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Race and the Possibilities of Comparative Critique

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IS IT POSSIBLE TO USE comparative methods to “provincialize Europe”? Recent debates in several disciplines have made it abundantly clear that comparison, as a perspective and a method, has historically served to shore up Eurocentric and discriminatory ideologies and practices. The most productive potential of comparison is that it can establish connections and relations across seemingly disparate contexts and thus challenge provincialism and exceptionalism. But it is precisely this potential of comparative thought that has fed into the development of “global” or “universal” paradigms that posits a hierarchical relation between the entities being compared or simply exclude large chunks of reality from its domain. In other words, the perspective remains narrow while claims are enlarged.

The possibility of alternative methodologies, of course, has been the focus of recent debates within comparative literature and political science, both of which have historically claimed that they can address the “global.”¹ As a host of recent comparative projects begin to shift the angle of vision to the global South and decenter Europe (but without denying the power and legacy of colonial-capitalist modernity) it sometimes appears that the Eurocentric roots of comparative methodologies are so deep that it is impossible to denaturalize the habits of mind that have emerged from them.² In this essay, I want to explore the possibilities of a comparative critique of racial ideologies across temporal and spatial boundaries. At first sight, such a project would seem particularly problematic, given that the “development” of racial ideologies in the West depended upon making particular kinds of comparisons between women, non-Europeans, blacks, religious minorities, the poor, sexual “deviants,” and animals in order to deepen, broaden, and fine-tune the idea of a “natural” hierarchy between peoples and groups.³ Such comparison was foundational to disciplines such as anthropology, but more broadly to religious, literary, and cultural discourse. It was also an essential part of the very development of racial “science”—analogies and “metaphor [otherwise regarded as antithetical to the method of science]” became “part of the logic of science itself.”⁴ To write the history of racism thus necessarily involves a study of the work done by comparative

thinking. Might such a history also allow us to turn comparison on its Eurocentric head and reveal the global connections that have shaped racial histories in different parts of the world? Or would it be like trying to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house or to curse in the colonizer's tongue?

At the most fundamental level, the activity of comparison is an outcome of any process of categorization, which is one of the fundamental forms of knowledge production. As Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star remind us, "sorting things out" into groups may be a necessary part of making sense of the world, but it is crucial to understand the ways in which this work of classification happens—in the sciences, in the social sciences, in the humanities, and indeed in everyday life. Who decides what count as categories, and the lines between them? How are such categories institutionalized so that they become received knowledge? Because over time we learn to take classificatory schemas for granted, they get naturalized and then exert a huge power over us to the point where the line between what is natural and what is socially constructed is obfuscated.⁵ These insights can be directed to the work of comparison itself: who decides how categories are to be constructed or which categories can be compared or which comparisons are legitimate and which not? Today we might ask, under what conditions can we denaturalize existing comparative methods and perspectives? In addition, we might ask: is comparison a *necessary* corollary to the work of categorization? On the other hand, can we make use of the comparative method to question these categories themselves?

Comparisons between the racial ideologies of different historical periods, between race and class, between racial and religious difference, and most crucially, between racial formations in different parts of the world are often undertaken by deploying dominant understandings of race, which are themselves colored by the perspectives and methods normalized in and through racial histories. So, for example, theorists and historians of race have widely worked with the assumption that "race" is a "modern" European ideology crafted in the crucible of Atlantic slavery and anchored in the belief that there are "biological" differences between groups of people.⁶ The comparison of premodern with modern European ideologies of difference, and of different racial formations across the world, is often shaped by these assumptions. To take two very different instances that will concern me in this essay: it is still common to hear that it is anachronistic to identify racism in the premodern European world because, at that time, human differences were understood to be rooted in "culture" rather than in "nature." For similar reasons, caste exploitation in India has also been excluded from discussion as a form of racism. Strikingly, and not accidentally, this

understanding of “caste” also travels to Latin America, where also it is routinely contrasted with “race.”⁷

In this essay, I will briefly discuss both these instances of “premodern” difference, suggesting that we revisit their relationship to the supposedly “modern” forms of racism with which they are routinely contrasted. This exercise allows us to see what is common to these two otherwise diverse histories, and helps us articulate the politics of comparison as a method, *and* to intervene in theoretical and political discussions about the histories and present forms of “race.” In both cases, religion is the central issue that seems to cloud the discussion. Religious difference is understood to be rooted in culture, affiliated to discourses of faith and belief rather than those of the body, and therefore, at least theoretically, less rigid. But the history of racial formations testifies not to a neat separation between these categories but to their deep interconnection; without such interconnection we cannot understand the very development of what is now referred to as “scientific” racism. Indeed, “biology” itself has a history, and one that is profoundly shaped by the history of racial ideologies. The separation of “biology” from “culture” is the outcome of this very history. A mechanical and historically uninflected understanding of “biology” obscures the complex contours and genealogies of racial ideologies and reinforces the divisions between “culture” and “nature,” which were not established in an earlier period and should not be understood as absolute in our own. Indeed, comparing earlier histories of race with later ones, or European histories with non-European ones, illuminates why concepts such as “biology” and “culture” should be understood as terms whose meaning fluctuates contextually and in relation to one another.

Shu-mei Shih rightly suggests that “the colonial turn” is crucial for understanding racisms in the contemporary world, and for connecting the apparently different forms taken by racism in the “metropole” and the “colony,” but this move is not enough.⁸ We also need to be able to situate “the colonial turn” itself in a wider and longer history and to understand how the forms *it* took were shaped by precolonial and non-European ways of thinking. We can then revisit more clearly the complex legacies that colonialism has spawned—legacies that cannot be understood through conventional, and still dominant, ways of categorizing racial formations.⁹

* * *

In medieval and early modern England, religious outsiders, minorities, as well as people from a vast spectrum of non-European lands were

routinely described in terms of color; so in writings of these periods, we get black Jews, black Saracens (or Muslims), black gypsies, and black Indians, just as we get black devils and black evildoers. For some writers, blackness became synonymous with particular geographies—thus, in 1559, George Abbot writes: “The men of the south part of India are black, and therefore are called men of Inde.”¹⁰ Blackness was a condition of the lack of Christianity—the English term “blackamoor” fused blackness with Moor (a term that originally meant Muslim). A reverse logic is also visible, as when the seventeenth-century Dutch traveler Jan Huyghen van Linschoten writes about “the black people or Caffares of the land of Mozambique” drawing on the Arabic word “kaffir” meaning “unbeliever” to describe blacks.¹¹

