

Prasad Amit (2023) Science Studies Meets Colonialism. Cambridge: Polity Press. 232 pages. ISBN 978-1-5095-4441-7

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For over three decades, science studies have grappled with the impact of postcolonial scholarship and the role of China, Egypt, and India as entangled in shaping the history of modern European science. As the postcolonial theory began encroaching on Euro-Western academia, questions about the roots of Western scientific knowledge and its colonial consequences made two things clear: the claim for universal science needed to be turned on its head, and the implications needed to inform political action beyond academia. Many Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars have calibrated postcolonial historicism. However, as the critical debates deepened, the narrative exercises seemed at times to have lost sight of the postcolonial purpose and the “decolonization of imagination” (Prasad, 2008: 44).

Prasad’s intriguing new book contributes to these debates on defining and situating the genealogies of postcolonial science studies (Prasad, 2023) and their various interpretations of the history of science that usually ventured into Eurocentric temporalities (i.e., first in Europe, then elsewhere). Early in the book, he claims to chart a Foucauldian genealogy of colonialism and its presence in today’s science. What kind of ‘science’ is present in our daily lives, how is it instrumentalized to include and exclude, and how can it reinforce misinformation and conspiracy? These are some of the intriguing questions the book engages with as it “excavates the history of present” (p. 119). As the book develops through three chapters and a conclusion, Prasad makes

clear that his ambition in the book is to “merely” show how, despite the profound advancement of the postcolonial scholarship in STS, many influential works shaping these very schools preserved and reinforced the Euro/Western ideals of science and its study. To this end, he uses three examples: the anti-science movement during the COVID-19 pandemic, Eurocentric historicism, and postcolonial desires in more recent works of Western/European STS scholars.

The COVID-19 pandemic case is a compelling account of how different strands of knowledge and public perception of the pandemic-related health measurements and their politics served to delineate science vs. anti-science. In this context, the universal claim of Western scientific knowledge(making) has been utilized to ‘other’ particular public groups and render their political beliefs as “anti-science” and, hence, anti-West. This line of thought is situated in a broader political discussion of the US-China relationship and the general worry in the West about China’s rising economic power.

Extending this idea into historical accounts of the Scientific Revolution in the second chapter, Prasad spends considerable time revisiting Sarton’s, Butterfield’s, and Needham’s views as the core debates informing the de/postcolonial literature on science studies, and herein also offers a critical examination of Eurocentric preservations in the works by Shapin, Chakrabarty, and others.

Although likely stemming from the fact that this book is an extension of Prasad’s earlier works



on postcolonialism, the use of the central terms such as colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial and the distinctions among these schools of thoughts appear undefined throughout the book. Making it less nuanced in definitions and, hence, the semiotic influences of these periods on science studies, concepts such as 'Western' and 'European' also appear interchangeably, albeit Prasad's primary focus is on the effects of European science in the historical context. At times offering transient analysis, Prasad nevertheless captures a niche of lacking engagement with decolonizing some of the foundational methodologies and thinking in STS.

Prasad is careful in reminding the reader that the book does not intend to undermine these influential works that shaped the second wave of Western postcolonial thought (see Go, 2016), nor does it aim to develop an alternative model of thinking, whether in postcolonialism or STS. In its promise of tracing genealogies, the book synthesizes different historical episodes by some of the fundamental STS scholars, and in that, arrives at a carefully interwoven critique where one still "can map the genealogies of entangled exchanges that cut across these boundaries" (p. vii). Keen to reveal the underlying colonial thinking and 'othering' inherent in the Western analytical approach, the third chapter draws a nuanced critique of the works of Lin and Law, de Laet and Mol, particularly those works engaging Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). The chapter scrutinizes four articles in particular: "Where is East Asia in STS?" (Lin and Law, 2019), "Provincializing STS: Postcoloniality, Symmetry, and Method" (Law and Lin, 2017), "We Have Never Been Latecomers!? Making Knowledge Spaces for East Asian Technosocial Practices" (Lin and Law, 2015) and "The Zimbabwe Bush Pump" (de Laet and Mol, 2000). The thread connecting these articles, namely, the actor-network, argues Prasad, is West-centric and relegates the core ANT principle of reflexivity "to a blind spot" (Morita, 2014: 230), where concerns are mentioned but quickly brushed off again. The book also raises several concerns around the works of Anderson, Mol, and Harding, pointing

out how their works have, perhaps unintentionally, maintained colonial thinking in the very ways they championed post/decolonial school by trying to embed it in the already existing Western scientific principles such as reflexivity and objectivity (Harding, 1998).

In the book's final part, Prasad draws on his personal intellectual genealogy, bringing into conversation his teachers and inspirations. Prasad's academic advisor, JPS Uberoi, an Indian sociologist of modernity, and Bruno Latour, a French philosopher of science, are the center of this chapter's science and culture discussion. The two thinkers exemplify opposite yet inter-linked analytics in science studies, one who has to reconcile producing universal (and hence Western) modern science but do so from the standpoint of the colonized (Uberoi) and one who is "unencumbered by different elements of 'othering'" (Latour) yet rejects the concept of universal science (Prasad, 2023: 163). Perhaps somewhat divergent from the book's critical agenda, Prasad concludes by self-reflexively defending Latour's works and position in molding the alternative for postcolonial thinking, including his own.

As a lecturer in cross-cultural STS engagements with health and illness and with a multicultural and interdisciplinary academic identity, the book harks back to the core of my work and scholarly career that strives for different and 'othered' ways of knowing. This book is a valuable reminder that scientific knowledge has deep colonial roots, and their animation in our world today shapes how political and social structures respond to global 'problems,' innovations, and scientific knowledge-making practices through, even if critical, Western scholarship. "Science Studies Meets Colonialism" will be of particular interest to those interested in postcolonial and decolonial politics of the present as well as the technoscientific futures and the historical accounts that are dragged into and kept up in narrating and making (post-)postmodern science. In this regard, the book is nuanced enough and fine-tuned in the grand scheme of *colonialism shaping the modernity* debates.

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