

Editorial Foreword

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND AUTHORIZING RELIGION In “Hindu: A History,” **Audrey Truschke** leads us on a genealogy of 2,500 years of the word “hindu,” profoundly unsettling conventional histories. Long before acquiring a specifically religious signification, “hindu” was used in multiple languages from Old Persian to Marathi to describe shifting forms of identity. By restoring the multiple premodern histories of “hindu,” Truschke unburdens the word of its contemporary overdetermination. Among many other virtues, the article offers critical tools for thinking against narrowly religious nationalist etymologies that have, in the postcolonial period, too often stunted this key term’s range of meanings.

Moving from the linguistic ways religious boundaries are authorized to the construction of religious forms of authority, **Ali-Reza Bhojani** and **Morgan Clarke** revisit and unbalance Max Weber’s over-familiar typology of the forms of legitimate domination. In their contribution, “Religious Authority beyond Domination and Discipline: Epistemic Authority and Its Vernacular Uses in the Shi’i Diaspora,” they discover new, additional forms: to wit, epistemic religious authority. Building on ethnographic work in a Shi’i diaspora community in the UK, they argue for moving beyond Weber’s (and Joseph Raz’s) classical formulations of religious authority. Their intervention calls us to shift attention away from the forms of clerical power, and away from the focus on ethical discipline, and toward non-specialist uses of clerical authority. These vernacular uses often take the form of expert opinion, serving as justifications for everyday action. Their ethnography of ordinary practice shows the sheer diversity of ways that epistemic authority is taken up and applied in the most mundane of acts.

MARKED BODIES AND (UN)MAKING KIN In “Prison of the Womb: Gender, Incarceration, and Capitalism on the Gold Coast of West Africa, c. 1500–1957,” **Sarah Balakrishnan** offers a provocative and important addition to global carceral histories by tracing the emergence of a prison system in nineteenth-century West Africa that was organized around the female body. Balakrishnan shows how birthing, impregnation, and menstruation shaped West Africa penal practices, including the selection of the captives, the duration of their time in prison, and the ways the prison factored into the legal infrastructure surrounding tort settlements for debts and crimes. The phrase, “prison of the womb,” describes how these West African prisons held bloodlines captive by threatening the impregnation of female kin members. This constant threat was also a ransom demand, motivating accelerated tort settlements. Even more, Balakrishnan explores how this female incarceration and its role in kin-making and unmaking was part and parcel of the spread of mercantile capitalism on the Gold Coast during the nineteenth century.

Farzin Vajdani focuses on a different form of corporeal punishment and a different threat to the body’s integrity. In “Branded Bodies: Judicial Torture,

Punishment, and Infamy in Nineteenth-Century Iran,” Vejdani documents instances of forced branding, tattooing, and bodily inscriptions. He considers branding in its multiple significations: as a marker of ownership, in its cosmological meanings, and in its resonance with Persian ideas of divine love; its judicial uses as torture or punishment, shame, stigmatization, and more. Important in all of these is the question of branding and time—the ways the act inscribed a certain version of identification and social order in nearly permanent ways. Nearly, but not quite, because the valuation of branded marks could under certain conditions be inverted to become a mark of status.

Roberta Bivins considers more recent technologies for affixing identity like DNA fingerprinting. Her article, “Pilot Programs and Postcolonial Pivots: Pioneering ‘DNA Fingerprinting’ on Britain’s Borders,” recounts the technique’s development in Britain and the United States in the 1980s, and its subsequent rise to global technology. Yet its role in the exercise of imperial power has, to date, not received the attention it deserves. Bivins reveals how the first state-sanctioned use of DNA fingerprints was as a pilot program applied in disputed cases of family reunification and migration from Bangladesh and Pakistan to cities in Great Britain. Her account demonstrates the interplay between imperial and postcolonial models and networks of power and forensic regimes of truth. At the same time, Bivins shows, the experiment prefigured and conditioned the wider reception of DNA profiling in matters of kinship. The use of genetic profiling by migrants seeking to exercise their legal rights in the face of a hostile state also worked to naturalize genetic ties as the sole markers of “true” (and legally recognized) familial relationships.