Medieval texts often feature the conversion and consequent whitening of such folk: thus, upon conversion, black Moors fantastically become white, and unbelievers find their deformed offspring transformed, as in the thirteenth-century *Cursor Mundi* or the early-fourteenth-century *The King of Tars and the Soudan of Damas*. While such transformations can be legitimately interpreted as the sign of a somewhat fluid notion of identity, at another level they can also be seen to tighten the association of particular skin color and bodily attributes with particular faiths or moral qualities, which is a central feature of racial ideologies. The equation between a particular kind of body and a particular kind of religious belief is underlined when a black Muslim is depicted as being transformed into a white Christian. Indeed, it is often *through* such transformations that medieval texts imply that black and white cannot easily mingle; in the thirteenth-century German romance *Parzival*, for example, the child of a black Moorish woman and a white Christian man is born “dappled”—the black and white parts of his skin remain separate and attest to the difficulty of such mixing.¹²

It is often suggested that it was the medieval and early modern belief in monogenesis—the notion that all human beings were, in the words of St. Augustine, “Adam’s progeny [*protoplastos*]”—that more readily admitted the possibility of the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity than the later theory of polygenesis, which was itself shaped in and through colonial history, especially the discovery of the New World, and that made possible the conception of different human groups as distinct species.¹³ But, although monogenesis *theoretically* facilitated the possibility of conversion, its actual possibility was severely limited by several prejudices and practices. One was the belief about the fixed moral being of non-Christians, especially Jews and Muslims, and their inability to change. This fixity was routinely compared to the indelibility of blackness, as in the 1560 Geneva Bible’s lines: “Can the black Moor change his skin or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”¹⁴ The comparison between faith (an inner, unseen quality,

and one which is theoretically changeable) and color (a visible marker, supposedly fixed) is reinforced in many medieval and early modern texts—both literary and nonliterary—that convey the difficulty of converting unbelievers by drawing upon the image of an “Ethiope,” “Man of Inde,” or “blackamoor” who cannot be washed white. Thus, black skin is fixed as permanent by comparing it to the “indurate heart of heretics,” but the comparison in turn anchors the heart of the unbeliever as also unchangeable. We see this in an emblem called “AETHIOPem Lavare” in England’s earliest emblem book, Thomas Palmer’s *Two Hundred Poesees* (1566), where the following lines accompany a picture of two white men washing a black man:

Why wastest thou the man of Inde?
 Why takest thou such pain?
 Black night thou mayest as soon make bright
 Thou labourest all in vain. . . .
 Indurate heart of heretics
 Much blacker than the mole;
 With word or writ who seeks to purge,
 Stark dead he blows the coal.¹⁵

A long tradition of describing both non-Europeans and non-Christians in similar terms was continually reshaped by early modern and then modern discourses.¹⁶ Thus, in 1566, Jean Bodin, the French jurist and political philosopher who is often given the dubious distinction of being the first to articulate modern categories of race, asserted that “Asiatics and Africans, unless indeed by miracles from heaven or by force of arms, do not abandon the religion they once adopted” and immediately proceeded to write about Jews in similar terms: “Certainly that race could never by any reward or punishment be enticed from its doctrines and, dispersed over the whole world, alone it has vigorously maintained its religion, received three thousand years ago.”¹⁷ The following passage from a Spanish biography of King Charles V makes the logic of the comparison explicit: “Who can deny that in the descendants of the Jews there persists and endures the evil inclination of their ancient ingratitude and lack of understanding, just as in Negroes [there persists] the inseparability of their blackness. For if the latter should unite themselves a thousand times with white women, the children are born with the dark colour of the father. Similarly, it is not enough for a Jew to be three parts aristocratic or Old Christian for one family-line alone defiles and corrupts him.”¹⁸ Written in the context of the anxieties over the conversion of Muslims and Jews to Christianity in Reconquista Spain, comparison in this passage hinges on the specter of sex across accepted lines of community borders in order to render both Jewishness and blackness congenital.

Several critics suggest that it was the *possibility* of religious conversion in Iberia, the fact that millions of Muslims and Jews did convert to Christianity, which heightened anxieties about the nature of Christian identity—posited increasingly as the necessary requirement of a national identity—and catalyzed the development of biological notions of race.¹⁹ Such anxieties were in part provoked by the fact that Iberian Jews, Christians, and Muslims were *not* usually physically distinguishable from one another. Hence the need to find a distinction that lay deeper inside, or a “purity of blood,” which in this case corresponded exactly to a supposed “purity of faith.” In 1480, the Inquisition had formalized the correspondence between the two by proclaiming that religious faith was manifested in “purity of blood” (*limpieza de sangre*). Thus differences of faith indicated different interior essences, and faith was not a matter of individual choice.²⁰

These histories are not obscure, but their implications continue to be sidelined by many modern theorists and historians of race who invoke comparisons across historical periods or geographic spaces only in order to assert qualitative *differences* between premodern and modern ideologies of race. Thus, one critic working with the assumption that modern racism is a specifically Atlantic discourse born of black slavery insists that the blood-test in Inquisition Spain was related to the “genealogical context of families” and not “a belief that Jewishness actually resides in the blood. It reflected the jural dimensions of structured kinship *rather than* the fact of biological connection, the significance of the *pater* rather than the *genitor*.”²¹ But surely what these blood statutes sought to codify was the *connection* between “pater” and “genitor”—it was precisely the genealogy of particular families that shaped the classification of larger religious and increasingly racialized groups. “Blue blood,” or *sangre azul*, was claimed by several aristocratic families who declared they had never intermarried with Moors or Jews and hence had fair skins through which their blue blood could be seen—indeed this context is the origin of the English phrase “blue blood,” which now indicates class status rather than race but actually rests on the connections between the two. The point I am making is that comparisons between that moment and ours can illuminate crucial historical connections that can help us understand many of our present discourses of race. More specifically, the possibility of religious conversion did *not* testify in some simple way to a “cultural” and benign notion of difference but was a contradictory and variable discourse in which we can detect the development of ideas about inheritance, or what we now call “biology.”

