

Comparative Colonialism



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What is colonialism and how is it related to the history of imperialism in the modern era? How have violent encounters between the West and the non-West—for example, by way of military invasion, Christian conversion, settler occupation, slavery and ethnic cleansing—also shaped such fundamental ideas as civilization, humanity, freedom and justice? How were these colonial encounters mediated by shifting notions of race, gender and property, and by technologies of communication and translation? Indeed, in the midst of the contemporary resurgence of empire in the form of globalization, do these categories “Western” and “non-Western” still make sense? What were and are some of the ways by which colonized people respond to their colonization, for example by way of collaboration, resistance or escape? What role does nationalism play in determining the limits and possibilities of colonial rule and resistances to it? Finally, how can we understand the re-assertion of and challenges to imperialism in the wake of 9/11 and the rise of “political Islam” as the most visible and problematic challenge to empire today? In addressing these questions, this course will examine a variety of historical, ethnographic and cinematic productions set in colonial and postcolonial contexts ranging from the Americas to Asia and Africa. In doing so, the course will treat colonialism as a world historical event whose effects continue to be felt and whose power needs to be addressed.