

Unframing the Binary: Introducing Bodies Beyond Binaries

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As a complex or as a matrix—and in contradistinction to accounts that render it mainly a supine subject—the body is an agent, a force, which *indexes* historical processes that, in turn, help to stabilize it as an object of violence, a resource for labor, a vessel of reproduction, an instrument of pleasure, and above all, a mode of power.¹

—Antoinette Burton, “The Body in and as World History”

In its constitutive precariousness, perceptual blind-spots, linguistic indeterminations, muscular tremors, memory lapses, bleedings, rages, and passions, the body as archive re-places and diverts notions of archive away from a documental deposit or a bureaucratic agency dedicated to the (mis)management of “the past”.²

—André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive”

In the past few decades, historical research has amply demonstrated that the body can be fruitfully employed as a prism through which to explore not only forms of social identity like race and gender but also phenomena linked to processes of modernity like nationalism, imperialism, and anticolonial struggles. *Bodies Beyond Binaries in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia* centers on histories of the body to understand the embodied making and unmaking of nations and empires within individual and collective bodies. Formal European empires claimed preeminence over much of the world in the nineteenth century, before endemic warfare and violence in the twentieth century led to a collapse and reconfiguration of power in Asia around imperially-minded nations like the United States, Japan, and China. By exploring how former colonial powers informed and interacted with nation states, as well as Indigenous, migrant, and displaced communities, this volume endeavors

¹ Antoinette Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 272–284, here 276.

² André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances”, *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 34.

to understand how embodied, human experiences of pain and pleasure, horror and exaltation, reveal the faultlines of inclusion and exclusion that colonial powers alternately promised or withheld, shaping postcolonial destinies.

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have explored how, like women and subaltern groups in local contexts, ruling powers regarded colonized people as being enmeshed in a bodily existence.³ In this, historians of the body owe a great debt to feminist scholars reinterpreting the insights of scholars such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said, most associated with the so-called “somatic turn”.⁴ Historians such as Anne McClintock, Ann Stoler, Antoinette Burton, and Theodore Jun Yoo, among others, have provided important insights about how this inescapable corporeality made the attainment of rationality—and by extension, autonomy and freedom—questionable for the colonized and contingent upon different variables.⁵ Bodies—raced, sexed, classed and ethnicized—were central sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised and on which the colonial rule of difference was inscribed. Race went beyond an association with skin color and incorporated many forms of somatized or biologized distinction. Certain physical traits came to denote inferiority, aberration, and anomaly due to essentialized gendered and sexual connotations. In the context of asymmetrical power relations, “natural” physical difference became the justification for social inequality. Investigating the body mainly as a symbolic and discursive signifier, scholars have challenged naturalistic essentialisms by shifting the focus on the socio-cultural constructions of the body.

The body has proved to be a compellingly complex and productive topic for historical interrogation, as it sheds light on the intricacies and entanglements of race,

³ For a concise discussion on the somatic turn in scholarship, see Bryan Turner, “Introduction: The Turn of the Body”, *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. idem (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012) 1–17; and Roger Cooter, “The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal”, *Arbor* 186, no. 743 (2010): 393–405. On feminist perspectives on the body a classic reading is Londa L. Schiebinger, *Feminism and the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Writings of Foucault*, eds. Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press 1997), 223–251; and “Governmentality”, in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, eds. Michel Foucault and James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2001), 3:201–222; Edward Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors”, *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 205–225.

⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and, by the same author, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities* (London: Routledge, 1999); Theodore Jun Yoon, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labour and Health, 1910–1945* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008).

gender, class, health, and age. These debates continue to resonate today with the fundamental changes in the relationships existing between bodies, technology, and society. The ambivalence of the body turns it into an object that is both inscribed and defies inscriptions. The body is both universal yet particular, individual yet collective, a living organism yet a cultural product, something timeless and at the same time profoundly historicized. Modern rational thinking has tried to erase this ambivalence and tension. Within science, we find the body framed as an object of nature to heal, within the broader economy as labor to employ, in the light of politics as matter to discipline and control, in religion as flesh to redeem, in psychology as unconscious to free and in sociology as the support of signs to transmit.⁶ And yet, the body remains stubbornly fluid, unwilling to be neatly categorized or siloed. The body is at the heart of organizing social behaviors and attitudes as well as power relations, confrontations with modernity, and colonial encounters. Yet the meaning and value of bodies shifts through identity formation, repression, and struggles for equality. Modern bodies' encounters with modernity, in particular, were profoundly mediated by the context of colonialism. Intrusive modern empires sought to impose their own notions of modernity and teach ways of behaving, clothing, moving and curating one's body that still shape the present.

As we interrogate and analyze the profound influence of colonization in Asia, this volume asks: can colonizing and colonized bodies and their histories escape binaries? Established dichotomies, Susan Gal has argued, hold the inherent possibility of opening up cracks and leave space for change, subversion, creativity, and negotiation, no matter how carefully traced and protected their boundaries appear.⁷ Colonial bodies, whether in perceptions, representations, and repressions, are largely subsumed within several binaries—including colonized/colonizing bodies, subaltern/hegemonic bodies, and mind/body. While these frames show how the body became the site and sign through which differences and hierarchies were reinforced or challenged, scholars often unintentionally reify this stratification, obscuring the coexistence and comingling between conquerors and conquered, as well as among these heterogeneous groups.