The relevance of early modern Iberia to “modern” and American forms of racism has been acknowledged, but Iberian histories are not sealed off from those of other European countries at the time because of the

transnational connections between early modern nations and shared histories of slavery. Hence when Elizabeth I of England tried to expel “the great numbers of Negroes and blackamoors” from her realm, authorizing a slave trader to take possession of them, she also called them “infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel” who had “crept” into her realm from Spain, implying that they were Spanish Muslims.²² But such people would not have necessarily been dark skinned; Elizabeth’s terminology appears contradictory and hard to interpret unless we keep in mind the overlaps between the discourse of faith and that of the body. The history of English slavery is testimony to such overlaps and contradictions. Precisely because of the conviction that Christians should not be enslaved, the practice of slavery often retarded the possibility of conversion. In 1555, Andrew Boorde’s “Book of Knowledge” articulated this through the voice of a slave:

I am a black More born in Barbary,
Christian men for money oft doth me buy,
If I be unchristened, merchants do not care,
They buy me in markets be I never so bare.²³

A century later, when Richard Ligon spoke to a plantation owner in Barbados concerning the request of a slave to be converted, he was told that “the people of that island were governed by the laws of England, and by those laws we could not make a Christian a slave.” Ligon clarified that “[m]y request was far different from that, for I desired him to make a Slave a Christian. His answer was that it was true, there was a difference in that: But, being once a Christian, he could no more account him a Slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as Slaves, by making them Christians; and by that means should open such a gap as all Planters in the island would curse him. So I was struck mute, and poor *Sambo* kept out of the Church.”²⁴ At the same time, of course, the possibility of conversion was continually invoked as a *justification* for English slavery: “It being a means to better these people, and likewise have influence on these they sell as slaves to the English to persuade them, that by their slavery, their condition will be bettered by their access to knowledge, Arts and Sciences.”²⁵ It is hardly surprising that “An Act against Carnal Copulation between Christian & Heathen,” passed in Antigua in 1644, uses the terms “white” and “Christian” interchangeably, as it does “heathen” and “black.”²⁶ Some decades later, the Anglican clergyman Morgan Godwyn, who was forced to flee Virginia because he advocated the conversion of slaves, concluded that “bondage is not inconsistent with Christianity,” noting that just as “Negro” and “slave” had “by custom grown homogeneous and convertible,” so too “Negro and

Christian, Englishman and heathen, are by the like corrupt custom and partiality made opposites."²⁷ Later, the English parliament was enjoined to proclaim that Africans and indigenous Americans were part of God's plan for salvation and should receive baptism and thus formally abandon "the traditional view that Christians cannot enslave Christians, affirm the property rights of the slave-owners, and destroy any possibility of freedom achieved through baptism."²⁸

To recover these histories is also to understand better the connections between what are often treated as divergent histories of colonialism—the Spanish and the Anglo-American—as well as past and present configurations of racial formations. In recent years, antiracist work has been confronted with a "culturalist" discourse, which is often regarded as a new development because it posits uncrossable boundaries between different groups even while unyoking their identities from a biological essence. In a suggestive essay written some time ago, Etienne Balibar suggested that modern "neo-racism" or "racism without race," which "does not have the pseudo-biological concept of race as its main driving force," illustrates that today "culture can also function like a nature," becoming an uncrossable barrier between "us" and "them."²⁹ It is significant that Balibar compared these new forms of racism, directed at largely Muslim immigrants in Europe, to the anti-Semitism of Reconquista Spain—a comparison that subsequently allowed many early modernists, including myself, to analyze earlier forms of discrimination and to make the connection between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. It also allowed us to make the point that these "new" forms of racism drew upon long and continuing histories. Contrary to the assertions of many analysts of new racisms, it is not the case that religion is a preracial form of difference or the "latest" form of racism or the form of difference confined to the global South; rather, religion has been central to the development of modern forms of racism all across the globe, and in ways that we need to engage with today.

Balibar's phrase for neoracism—"racism without race"—is now sometimes imported into early modern studies in order to highlight crucial dimensions of earlier histories of difference.³⁰ But helpful as Balibar's work is for a conceptual reorientation of our understanding of race, this phrase can reconfuse matters by continuing to equate the term "race" with ideologies of difference that center around color or pseudobiological classifications. As a result, a theological or culture-centered notion of difference becomes a special kind of racism—early modern racism, neoracism, but not racism *per se*.³¹ Instead, I am suggesting that early modern histories of difference, by illuminating the centrality of religion and culture to the development of the idea of race, can help us retheorize the idea of racial difference in a much more radical way. We

need to adopt a complex understanding of the relationships between the so-called social and the so-called biological discourses that are marshalled by racist discourse and practice. They underscore the point that the biological discourse of race was never really biological and that its categories were in fact always cultural, just as, on the other hand, in “premodern” racial discourse, as Robert Bartlett suggests, the vocabulary deployed was biological (“blood,” “*gens*,” et cetera) but the categories it indicated were cultural.³²

Comparing “then” and “now” helps us question rigid divides between “periods,” which have been formulated according to a Eurocentric conception of history in the first place, as well as interrogate the usefulness of making the “culture” versus “biology” distinction the basis for our understanding of the history of racism.³³

* * *

I now want to turn to the distinction between “culture” and “biology” as it surfaced in a public controversy a few years ago, following the plea of Dalit groups in India that casteism is a form of racism and should be discussed at the 2001 United Nations Conference Against Racism in Durban.³⁴ Taking place as it did in a city, which had witnessed the launch of Mahatma Gandhi’s anticolonial campaign, as well as bitter struggles over apartheid, the conference was an appropriate venue for raising fundamental questions about forms and legacies of racism—not only caste (dubbed a “hidden apartheid” by the Human Rights Watch in 1999), but also the question of Zionism, and of reparations for colonialism and slavery, were brought to the table. Although Balibar rightly notes that the event signaled “the urgent necessity to question afresh what exactly we call racism, why we do so, and what kind of political and intellectual tradition we are continuing by using this terminology,” it is telling that his discussion resolutely remains within the confines of European histories, relegating caste, quite explosive at the conference, to a small footnote.³⁵ The three issues—caste, Zionism, and reparations—led to global solidarity between the various activists raising them at Durban as well as global alliances between the governments who were seeking to disallow them as legitimate issues for the conference. Thus, whereas in 1975 India had voted in favor of the United Nations General Assembly resolution naming Zionism as a form of racism, at Durban it joined hands with the governments of the United States, Israel, and India on Zionism as well as the demand for reparations.