TIME-SPACES OF DECOLONIZING AFRICA Decolonization in East Africa required the remaking of temporal orders, complicated by the different independence timelines of Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya. In “*Uhuru Sasa! Federal Futures and Liminal Sovereignty in Decolonizing East Africa*,” **Kevin P. Donovan** explores the uneven terrain of what he calls “liminal sovereignty,” wherein polities and people were suspended between competing timelines and conflicting legal orders. In consequence, East Africans found themselves wielding only partial control of their collective futures. Donovan analyzes the tactics of temporal activism by Africans who aimed to undo British control over the pacing, sequencing, and synchronicity of decolonization. The spaces of decolonization were linked to uncertain temporalities of independence. The phrase “liminal sovereignty,” and the related term *chronopolitics*, point to the ways self-determination was made fragile and contingent because they were subject to spatial and temporal parameters. But *chronopolitics* also refers to the potential for strategic uses of time in East African claims-making that could hasten self-determination in the postcolony.

Nana Osei-Opare’s essay, “Ghana and Nkrumah Revisited: Lenin, State Capitalism, and Black Marxist Orbits,” reexamines African socialism and its transatlantic intellectual heritage under Kwame Nkrumah (1957–1966). Black Marxists like Nkrumah, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and Bankole Awoonor-Renner crisscrossed the distances between Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Soviet Union. Osei-Opare traces out a moving geography of Black Marxist thought whose agents were makers of political-economic theory, not merely its recipients or executors. These global traveler-thinkers refigured ideas of Marx and Lenin to imagine new forms of state capitalism for postcolonial Africa. Taking the case of Ghana as exemplary, Osei-Opare situates African postcolonial political ideologies

within transnational exchanges of Black intellectuals and the British, American, and Soviet espionage agencies that sought to restrict their movements and hold them in place.

FABULATIONS OF EMPTINESS AND FULLNESS Caroline Ford's article, "The Environmental Transformation of 'Empty Space': From Desert to Forest in the *Landes* of Southwestern France," explores the intersections of environmental transformation and the human attributions of meaning to landscape—what Henri Lefebvre called the "production of space." From the eighteenth-century to the present, the moorland of southwestern France moved from the status of despised wilderness and "empty space" to a forested landscape coveted for its productive potential and its aesthetic beauty. Analogous processes of environmental change, woven together with shifts of social perspective about the land, took place during the same period in North America, Central Asia, and Africa. Settler- and colonial states along with imperial powers sought to transform so-called empty spaces through seizure, development, and occupation. Ford points to the porosity of the boundary between man-made and natural landscapes in the making of sites of national heritage in the more recent past, and the enormous cultural and material processes that preceded the carving out of modern-day protected zones of allegedly pristine "nature."

In "Hamlet after Genocide: The Haunting of Soghomon Tehlirian and Empirical Fabulation," Ayşe Parla recounts the 1921 acquittal of Tehlirian for the killing of Talat Paşa, Ottoman minister and architect of the Armenian Genocide. Parla examines the 1921 trial in relation to Tehlirian's 1953 memoir, using the tension between the documents to show the legal, moral, and epistemological work done by haunting: in this case, by the ghost of Tehlirian's mother. Animated by Saidiya Hartman's notion of "critical fabulation," Parla seeks a middle ground between strict readings of empirical truth, on the one hand, and complete fiction, on the other. She reads Tehlirian, rather, as an empirical fabulist, finding in him at once a genocide survivor who aspired for collective justice, a son haunted by his mother's ghost, and a historical actor who gave a fabricated testimony that was nonetheless drawn from empirical facts of genocide. Parla invites readers to explore the political and ethical potential, and perhaps even the necessity, of fabulation in recounting acts of genocidal violence that defy straightforward representation and call for new sources to fill historical gaps, especially in cases when the existing rule of law does not rise to the demands for justice.