

Misha Ewen, *The Virginia Venture. American Colonization and English Society, 1580-1660* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022). 213 pp. ISBN 9781512822991 (hardcover), 9781512823004 (e-book).

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It is easy to think of the European colonial period as limited to the world of high politics, intellectual idealists, or ruthless capitalists. However, Misha Ewen, lecturer of Early Modern History at Bristol University, demonstrates that in England, colonization was not exclusively an affair of the male educated elite. Instead, she argues for the inclusion of individuals across the social spectrum to understand colonizing enterprises and the role of “ordinary” people and women. Focusing specifically on the colonization of Virginia, Ewen very convincingly argues for what she calls the ‘social depth’ of colonization in a concise book of a little over 200 pages. In order to tell this story, Ewen relies on a long list of scattered archival material and is influenced by the work of scholars like Marisa Fuentes to ‘stretch archival fragments’ to uncover the experiences of those outside the traditional circles of the elite men.

The book is made up of five chapters. The first chapter details how information about the colonial world would be able to circulate through all levels of society. As Ewen traces the consumption of printed material about colonial world as well as manuscript and eyewitness testimonies, we discover that all layers of society learned about the colonial world.

Shifting to investments in the Virginia Company in chapter 2, Ewen focuses mostly on women of the nobility. Although Company records rarely capture the full extent of women’s involvement in the Company, Ewen is able to reconstruct how women were lending money, influenced company policies, oversaw plantations in Virginia, attended Company meetings, and traded in tobacco or silk worms.

Chapter 3 highlights lotteries and charitable collections to reconstruct the financial entanglement of ‘the “common sort”’ in the Virginia Company. Lottery tickets started as low as 12d meaning that participation was possible for huge swathes of the population. In London and in England’s provincial towns, the Company raised £ 29,000, which was enough to fund thirty voyages or the passage of 3,625 ‘maids’ to the colony. This development made the lotteries ‘the real and substantial foods’ that ‘nourished’ colonization (71). Donations were made by wealthy donors, but smaller donations – think

of shillings and pence – indicate that not necessarily all donors were part of the financial elite.

The fourth chapter discusses how forced transportation of England's vagrant children and poor to the colony transformed metropolitan society. The chapter has a particular focus on welfare reform policies and changes in attitudes toward the poor which showcase the intersection of debates on poverty and paternalism. Moreover, the chapter discusses how prisoners could petition if they were 'desirous to be transported to Virginia' and as a servant on a plantation 'take honest pains' for their living (93). In other words, transporting the English poor to the colonies was not exclusively a top-down process, and 'many had to rely upon, and negotiate, the charity of the Virginia Company in order to ensure the welfare of the wives, mothers, and children they left behind' (100).

Finally, chapter 5 focuses on metropolitan tobacco production to demonstrate how the overseas empire transformed metropolitan society. While tobacco originally came from the Americas, Virginia tobacco was competing with English tobacco almost from the start. The conflicting economic interests resulted in the Virginia Company agreeing to pay higher custom duties in exchange for the suppression of domestic tobacco by the crown. The moderate success that was achieved seems to have mostly impacted the subsistence farmers that grew tobacco in an attempt to remedy their poverty. Other economic policies that were contested consisted of pipe-making and retail. Together, these disputes over the various economic sectors demonstrate popular participation in imperial politics, popular resistance, and threats of violence that continued long after the existence of the Virginia Company, against the backdrop of general civil unrest in England.

The argument that early seventeenth-century English colonization permeated all layers of society and geographies far outside the City of London is convincing and makes for altogether an excellent book. In fact, the book deserves to be read not just by people interested in early English colonization.

Unfortunately, the book does suppose some existing background knowledge that readers outside the Anglophone world and education system might not have come by automatically. Therefore, non-experts might, for example, be overwhelmed by the sheer number of dukes, earls, lords, and ladies that are introduced alongside the names of "ordinary" people. Given that the book is just over 200 pages, there would have been room for a chapter explaining the various court systems or general context about English society between 1580 and

1660. Nevertheless, readers from different backgrounds who are willing to overcome this knowledge gap on their own are in for a treat as this book demonstrates how combining different archival fragments can tell a new and important story of early English colonization and society.

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Emmanuel Kreike, *Scorched Earth. Environmental Warfare as a Crime Against Humanity and Nature* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021). 521 pp. ISBN 9780691137421.

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In 2013, historian Rob Nixon coined the concept of ‘slow violence’. With that phrase, he meant that violence caused by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, and oil spills takes place gradually and often invisibly. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon moreover states that the environmental aftermath of war can have devastating consequences, especially for the globe’s poor. Can war be seen as a crime against humanity and nature? That is at least what Emmanuel Kreike posits in his impressive and provocative *Scorched Earth. Environmental Warfare as Crime against Humanity and Nature*.

In contrast as to what the reader might expect based on the book’s cover – a well-known picture of British soldiers during the First World War amid a landscape of destroyed trees and pools of mud – Kreike’s main focus is on the period prior to the twentieth century, not only in Europe but also in Asia and North America. Although it would seem logical to include the twentieth century – after all: it saw the widespread use of chemicals in war (see World War I and Vietnam), as well as the use of two atomic bombs – Kreike makes a convincing argument for above all focusing on the early modern period, more specifically Brabant and the Austrian Netherlands.

Kreike states that ‘war affects environment and society simultaneously because humans are shaped by and in turn shape the environments they inhabit’ (p. 2). According to the author, there is ‘environcide’, that is, (un)intentionally ‘damaging, destroying, or rendering inaccessible environmental infrastructure through violence that may be episodic and spectacular (e.g., genocide or mass killing) or continuous and cumulative (e.g., everyday violence)’ (p. 3). Whereas