All three issues, particularly caste, highlight the need to rethink the connections between the different legacies of race and colonialism, which

are lost without some attempt to think comparatively. While I am mindful of warnings, such as Stuart Hall's against "extrapolating a common universal structure to racism" and his reminder that "it is only as the different racisms are historically specified—in their difference—that they can be properly understood,"³⁶ I am suggesting that, at the same time, we also need to interrogate the intellectual and political pitfalls of a mechanical insistence on the uniqueness of different racial formations. If a certain Atlantic exceptionalism has operated in large sections of Western race theory, then, on the other hand, a colonial and Indian exceptionalism has insisted that caste is *sui generis*, that it cannot be compared to other discourses of difference because it is quintessentially and uniquely Indian (and the move also conflates "Indian" with "Hindu").

The best known articulation of this exceptionalism has been Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, which projected caste as *the* symbol of community in India, a community that had been lost in the West with the rise of individualism.³⁷ Different versions of this approach were also espoused by dozens of other commentators, ranging from nationalist figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru to anticaste activists such as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.³⁸ Oliver Cromwell Cox's book *Caste, Class, and Race* argued strenuously that the comparison would abstract race from capitalism and render it timeless—the assumption being that *caste* is static and can be abstracted from capitalism.³⁹ Indeed it is this exceptionalism of caste that was invoked by the Indian government in the Durban debates: "Communities which fall under the definition of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are unique to Indian society and to its historical process" and so caste discrimination is an internal matter for the Indian government and Indian people to deal with.⁴⁰ An extreme version of this argument was the view that the Dalit desire to go to international forums like the World Conference Against Racism showed a neocolonial mentality, or worse, was a product of the "temperament of liberalization"; a well-known academic wrote: "We have ceded knowledge advantage to the West on one front after another—beginning with economic, then flowing on to the political, and now we need tips on how to handle cultural discrimination as well."⁴¹ Some of the most conservative Indian voices piously suggested that bringing caste into the picture would mean that racism would not receive proper attention.⁴² Coming from a different direction was the argument that to discuss caste as race was to follow an agenda set by the new American empire: "One of the dangers of US imperialist hegemony is that the global anti-imperialist agenda may also end up being set in US anti-imperialist terms. . . . Race, then, as a central category for the struggle, may be self-evident in the US context, but not as useful in other settings."⁴³ To confine racism to the United States is even more myopic than equating it with oppression against blacks. As I will argue,

it is this very narrow understanding of race that has structured much of the denial of comparison between race and caste across the political spectrum in India, just as it has also stymied the understanding of the history of race.

Finally, the case against caste being discussed at Durban was articulated both by the government of India (then formed by the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party), as well as several respected academics by reverting to the terms of colonial anthropology. Thus the well-known sociologist Andre Béteille cited long-discredited colonial scholarship on race, arguing that anthropologists had “established conclusively . . . the distinction between race which is a biological category with physical markers and social groupings based on language, religion, nationality, style of life or status . . . If discrimination against disadvantaged castes can be defined as a form of racial discrimination . . . Muslims and other religious minorities will claim that they too, and not just backward castes, are victims of racial discrimination.”⁴⁴ Dalit activists argued that not only is caste, like race, a hierarchy based on lineage and descent, but it also involves a particular construction of the Dalit body and mind. Dalits were regarded as so polluted that even their shadows were understood as contaminating those they fell upon; even today, Dalits (by some calculations about one hundred and eighty million people) are often debarred from eating, praying, or studying with upper-caste individuals, from marrying outside their caste groups, as well as drawing water from a common well, or dressing above their station. Despite the fact that many Dalits are prominent in public life, the reality for most remains that those who are perceived as transgressive regularly meet with violent hostility, murder, and lynching. Despite the fact that Mayawati, a Dalit woman, is currently the chief minister of India’s largest state, and projected by her party as a potential prime minister, Dalit women remain especially vulnerable to rape and sexual assault.⁴⁵ Such contemporary realities anchored the Dalit activist position demanding consideration at Durban.⁴⁶

Some theorists have specified the perniciousness of anti-Dalit feelings by contrasting them with religious prejudices. The philosopher Akeel Bilgrami writes: “When I think sometimes about caste in India—without a doubt the most resilient form of exclusionary social inequality in the history of the world—it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that even the most alarming aspects of religious intolerance are preferable to it. To say ‘You *must* be my brother,’ however wrong, is better than saying, ‘You will *never* be my brother.’”⁴⁷ Bilgrami is right in theory, but in practice the difference is not absolute. As I discussed in the previous section, the discourse of religious conversions in early modern Europe embodied *both* these attitudes—Jews, Muslims, and blacks were simultaneously invited to convert *and* imagined as unable to fully do so. Moreover, it was the

combination of these two apparently contradictory positions that catalyzed racial thought. I want to suggest that an analogous—though not identical—contradiction underpins the discourse of caste in India. On the one hand, it is true that in the ideology of casteism, the hierarchy is regarded as fixed. Those Dalits who convert to Christianity and Islam cannot rid themselves of the taint of caste; that is the basis on which many once-Dalit Christians, for example, continue to argue that affirmative-action provisions for Dalits should be extended to them. But, at the same time, it is precisely the place of lower castes within the Hindu religious and social hierarchy that guarantees the stability of the whole, which is why a belonging of sorts—oppressive, unequal, but nevertheless a belonging—is demanded of the Dalits by upper castes and particularly right-wing Hindu ideologues. Thus it is that V. D. Savarkar insisted that “some of us are Brahmans and some Namashudras or Panchamas [untouchable castes]; but . . . we are all Hindus and own a common blood.”⁴⁸ Thus, too, Hindu conservatives are bitterly opposed to religious conversions.⁴⁹ It is on the supposed basis of the “belonging” of Dalits and lower castes to a Hindu whole that right-wing Hindu groups have also embarked on the aggressive wooing of Dalits and Adivasis, which has resulted in complicated new political alliances in various parts of India, but also resulted in the participation of these groups in right-wing organized violence against Muslims.⁵⁰

