times more likely to report difficulties in school than their White counterparts. These racial social constructs of our time define real social experience, and they are rooted in deep, and still ongoing, historical legacies of colonial history.

From the start, colonialism generates a spectrum of racializations in different contexts and societies. By continuously separating human communities across lines of dominance and subjection – lines of racial and colonial difference – the colonized are made disproportionately more socially insecure as individuals, communities, and intergenerational groups. Yet, conversely through this process, the subjugated create their own means of endurance and strength, and their own visions of the future. Racialization is as much about the fact of survival and vital reclamations among the colonized as it is about the social violence inflicted by colonizers.

Racialization, when understood through the lens of colonialism, can be studied in comparative and global perspective. Native peoples were racialized as vanishing and disappearing, supposedly making way for the expansion of White settlers to take over their lands. Meanwhile, African peoples were racialized as morally indebted, as fit for toil as slaves, as permanently punishable, and as radically unassimilable into White settler society. Chicano and Latino people, in the course of Anglo-American Westward Expansion during the nineteenth century, were racialized as trespassers and migrant threats to Anglo-settler manifest destiny. In the Hispanic Americas, Indigenous peoples constituting large peasancies were racialized as backward and primitive in relation to families claiming
European descent. Asians were racialized as permanent outsiders in colonial societies, while European migrants were also differentially racialized as White “settlers” and “pioneers,” or as “the White working class” and “the poor.” Meanwhile, Eurowhiteness emerged among the populations left back home, as colonial extraction and consumption nourished the growth of European national cultures. These disparate racializations exist because of colonialism. They function in a relational matrix with each other, and thus continually reference each other within systems of social power.

Race functions within a matrix of constructed social differences. These different racializations do not lead us to equivalent histories and experiences of colonial domination and decolonizing response. Rather, they involve differential experiences of vulnerability, exploitation, and resistance. The oppression of Native people is not the same as the oppression of Black people, just as the ongoing legacies of settler genocide are not the same as those of anti-Black racial slavery. Anti-Muslim racialization is not the same as anti-Jewish racialization, even though they both have enabled practices of genocide. The West’s Islamophobia is not the same as its Afrophobia. Yet, these racializations conspire together to provoke interlocking histories of oppression and resistance, and radical and coalitional possibilities for liberations still to come. We cultivate parallax by learning to recognize how these different threads hold together.

Colonized peoples, for their part, continuously contest the racialized containment imposed by colonial powers, perpetually skewing the plot by their own emancipatory acts. Small and large acts of emancipation create the counterpoint of new forms of culture, new claims to human meaning, and new modes of community and belonging that cannot be anticipated. Colonial power, as Patrick Wolfe said, is a reverse “imprint” of the ongoing, uncontainable agency of the colonized. Colonialism is the story of conquests and occupations, but also of runaways, rebels, strikers, preachers, artists, community organizers, healers, futurists, revolutionaries, and chosen kin who continuously resist the ruling designs.

COLONIAL FORMS

Although we are interested here in the new kinds of colonialism emerging during the 1400s that still live on today, we also recognize that
colonialism is itself ancient. Colonialism as the conquest, occupation, and rule of peoples and territories by dominant groups has had a long history. In order to understand the newly emerging colonial expressions of the 1400s – colonialism under racial capitalism – we should also consider what was already old then, too. For example, the Roman empire existed a millennium earlier and occupied scores of colonial domains stretching from today’s Bulgaria to Britain. From the 1200s to the 1800s, other tributary empires proliferated across Asian domains. They derived their wealth from farming revenues, tributes, tithes, and taxes from disparate colonized peoples. Consider, too, the many Asian mercantile empires, such as the Chola or Omani, amassing wealth from lucrative colonial trade in sugar, spices, and slaves across distant port cities of the Indian Ocean.

So, what was so different about a subset of emerging empires beginning in the 1400s? As explained in detail earlier, a specific new characteristic emerged: capitalist interests sought to drive the principle of profit-making deeper and deeper into the realm of life by using racial differentiations. Out of this new colonialism, novel political, economic, and social formations arose. States transformed from small, relatively uncoordinated entities waging scattered wars, into large, centralized, profit-seeking national and imperial states deploying well-coordinated and persistent warfare. European statecraft increased its administrative capacity to forcibly promote long-distance capitalist expansion. Colonial force eventually bored into subterranean mineral reserves, rocketed up into the skies, and penetrated deep into the bodies of humans, plants, and animals. Colonies do not collect on shadowy margins of the earth. The wealth they generate, and the social and ecological entanglements they comprise, are the dispersed centers of our shared global history.

