

Book Review: Rupa Marya and Raj Patel, *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021 ISBN-13: 978-0374602512 (hardcover). 496 Pages. \$22.99.

Reviewed by Tamsin Kernick¹

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The human body is a genuinely complex web of systems that accumulate to carry out our daily processes. While individuals each have their own set of networks, we often are unaware of the intricate ways it impacts our everyday health, much less how the environment surrounding us drives such effects over generations. In an age of a global pandemic, social uprisings, accelerating climate change, it is no surprise that our bodies hold a lens into the connection between health and structural injustice. The progression of medicine from its colonial past has left certain communities, specifically BIPOC, behind. As inflammatory illnesses arise within the health sector, our societies, and planet are experiencing their own inflammation. The relationship between the health of our biological systems and the disparities from post-colonization systems is undoubtedly in clear need of a radical antidote.

Rupa Marya and Raj Patel's book, *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice*, pushes readers to unearth the clandestine connections between inequities rooted in health's colonial history and its impact on bodies. In Chapters 1 through 3, Marya and Patel conduct a pronounced exploration of health consequences related to an individual's past. The authors' phenomenal inclusion of intergenerational trauma and human impact on the environment bring needed focus on how individual actions do not entirely build one's health, a common idea held within modern medical systems. By placing such commentary in the beginning, a critical foundation corrects the disillusioning myth that individuals are born with equal health opportunities. Marya and Patel adeptly explain the relationship between an individual and their ancestors through examples; Chapter 1 describes how the descendants of slaves and victims of

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colonization are more likely to have heightened levels of certain stress-related brain chemicals. Along with this, human activity, specifically those of historically colonizing nations, has altered the environment for economic and political gains. In effect, human-caused climate change and habitat degradation has comprised the health of generations. Marya and Patel convey the deep-rooted negative impacts of post-colonial social structures and economic activities on people's health, specifically those communities most impacted by colonization.

Marya and Patel's unique structural arrangement of chapters where each focuses on a different internal system is one of the most captivating ways that I have seen utilized. Their addition of biological context maintains the connection between the body and the social and physical environment. In *Inflamed*, the reader follows the digestive, endocrine, circulatory, respiratory, reproductive, immune, and nervous systems. The authors connect each system to an aspect of the natural world, emphasizing their intertwined relationship. Marya and Patel focus Chapter 2 on salmon and the circulatory system. Pacific salmon bring essential nutrients to other organisms and soil. However, humans have worked to outsmart natural ecologies through controlled farming systems, which have decreased the population's genetic diversity and made it less nutritional. Marya and Patel implore readers to examine the power of colonization's dire health consequences as it can change a naturally available medicine into a source of illness. The authors properly expand on the relationship between health and society in Chapter 4, which focuses on the respiratory system and forest fires. As the pandemic ravaged the planet, similar to an uncontrolled blaze, it was clear that BIPOC were more susceptible to contracting and dying from Sars-CoV-2. Patel and Marya push readers to examine how the current global pandemic has deep connections to centuries of institutional racism. Ultimately, Marya and Patel successfully illuminate how an individual's health is connected to the social conditions of the present as well as the past by explaining the ability of social structures and historical human activity to shift their current health situation.

While Marya and Patel cowrote an exemplary piece of research, there is a somewhat imbalance between the development of the problems presented in comparison to the possible solutions. In-depth explanations are needed as it helps the reader follow the entire piece and the complexity of the relationship. Even so, I would suggest allocating more chapters to solutions rather than only Chapter 9. Despite this, Marya and Patel provide an excellent explanation for their proposed idea of destructuralization. The authors consistently provide thorough arguments that cement post-colonialism's imprints; however, their point on the negatives of

biotechnology and large farms deserves a more comprehensive critique. Marya and Patel focus heavily on the negatives of modern agriculture commercialization: increased pesticide usage, controlled farming, etc. However, I suggest that this point neglects to include the benefits of organic farms that imitate the natural world through integrated agricultural techniques. Large farms can be beneficial, especially during a time of population growth, if correctly run. My alternative is that large farms function without negatively impacting the health of people and the environment through responsible agricultural methods that work with the natural world, bringing in community members to be a part of the growing process—this way, people are fed equitably in a way that does not compromise their health or the environment.

Such a topic with countless interconnected pieces can quickly become inaccessible for non-academics. Yet, Marya and Patel do a stunning job of succinct writing that does not hinder understanding the content. Their clear structure and consistent usage of natural world examples concerning their topics is an unusual, but compelling, way for the reader to visualize the complex subjects. Such writing's attention to accessibility and relation to numerous academic disciplines is a refreshing alternative to what is typical of today's academia. *Inflamed* is clearly related to Sociology while also applicable to subjects like History, Biology, Environmental Science, and Gender Studies. Moreover, *Inflamed* provides critical information for the entire public, especially those within healthcare. Marya and Patel fully display how the colonial view ever-present within healthcare has ripped the connection of illness from its socio-historical context through thorough explanations and a clear writing style.

Marya and Patel's decision to close *Inflamed* with their own anecdotes and individual stories is a distinctive way of imploring the reader to recognize their part in this health system. Both authors show that personal reflection is essential in the effort to decolonize health. By combining the experiences of identity, diaspora, and geographical location, Marya and Patel adeptly convey the complicated relationship that people affected by colonialism may find themselves forced to function within. This section is a unique and needed aspect that brings in a personal element. In effect, the authors incentivize readers to examine their relationships to the ancestors of the land they find themselves in and their own ancestors. During this section, Marya and Patel provide critical points that phenomenally explain abolition and fugitivity as the prescription to post-colonial medicine. Subsequently, concrete action ties into the entire content of the novel. Marya and Patel clarify that we must work against and away from our current colonial institutions, from hospitals to prisons. Critical resistance

is needed to establish systems of justice that decrease rates of trauma, open new structures of equitable healing, and hold coordinated enterprises accountable for the people they serve. Such changes can lead to a decrease in the inflammation of our health, societies, and environment. Undoubtedly, Marya and Patel push their readers to further their own knowledge regarding the modern health system and conjure a future where health is equitable through much-needed radical change.