As early as 1612, the Portuguese observer Diogo de Couto articulated the view that it was the caste order which prevented the conversion of Hindu elites to other religions: “The great impediment to the conversion of the Gentoos is the superstition which they maintain in relation to their castes, and which prevents from touching, communicating, or mingling with others, whether superior or inferior; those of one observance with those of another.”⁵¹ The idea that caste kept the Hindu order as a whole from disintegrating was put forth with increasing sophistication during the colonial period. At the end of the eighteenth century, Abbé Dubois insisted that the caste system had guaranteed Indian civilizational achievement; such ideas simultaneously preserved the *difference* of India from the West and made clear the value of a hierarchical order, which could work as a universal model of sorts. This is not to suggest that an unchanging *religious* order demanded this “fellowship”—on the contrary, caste hierarchy is always political and social, and its contemporary forms have been forged in and through particular colonial and postcolonial histories. Nicholas Dirks has argued that “Under colonialism, caste was . . . made out to be far more—far more pervasive, far more totalizing, and far more uniform—than it had ever been before, at the same time that it was defined as a fundamentally religious social order” (*COM*, 13). Just as colonialism reshaped other social relations, such as those of class

and gender, so also was it the case with caste, although it is important not to see this as a simple imposition by British colonialists but a process involving the active participation of local elites.⁵²

Moreover, the histories of Western racial formation and those of caste are not isolated from one another. While there has been extensive writing on the relationship of caste and race, and whether these are analogous or different, scholars have yet to fully explore how European ideologies of race drew heavily upon caste divisions, which European travelers, merchants, and colonists observed in Indian society and how these borrowings help us think about analogous problems in racial formations in different parts of the world. The Portuguese word *casta* (first used in the Indian context) was used to indicate not just these divisions, but also all kinds of other groupings based on color, class, and religion precisely along the lines that the word “race” was used in early modern English.⁵³ Often the two were made explicitly interchangeable, as in a decree issued by the Sacred Council of Goa in 1567: “In some parts of this Province (of Goa) the Gentoos divide themselves into distinct races or castes (*castas*) of greater or less dignity, holding Christians as of lower degree, and keep these so superstitiously that no one of a higher caste can eat or drink with those of a lower.”⁵⁴ Thus, while in the sixteenth-century Europeans felt that they were equated with the lower castes in India, colonial anthropology shifted the alignments to posit an equation between Europeans and indigenous higher ranks.

The term “*Arya*” (which means aristocratic in Sanskrit) was appropriated as “Aryan,” a term with bioracial connotations in European discourse, and which in turn shaped the ideologies of caste and regional affiliation, as well as Hindu supremacy, in colonial India. In 1786, the British orientalist William Jones argued that all speakers of Indo-European (or Indo-Aryan) languages belonged to the same racial group and were essentially derived from “a race of conquerors” who migrated from west Asia to various places, including India, a view that was picked up by the German philologist Max Müller.⁵⁵ While this argument allowed the theoretical possibility that Indians were of the same race as Europeans, it simultaneously divided Indians into superior Aryans, who were supposed to have moved into the region from the North, and inferior Dravidians, or the original inhabitants of the land. The racial classification of Indians was based on the supposition that the Northern or “martial” peoples of India were largely Aryans who developed the caste system as a way of preventing miscegenation with the Dravidians and aboriginals.⁵⁶ At the end of the nineteenth century, as Nicholas Dirks has detailed, when race had become the primary mode of classifying humans into hierarchical groups in the West, caste was used to categorize Indians. The census commissioner H. H. Risley was “confident that he could actually test in

India the various theories about race and the human species that had been merely proposed on speculative grounds in Europe" (*COM*, 15, 84). According to Dirks, he "fashioned a peculiar symbiosis between the racial anxieties of imperial Britain, and the ritual anxieties of Brahmins and other higher castes at the turn of the century" (*COM*, 224). This symbiosis is evident in a range of British literary texts of the period, such as Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, where caste, region, and race dovetail to produce a taxonomy of "types," such as the fiercely honest and martial Afghan, the Sikh soldier loyal to the British, the effeminate but clever Bengali "Baboo," and so on. Susan Bayly points out that if colonialists interpreted caste through the lens of race, this means that they were in fact *not* regarding India as unique, but trying to fit it into what they saw as universally applicable biological hierarchies.⁵⁷

Such views about the overlap of caste and race are still in circulation—in 2001, precisely at the time when Dalit groups were lobbying to take their case to Durban, a study published by the journal *Genome Research* argued that "the upper castes [in India] have a higher affinity to Europeans than to Asians, and the upper castes are significantly more similar to Europeans than are the lower castes."⁵⁸ Ironically, of course, the findings of the *Genome Research* study could be cited in *support* of Dalit organizations' plea for thinking about caste as race! That is why, historically, movements against caste oppression seized upon this analogy. In the mid-nineteenth century, Jyotiba Phule argued that Brahmins were colonists who subjugated the native inhabitants: "The cruelties which the European settlers practised on the American Indians on their first settlement in the new world had certainly their parallel in India in the advent of the Aryans and their subjugation of the aborigines [that is, Dravidians] . . . This, in short, is the history of Brahmin domination in India In order, however, to keep a better hold on the people they devised that weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste."⁵⁹ To Phule, caste was "*slavery*, as vicious and brutal as the enslavement of the Africans in the United States, but based in India not only on open conquest and subordination but also on deception and religious illusion."⁶⁰ Phule built his views precisely on the same theory of the Aryan race which was used by colonialists and Orientalists, but, as Gail Omvedt argues, he "turned it on its head, in a way somewhat akin to Marx standing Hegelian dialectics on its head" (19). Phule emphasized the violence inherent in this process.