Across the arc of 500 years of history, we note the rise of different kinds of colonies. Plantation and extraction colonies are sites of the intense exploitation of enslaved or bonded laborers on enclosed and exploited lands. A few major examples include the plantation colonies of Jamaica, Saint Domingue (today’s Haiti), the Mississippi Delta, and the mining centers of Potosí, Bolivia and Guanajuato, Mexico. Settler colonies are territories on which mercenary arrivants seek to eliminate and replace Indigenous peoples through the confiscation of lands, and the
imposition of settler laws and maps. Here we think, for example, of the United States of America, Argentina, Australia, and the Israeli state. *Entrepôt* and *port colonies* are the transfer points through which colonial laborers and resources pass into interoceanic webs of colonial capitalism. We think here of Hong Kong, Acapulco, and Elmina. *Protectorate colonies* are yet another form of colony, emerging primarily from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, in which centralizing imperial states impose dictatorial “protection” onto overseas colonized societies. The British Crown Colonies, the Dutch East Indies, and the American Pacific are some examples. Finally, *militarized zones* and *penal colonies* mushroomed across land and sea from the 1600s onwards as colonial militaries divided, displaced, and incarcerated colonized peoples upon their own lands. Just a few examples include Diego Garcia, the Andaman Islands, and the vast prison-industrial complex of the United States of America.

Such categorization highlights the dissimilarity and asymmetry of colonial forms, but also the failed comparisons imposed by these categories themselves. Different colonial forms nest in each other and fuse with each other. Port colonies and protectorate colonies can nest in settler colonies. And extraction colonies and militarized zones can wedge into protectorate states. But, more importantly, the colonial experience of Elmina is not equivalent to that of Acapulco; nor is the experience of Native North America the same as Aboriginal Australia. Colonial formations tangle up different kinds of subjects and legacies, from dispossessed and forcibly removed Native peoples, to kidnapped and enslaved African peoples, to bonded and policed Asian labor migrants, to the socio-economically exploited populations of the Global South. We have to work parallactically to explore these interwoven histories, while also striving to avoid the imposition of false equivalences. We struggle against the limits of flat comparisons to witness the textured matings of history. These textures have implications for our ethical responsibility to each other, to our living pasts, and to our vibrant futures.

**BEARING WITNESS**

Each of the following chapters bears witness to artifactual evidence – evidence I stumbled across in an archive that stopped me in my tracks,
and asked me to look again, and to recognize something that seemed initially hidden from sight. These objects shed light on the colonial logics under discussion. I think of these objects as glyphs, or small condensates of colonialism’s processes of camouflage and cover-up, but also to the quiet survivals and resilience that colonialism engenders. Throughout these pages, we will pause to consider these objects as puzzles. Our aim is not to solve the puzzle presented by colonial materials, but to think with and through them. Objects mediate relationships between historical processes, temporalities, and peoples. Objects also exercise a kind of gravitational pull on our interpretive world. They want to speak to us, but we must also wish to hear. And by ‘deciphering’ objects, we confront the limitations of dominant frameworks of historical understanding. The historical meaning of material objects can be unknotted, but only in ways that also tell us about ourselves, our blind-spots, and our own limits as interpreters. Following the inspiration of approaches to historical study provided by Saidiya Hartman, with her concept of “critical fabulation,” and Lisa Lowe, with her call for critical inquiry into “what could have been,” I am interested in asking questions of archival objects that evoke what is hidden, but eminently alive and present, all around us.

Through their confrontation with colonial power, disparate colonized peoples were actively made into new kinds of subjects in relation to each other. Differently racialized groups reclaimed themselves as new subjects in creative response to their confrontation with the colonial force of racial capitalism. This emerging subjecthood of the colonized – their agency and action within interoceanic and global fields of relation – is an unintended living consequence of colonial domination. Colonialism is not just a set of “strong” acts and top-down impositions. It is also the responses, contestations, and creativity among the supposedly “weak,” as their underground and grassroots disruptions shake anxious and fragile ruling orders to their core.

When considering colonialism, we bear witness to stories and processes from which we cannot turn away. Our world is created in and through colonial force and the multiplicity of resistances to it. Active witnessing, as a mode of historical study and of critical reflection on our
present, prompts us both to call out ongoing processes of colonial war, racializing rule, and moral deception, and to confidently play our part in transforming our shared history on earth in relation to our unbound and unruly futures. This is a journey for us to continue on together, for history has already interwoven our pasts.