

Artificial intelligence is creating a new colonial world order | MIT Technology Review

By Karen Hao

April 19, 2022

This story is the introduction to MIT Technology Review's series on AI colonialism, which was supported by the MIT Knight Science Journalism Fellowship Program and the Pulitzer Center. [Read the full series here.](#)

My husband and I love to eat and to learn about history. So shortly after we married, we chose to honeymoon along the southern coast of Spain. The region, historically ruled by Greeks, Romans, Muslims, and Christians in turn, is famed for its stunning architecture and rich fusion of cuisines.

In Barcelona especially, physical remnants of this past abound. The city is known for its Catalan modernism, an iconic aesthetic popularized by Antoni Gaudí, the mastermind behind the Sagrada Família. The architectural movement was born in part from the investments of wealthy Spanish families who amassed riches from their colonial businesses and funneled the money into lavish mansions. Little did I know how much this personal trip would intersect with my reporting. Over the last few years, an [increasing number of scholars have argued](#) that the impact of AI is repeating the patterns of colonial history. European colonialism, they say, was characterized by the violent capture of land, extraction of resources, and exploitation of people—for example, through slavery—for the economic enrichment of the conquering country. While it would diminish the depth of past traumas to say the AI industry is repeating this violence today, it is now using other, more insidious means to enrich the wealthy and powerful at the great expense of the poor.

I had already begun to investigate these claims when my husband and I began to journey through Seville, Córdoba, Granada, and Barcelona. As I simultaneously read *The Costs of Connection*, one of the foundational texts that first proposed a “data colonialism,” I realized that these cities were the birthplaces of European colonialism—cities through which Christopher Columbus traveled as he voyaged back and forth to the Americas, and through which the Spanish crown transformed the world order.

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