Throughout the early part of this century, non-Brahmin and Dalit movements were to seize and invert the racialized logic of caste domination, laying claim to being the original inhabitants or "*adi-vasis*" of the land.⁶¹ Ambedkar, one of the most important Dalit leaders as well as a major interlocutor of Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, was to

critique this view, arguing that the Aryans were not a race and that “to hold that distinctions of caste are really distinctions of race . . . is a gross perversion of facts.”⁶² But he nevertheless thought about the relation between *casteism* and *racism*, writing to W.E. B. DuBois that there was “so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and the position of Blacks in America” and that he “was very much interested to read that the Blacks of America have filed a petition to the UNO. The Untouchables of India are thinking of following suit.”⁶³ DuBois mentioned Ambedkar’s letter when he expressed his own concern about the narrowness of the Human Rights Charter; later, he also critiqued the American Jewish Committee’s “Declaration of Human Rights” for having “no thought of the rights of Blacks, Indians and South Sea Islanders.”⁶⁴ The name of the radical Dalit Panther party, formed in 1972, is in obvious dialogue with the Black Panther movement.

These historical conversations are still in the process of being fully documented, and they indicate that Dalit thinkers and activists have consistently connected with other antiracist movements globally not in order to *conflate* caste with race, but to highlight their plight, to indicate the overlap between these forms of oppression, and to draw attention to their situation globally. When they raised the question of *comparison*, the dominant academic and governmental response was to construct their argument as one predicated upon a claim of *identity*. Thus, neither critiqued the colonial “science” that had in fact frequently employed the comparison of caste and race, even as they deployed the categories of this very science to lock both race and caste into discrete compartments.

The Durban controversy reminds us that both race and caste are highly malleable categories, which have historically been deployed to reinforce existing social hierarchies and create new ones. Like race, caste overlaps with, but is not identical to, class, and both are deeply entwined with gender oppression. Both demand an engagement with questions of culture and ideology, as well as with questions of the economy. But they also demand that we go further than that, and question the *politics* of theory. As Shiv Viswanathan observed, the answer is to be found “not at the level of concepts but at the level of *the politics of knowledge* The worry about the ‘conceptual inflation’ that will follow if casteism is recognized as racism arises from an academic debate that is more concerned about the violation of disciplinary categories than with ‘atrociousness as violation.’”⁶⁵

The comparison of caste and race, or that of older forms of racism with contemporary variants, I have suggested, allows us to track the *politics* of comparison, and the politics of the *denial* of comparison. What is evident in both the cases I have discussed is the persistence of the conflation of race with color that has been especially pernicious in constructing an artificial divide between “scientific”/“biological” and “cultural”/“religious” discrimination. It is this division that has erected an unsustainable divide between historical periods—premodern versus modern—and between different geographical locations. The histories of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and caste-prejudice cannot then be fully connected to those of slavery, bonded labor, plantation labor, and color prejudice. Thinking across periods, and across regions, allows us to understand better *why* colonial race ideologies took the form they did, and how they drew from other forms of oppression globally.

There is, of course, brilliant scholarship that has made visible the importance of thinking comparatively and globally in terms of nineteenth and twentieth-century histories of racialization. Aamir Mufti’s work showing why “the crisis of Muslim identity” in modern India “must be understood in terms of the problematic of secularization and minority in post-Enlightenment liberal culture as a whole and therefore cannot be understood in isolation from the history of the so-called Jewish Question in modern Europe” is a case in point. Mufti yokes two histories in order to “resituate the . . . problematic of Jewishness within an extra-European, global frame” and to make this speak to postcolonial debates about secularism and minority culture.⁶⁶ But important as it is to connect the histories of Jews and Muslims, European and postcolonial discourses about “minorities,” it has been harder to think across the supposed divide between a process of minoritization that rests on *religious* difference and another, which seems to center on discourses of *color* and the *body*.

Even scholars who are otherwise committed to making visible international histories of cross-cultural contact and antagonism find it hard to cross that barrier. For example, Amitav Ghosh seeks to challenge the silence of Indian historians on the subject of race, which he rightly thinks arises out of an overemphasis on the differences between colonial ideologies and practices in different continents; he argues, instead, that the same pernicious forms of racialization that are evident in Africa or the Americas were in fact used by the British in governing India. Ghosh is right that because Indian historiography has worked largely with notions of cultural domination, of “persuasion” rather than “coercion,” it has been blind to certain aspects of colonial rule in India: “The truth is that India was to the late 19th century what Africa was to the 18th—a huge pool of expendable labour . . . I believe that it is because we South Asians fundamentally misrecognize racism that we are not able to give it its proper place within the history of colonialism.”⁶⁷ But for him, making

such a connection requires that we *distinguish* between “scientific” and other forms of racism:

Racism . . . is an ideology that is founded on certain ideas that relate to science, nature, biology and evolution—a specifically post-Enlightenment ideology in other words. . . . Generally speaking, Indian communalists recognize that their conflicts are located in the social domain: I do not think they put a biological or scientific construction on them.

Similarly racism and caste: you will perhaps remember that Louis Dumont distinguished between them in an appendix to *Homo Hierarchicus*. . . . It has taken me a long time to understand that racism is comparable to casteism and communalism only in that it has the same murderous effects: its internal logic is quite different. (158–59)

But the place of racism in “liberal” Enlightenment thought cannot be understood by taking *its* own divisions between culture and biology, or indeed the supposed “internal logic” of either caste or race as *our* analytical categories, not only because, as history tells us, this logic changes and transforms, but also because it does so at least partly in relation to histories that are not as distinct as they have become in our postcolonial analysis.

