

# Editorial Foreword

**POSTCOLONIAL REMEDIATION** How to remedy the postcolonial problems of former colonies depends greatly on how we assess the legacy of colonialism.

That legacy in Africa has been largely understood as economic, and is increasingly viewed as cultural; but, **Mahmood Mamdani** argues, the critical element may be politics—how Europe ruled, rather than how it exploited. Colonial states created legal identities for two underlying categories: races (non-native colonizer and resident immigrants such as Arab merchants) having rights and being subject to laws, and ethnicities (native groups), who were put under a regime of customary laws, tradition, authenticity. In postcolonial states this relation is transformed for the worse as indigeneity becomes the criterion for the possession of rights from which the non-indigenous are excluded. (Compare Serge Gruzinski and Nathan Wachtel, “Cultural Interbreedings: Constituting the Majority as a Minority,” 1997:231–50, on Mexico and the Andes.)

**GROUP TALK** The next two essays show, in different ways, how the discursive formation of groups can have large consequences.

**Charles L. Briggs** holds that cultural reasoning contributed to the institutionalization of racial inequality in Venezuela with, in a time of cholera, deadly effect—the racialization of death. As in the previous essay a distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous is crucial, as is the idea of modernity: “Cholera is constructed as a disease that clings to and kills the premodern. . . .”

**Dennis Sweeney** examines corporatist discourse among the leaders of heavy industry in the Saar region of Germany, which emerged in the decade leading up to World War I. Corporatism imagined the parties in industrial work as natural interest groups and proposed the formation of a corporatist state made up of representatives of occupational estates. Corporatism is often seen as a throwback to earlier times and a rejection of modernity; the author shows, to the contrary, that it “had little to do with the persistence of pre-industrial, anti-modernist, irrational, and anti-capitalists traditions and values,” but rather “framed an entirely new modernist project which aimed to re-design the early twentieth-century industrial-social order”—an “authoritarian-capitalist order” of productive estates.

**COIN OF THE REALM** Two articles examine money and its circulation in contexts for which money is more than money. (See also C. A. Gregory, “Cowries and Conquest: Towards a Subaltern Quality Theory of Money,” 1996:195–217 and Heinzpeter Znoj, “Hot Money and War Debts: Transactional Regimes in Southwestern Sumatra,” 1998:193–222.)

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**Michael Lambek** examines the strange role of special gold and silver coins—usually French, never Malagasy, sometimes antique—in the deaths of Sakalava royalty in northeast Madagascar, their transformation into spirits, and the validation of spirit mediums. So far from capitalism imposing its fetish upon Sakalava, or Sakalava critiquing capitalism, here “sanctity uses money to its own ends” and fetishizes royal power.

Attempts to retire the Indian Rupee as the standard currency in the East African Protectorate and replace it with the East African Shilling led to a crisis (1919–1921) in which the interests of British colonial rulers, Indian immigrants, and African indigenes were at odds. **Wambui Mwangi** disentangles the strands of an economic issue whose real structure, as the Rupee Crisis revealed, was political. The Rupee had been a money of trade that mediated differing systems of valuation and as such disrupted the colonial logic; the new money was now congruent with political authority and circulated in a “singular, bounded, homogenized place with London as primary economic and political referents.”

**COUNTING PEOPLE** Histories of statistics and of the census have much to gain by looking in unfamiliar places.

**David Darrow** closely traces the shifts in statistical ideas and practices in Russia that make way for the well-known theory of peasant economy devised by Chaianov. It is a story of the social construction of categories, but also of unintended consequences, as one category (area of allotment) gives way to another (land sown), whereby attempts to “make the heterogeneity of peasant life legible” to Moscow shift from a focus upon the commune to a focus upon the peasant household.

**Norbert Peabody** shows that, contrary to the prevailing view that the census in British India was a colonial imposition, systematic human inventories were not only carried out as part of the normal practice of precolonial states, but provided models that were folded into early colonial surveys, and were in some degree formative of colonial practice. From this fine case study of a seventeenth-century household census from a Rajput kingdom of the western desert (Marwar) and its appropriation by the British one comes to feel that transforming effects of colonialism are easily overstated and can only be truly measured with the help of expert study of the precolonial.

### CSSH DISCUSSION

**Philip Gorski**, in a review essay of four new works on early modern state formation, holds that we are in the midst of a third wave of explanatory styles, the first being socio-economic, the second geopolitical in character. The new style is more historical than social-scientific, emphasizing “the negotiated character of state power” and historical contingency while being skeptical about the possibility of finding a single explanation of state formation.