

Editors' Note

Timothy Mitchell and Anupama Rao

Our previous issue intervened in ongoing scholarly debates about slavery, which have tended to be dominated by a focus on plantation slavery and its relationship to capitalism in the Atlantic World. A special section titled “Trans-African Slaveries” expanded the reach of slavery studies in two ways: by situating the African continent as an important node between the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans, and by querying the reach and relevance of the term *Islamic slavery*, which tends to be used to counter the Atlanticist focus in explorations of modern practices of unfreedom.

A second special section addressed the relationship between art and politics, political art, and the key role of cultural producers in the modern Middle East in order to address the range of underexplored critical practices that arose together with Arab nationalism in the region. A third, titled “Southern Futures,” addressed the political imaginary of neoliberalism outside the North Atlantic. An important feature of that special section is the conversation between John Comaroff and Keith Hart about new forms of economic power and precarity that might expand our understanding of the “informal economy,” a term that Hart famously coined to describe economic life outside the purview of market regulation. The issue closed with a Kitabkhana on Saba Mahmood’s *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, which marks the passing of an important scholar and a dear friend to many members of our editorial board and the CSSAAME community at large.

The opening section of this issue returns to a theme that has been of special interest to the journal, namely, the relationship between state regulation and legal subjectivity. Ranging in temporal and thematic scope, each of the four essays in the special section “Law and Legality in Modern Indian History” is concerned to challenge the divide between law and custom and to criticize the focus on legal codification as colonial fetish. The essays in this section challenge the perception either that the state’s laws are more progressive or that they provide individuals with better protection than personal status or community-based laws, which are often criticized for being context-sensitive, or discriminating based on status and hierarchy. Instead, the four essays in this section, starting with Upendra Baxi’s important framing essay on the many modes of scholarly engagements with the apparatus of law, address issues such as new laws of clemency in the aftermath of Mutiny violence, which recalibrated the relationship between rebellion and state; the complex, intertwined relationship between modes of adjudication by local panchayats and law courts; and how postcolonial personal laws in India became a mechanism by which political debates about rights and entitlements were channeled into the legal domain where they underwent both domestication and depoliticization. Together and separately, the essays consider the ongoing politicization of the customary for and through state law, as well as its effects on everyday life.

A second section, “The Imaginative Capital of Lagos,” covers multiple eras and aspects of the city’s history as a way of posing broader questions about urban infrastructure, urban politics, and daily life. Skeptical of viewing Lagos through the prism of studies of *African cities*, the section asks instead about the place of Lagos as both catalyst for and object of human imagination, a place that is made and unmade through the rhythms of daily life yet subject to various manners of regulation. The three essays in the section—covering early colonial cartographic representations of the city, the rise of an indigenous press, and the politics of water and land—detail some of the ways in which the real city interacted with its idealized versions. As a whole, the section points to a new way of writing both African and urban history, one that rejects a categorical division between first world and third world cities while also avoiding a singular notion of urban modernity.

Three essays grouped under the rubric of “Rethinking Revolution” examine the relationship between reform and revolution by reading across the modern and contemporary global South. Roy Bar Sadeh’s study of the reception of M. K. Gandhi in the Cairo-based Islamic reformist press in the 1920s and 1930s illustrates intellectual connections between India and the Middle East that addressed issues beyond either nationalism or debates about religious orthodoxy, by focusing on a set of under-explored conversations among interwar Islamic reformists about the reach and relevance of Gandhi’s politics. A second essay by Begüm Adalet investigates James Baldwin’s status as a third world symbol, while also tracing an evolution in Baldwin’s own thought about the third world from a narrow politics of comparison informed by Cold War categories to a denationalized, more flexible, and consistent critique of empire, race, and capital. Nermeen Mouftah’s piece examines how literacy activism in post-Mubarak Egypt, though posited as a continuation of the 2011 revolution, in fact represented a retreat from its expansive aims by reinforcing divisions between social classes due to elite anxieties about the ignorance of the masses and the modes of its redress. Together the essays offer new directions for exploring revolution and its legacy in postcolonial societies.

We close this issue with a set of essays placed together under the title “Bureaucracy and Recognition.” Aniket Aga and Chitrangada Choudhury explore the ways contemporary Indian transparency laws and their attendant new demands of disclosure reconfigure practices and relations within bureaucracy. In the second essay, Sarah Gandeel argues that despite the Government of India’s dismantling of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, Rai Sikhs paradoxically came to be more conclusively aligned with the “criminal tribe” category in both the bureaucratic and discursive practices of local state actors. The two essays return to enduring concerns with the relationship between identity and identification, and between self and the state. ■■■■