Take the case of the term “caste” as it traveled to the colonial Americas. Although its histories there are distinct and can hardly be conflated with those on the South Asian subcontinent, there is a striking resonance between their relation to race *as a conceptual problem*. Writing in relation to early colonial Peru, Irene Silverblatt points out that in Latin America as well, “caste is understood to be a legal or social (as opposed to biological) construct at heart” whereas “race emerged as a dominant account of social differentiation in the West’s ‘modern,’ liberal age.” She goes on to suggest that we deploy the concept of “race-thinking” to cut across this divide, not in order to assert an identity between them but to grasp “what the race-caste division hides: that race and caste were not separate systems but interpenetrating. Race thinking helps us understand how race and caste might, chameleon-like, slip in and out of one another.”⁶⁸

Some of these slippages are evident, as I have suggested, in the history of caste in India. It is also painfully evident that European racial categories have patently influenced “communalist” views about the differences between Hindus and Muslims.⁶⁹ The language of Hindu fundamentalism, like that of Reconquista Christianity, increasingly draws upon notions of “cultural difference” *as well as* pathology—Muslims breed more prolifically than others, Muslim men are inherently violent, they always desire Hindu women, all Muslims are conservative—and it does so precisely for the same reasons that Reconquista Christian discourse did, because there is no *visible* physiological difference between Hindus and Muslims in India.

Today, “race” has become a term that functions as the universal marker of discrimination *even as it is often* understood in narrow ways that obscure its longer and global histories. I have suggested that a cautious comparativism can make these histories visible, and conversely, careful attention to these histories reveals both the political utility, and the limits, of comparative methods. Systematic analyses of the histories of racial thinking allow us to push at the limits of our understanding of the very grounds of cultural comparison and of knowledge production. For instance, we might ask how our understanding of the histories of racial thought might change if we think of comparing the historical development of race to the history and structure of caste formations (instead of the other way around). This history should push us beyond simply debating whether caste can legitimately be compared to race. Why is it that we cannot even imagine reversing the terms and comparing race to caste? The irreversibility of comparative terms is itself shaped by a Eurocentric view of history, and of what we regard as universal and what as particular. To push the comparison in this way is to challenge such a view and make available more complete intersections than have hitherto been visible.⁷⁰ The analytical priorities of that comparison will open up a different set of global intersections altogether—such as those between South Asia and Latin America—and thus productively interrupt, reorder, and fill gaps in our understanding of histories of race.

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NOTES

Many thanks to Ashley Cohen, Chris Taylor, Suvir Kaul, Sanjay Krishnan, Jed Esty, the Race and Empire Reading Group at the University of Pennsylvania, as well as Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman for their incisive comments on this essay.

1 See for example, Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003); Rey Chow, “The Old/ New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies,” *ELH* 71 (2004): 289–311; Aamir Mufti, “Global Comparativism,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2005): 472–89; Pheng Cheah and Jonathan D. Culler eds., *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

2 See especially Partha Chatterjee, “Anderson’s Utopia,” *Diacritics* 29, no. 4 (1999), 128–34, and Shu-mei Shih, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” *PMLA* 19, no. 1 (2004): 19.

3 See Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton eds., *Race in Early Modern England, A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

4 Nancy Leys Stepan, “Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science,” in *The Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1990), 38–57.

5 Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out, Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 1; 319.

6 Joyce Chaplin, “Race,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 154–72; Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Race,”

in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), 274–87; Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 31; Roberto Bernasconi and Tommy Lott, *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000); Brian Niro, *Race* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

7 See Irene Silverblatt, “Modern Inquisitions,” in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 282–83. I came across this essay when this one was being revised so can only draw attention to ways in which its argument is productively resonant with mine, as I will do below.

8 Shu-mei Shih, “Comparative Racialization: An Introduction,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1352.

9 It is a measure of the problem I am trying to highlight that the otherwise useful special issue of *PMLA* on Comparative Racialization (123, no. 5 [2008]) has practically no discussion of either caste or early modern racial histories.

10 George Abbot, *A Brief Description of the Whole World*, (first published 1599) (London, 1664), 106. In this essay I will consider mainly English histories as well as the Iberian ones, which were so consequential for shaping European colonial ideas.

11 “John Huighen van Linschoten his Voyage to Goa, and observations of the East Indies, abbreviated,” in *Purchas his Pilgrims*, ed. Samuel Purchas (London: William Stansby, 1625), 1752, 1753, 1756–1757, 1760, 1762–67. Arabs themselves had used the word to describe both Christians and blacks.

12 Wolfram con Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage (New York: Vintage, 1961). For a discussion of the dappling see Lisa Lampert, “Race, Periodicity, and the (Neo-) Middle Ages,” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (2004): 391–421.

13 Augustine writes, “If they be definable to be reasonable creatures and mortal, they must be acknowledged to be Adam’s issue.” St. Augustine, *Of the citie of God*, trans. John Healey (London: George Eld, 1610), 580–82.

14 Jeremiah 13: 23–25. The later King James Bible substitutes “Ethiopian” for “Blackamoor.”

15 John Manning ed., *The Emblems of Thomas Palmer: Two Hundred Pooeses* (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 56. This idea derives from one of Aesop’s fables entitled “The Moor or Ethiopian” and is echoed by the Bible as well as many early modern writings.

16 For an extended discussion, as well as complication, of the materials I discuss here see Loomba and Burton eds., *Race in Early Modern England*. There, other histories, such as those of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are also brought in, which this short essay cannot consider.

17 Jean Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (first published 1566), trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1945), 127.

18 Quoted by Jerome Friedman, “Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, no. 1 (1987): 3–29, 16–17.

19 The importance of early modern Spain to the development of what we recognize as race is explored by George Mariscal, “The Role of Spain in Contemporary Race Theory,” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 2 (1998): 7–23; James Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 54, no. 1 (1997): 143–66; Deborah Root, “Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain,” *Representations* 23 (Summer 1998): 118–34; Friedman, “Jewish Conversion”; Andre Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).

- 20 For a development of this argument, see Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 24–27, 67–70.
- 21 Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America*, quoted by Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 15 (emphasis added).
- 22 43 Elizabeth I (1601), in P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), 3: 221.
- 23 Andrew Boorde, *The fyrst booke of the introduction of knowledge* (London: W. Middleton, 1555), I 2^v.
- 24 Richard Ligon, *A True History of the Island of Barbados* (London: Peter Parker, 1657), 15.
- 25 This anonymous document in the papers of the scientist Robert Boyle is quoted by Cristina Malcolmson, “Biblical Monogenesis: Race and Gender in the Early Royal Society,” forthcoming in her book *Race, Religion, and Science in the Works of Robert Boyle and Margaret Cavendish*.
- 26 An Act against Carnal Copulation between Christian & Heathen, Antigua, 20 November 1644, “Laws, Regulations and Orders in force at the Leeward Islands From 1668 to 1672,” 49–50, Colonial Papers CO 154/1, Public Record Office, Kew. Thanks to Carla Pestana for this reference.
- 27 Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s & Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church: Or, A Persuasive to the Instructing and Baptizing of the Negros and Indians in our Plantations* (London: J.D, 1680), 142, 155.
- 28 Cristina Malcolmson, “Biblical Monogenesis.”
- 29 Etienne Balibar, “Is There a Neo-racism?” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Etienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 23.
- 30 See, for example, Sweet, “Iberian Roots,” 165.
- 31 Goldberg has recently argued that the “concept of *racisms without racism*” is “the peculiar expression of neoliberalizing globalization.” “Racisms without Racism,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1712–16. See also Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009).
- 32 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 197–99.
- 33 One example of a Eurocentric periodization is the fact that non-European places are understood as “medieval” before their contact with Europe. Thus India is called “medieval” until the beginnings of the British empire in the eighteenth century, and there can be no “early modern India,” which is contemporaneous with, say, “early modern England.”
- 34 Dalit literally means “broken” or “ground down” and was adopted as a term of self-definition by oppressed caste activists; the so-called lower castes were previously called “untouchables.” Gandhi called them “Harijans” or “people/children of God.” For a discussion of the politics of naming see Anupama Rao, “Who is the Dalit? The Emergence of a New Political Subject,” in *Claiming Power From Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*, ed. Manu Bhagvan and Anne Feldhaus (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 11–27. For a useful summary of the contemporary status of Dalits see N. Paul Divakar and Ajai M., “UN Bodies and the Dalits,” in *Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in an International Context*, ed. Sukhdeo Thorat and Umakant (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, 2004), 4 (hereafter cited as *Caste*).
- 35 Etienne Balibar, “Racism Revisited: Sources, Relevance, and Aporias of a Modern Concept,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1630–39, 1632.
- 36 Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance” in Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg eds., *Black British Cultural Studies, A Reader* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 16–60, 51.
- 37 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980). The original French edition was published in 1966.

- 38 See Nicholas Dirks's excellent commentary in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 4–6 (hereafter cited as *COM*).
- 39 Cox also argued that premodern interactions between peoples were *not* marked by racial antipathy. Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948). Later, the book was retitled *Race: a Study in Social Dynamics*.
- 40 Thorat and Umakant, *Caste*, xxiii.
- 41 Dipankar Gupta, "Caste is not Race: But, Let's Go to the UN Forum Anyway," in *Caste*, 53–54.
- 42 Jaswant Singh on February 7, 2001, cited by Vijay Prashad, "Cataracts of Silence: Race on the Edge of Indian Thought," in *Claiming Power*, 134.
- 43 Prashad, "Cataracts of Silence," 135–36.
- 44 Andre Béteille, "Race and Caste," *The Hindu*, March 10, 2001, <http://wcar.alrc.net/mainfile.php/For+the+negative/14/>.
- 45 For an easily accessible profile of Mayawati see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1958378.stm.
- 46 Many of the pieces published at that time, including Béteille's, are included in Thorat and Umakant, *Caste*.
- 47 Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Non-Violence: The Philosophy Behind the Politics," presented at the MLA Annual Convention, New Orleans, December 29, 2001.
- 48 Quoted by Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Idea of the Hindu Race in the Writings of Hindu Nationalist Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 334.
- 49 See for example, "A Swami's Open Letter to Pope," *The Times of India*, November 6, 1999.
- 50 See Anand Teltumbde ed., *Hindutva and Dalits* (Kolkata: Samya, 2005) for an excellent review of this development. See also Tariq Thachil and Ron Herring, "Poor Choices: Dealignment, Development and Dalit/Adivasi Voting Patterns in Indian States," *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 4 (2008): 441–64.
- 51 Quoted by Henry Yule and AC Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: a Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984), 171. Dirks, *COM*, sees this attitude as a product of later colonial and missionary views.
- 52 See Susan Bayly, "Caste and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography on India," *Concept of Race in South Asia*, 168.
- 53 In the nineteenth century, W. Hamilton was to suggest that the term had been taken from the term "*Kayastha*," which described a particular caste grouping; see Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 171.
- 54 *Archivo Portuguez Oriental* quoted by Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 170–71.
- 55 Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 12–13.
- 56 See also Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
- 57 Bayly, "Caste and 'Race,'" 168.
- 58 Michael Bamshad et al., "Genetic Evidence on the Origins of Indian Caste Populations," *Genome Research* 11, no. 6 (2001): 994–1004, 991.
- 59 Quoted by Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*, Tracts for the Times series no. 8 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1995), 17.
- 60 Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 18.
- 61 Hindu fundamentalists are caught in the contradictions of this discourse, laying claim, on the one hand, to being Aryan and, on the other, to also being the only original inhabitants of India. See, for example, *The Organizer*: <http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules>.

[php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=257&page=27](#). A good discussion of some of these contradictions is provided by Jaffrelot, "The Idea of the Hindu Race."

62 Quoted by Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, 49.

63 Quoted by Thorat and Umakant, *Caste*, xxix.

64 Thorat and Umakant, *Caste*, xxix–xxx.

65 Shiv Visvanathan, "Durban and Dalit Discourse," *Caste*, 272.

66 Aamir R Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007).

67 Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe," *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 146–172, 152–153, 160.

68 Silverblatt, "Modern Inquisitions," 282–83. See also note 13 above.

69 While Chakrabarty rightly makes similar points in his response to Ghosh, he hesitatingly conceded the need to distinguish between scientific racism and what he thinks is "prejudice."

70 I would like to thank Chris Taylor for this point.