This edited collection aims to reframe this analysis through twelve case studies focusing on different Asian colonial and, to a lesser extent, postcolonial, settings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The wide variety of contributions provides a complex picture in which bodies are both symbolic *and* material, methods *and* archives, analytical *and* pedagogical tools—in short, that which defies or goes beyond binaries. In so doing, this book builds on, and owes a great deal to, Tony

⁶ Umberto Galimberti, *Il Corpo*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1983), 11–26.

⁷ Susan Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 77–95.

Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton's *Bodies in Contact*.⁸ Burton and Ballantyne's work has called into question what we know about colonized bodies, and we hope, with this volume, to open up further "cracks". They have argued that examining empires helps us make sense of global history—of its "monumental quality and its ultimately fragmented character"—through the historical subjects who lived with and through it.⁹ The volume sheds light on historical connections and disconnections between different contexts, and to local adaptations and idiosyncrasies. In this way, the volume contributes to a critical rethinking of ideas and practices surrounding bodies that, while being bound to identifiable sites, are products of transnational, inter-imperial and global encounters that often stabilized social and political hierarchies and inequalities.

The volume cannot claim to be all-encompassing in our encounter with the many bodies of colonial and postcolonial Asia, nor with the many ways of making use of the body and knowing the body in this large, diverse setting. Far from being a comprehensive study of the many meanings of the body in Asia, the book features chapters focused on very specific communities, individuals, knowledge, and practices. This specificity is in some ways a benefit rather than a limitation—an opportunity to highlight core themes and problems in the study of the body, and to point the way forward to additional research.

Embodiment Beyond Binaries

Bodies Beyond Binaries integrates varied perspectives on the body through analytical lenses such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, non-human, class, caste, emotion, health, and religion. While historiography on the body has acknowledged the centrality of such lenses, our volume engages with the intersection of, and dialogue between, these critical concepts, cutting across conventional scholarly categories. In this way, supposedly binary categories of corporeality such as ruled and unruly bodies, emotional and trained bodies, mobile and confined bodies, and respectable and deviant bodies are reconsidered, problematized, and transcended. In its exploration of bodies beyond binaries in colonial and postcolonial Asia, the volume reveals and addresses the ambiguous, malleable, mutable nature of such categories.

⁸ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁹ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: Bodies, Empires and World Histories", in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. idem (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 4.

This work brings together a range of contributions from established and emerging scholars working on different Asian regional and transregional foci. They have used the body—and epistemes, techniques, and practices surrounding it—as a productive topic for historical investigation on political, social, economic, and epistemological shifts. Through the case studies presented, the insights in this book are not simply relevant across Asia, but also question Western-centric and culturally essentialist perspectives on the history of the body across the world. This includes rejecting the notion of “the Asian body”—an immutable, “Oriental”, othered body presented as antithetical to “the Western body”.¹⁰ Rather than taking “the body” as self-evident, this volume recognizes bodies as historically and contingently produced through racialization, gendering, sexualization, and class conflict.¹¹ In this sense it is useful, as propounded by Angelica Pesarini in her study on Black “mixed race children” in Italian colonies in East Africa, to think of bodies as counter-archives that are capable of challenging dominant ways of knowing.¹² While Pesarini argues that bodies as archives can make visible the invisible knowledge subjugated in the institutional archive, we also claim that bodies can make invisible the “visible”, blurring boundaries and confounding dichotomies.

Groundbreaking works by David Arnold, Mark Harrison, Warwick Anderson, Hans Pols, and Ari Heinrich have pointed to the crucial role of modern science and medicine in categorizing colonized bodies as “naturally” inferior, thereby crystallizing power relations and marginalizing local forms of knowledge. Their research has shown how these disciplines, exploiting the growing authority of “Western” science, propounded as scientifically based theories that were largely social creations, thus concealing the politico-ideological context wherein conceptions of the body arise.¹³ Engendered for purposes of epistemic dominance, governance, and

¹⁰ See, for example, Bryan Turner and Zheng Yangwen, “Introduction: Piety, Politics and Philosophy: Asia and The Global Body”, in *The Body in Asia*, eds. idem (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–21; and, in the same volume, Susan Brownell, “The Global Body Cannot Ignore Asia”, 23–29. The chapters, however, provide a useful discussion on embodiment and the need to investigate the social practices that produce it.

¹¹ Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, 274. For an inspiring critique of the use of the term “body” as a term that generalizes across bodily difference and generates exclusion, see Gordon Hall, “Why I Don’t Talk about ‘The Body’: A Polemic”, *MONDAY Art Journal* 4 (April 2020), <https://monday-journal.com/why-i-dont-talk-about-the-body-a-polemic/>.

¹² Angelica Pesarini, “Making Visible the Invisible: Colonial Sources and Counter Body-Archives in the Boarding Schools for Black ‘Mixed Race’ Italian Children in Fascist East Africa”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 58, no. 5 (2022): 625–639.

¹³ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); David Arnold, ed., *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine, 1859–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

social engineering by the colonial imperatives that shaped relations between Asia and the West, scientific knowledge impacted the perceptions and experiences of “Other” people with their visible and invisible bodily differences turned into proofs and justifications of unjust orders, domination and power.

Colonial modernity, however, was not a “coherent system that could be imported with marginal adaptations”, as Miriam Silverberg suggests.¹⁴ Rather, modernity and colonialism were ever-shifting, ambiguous ideological forces whose inconsistencies colonized peoples and collectivities could exploit to resist, hijack, and selectively appropriate for different purposes.¹⁵ For, even though the agencies of modern colonial power strove to fix bodies and make them legible sites of legitimacy, bodies—Burton suggests—must be understood as “technologies of resistance and rule and much in-between.”¹⁶ Those whose bodies faced the most coercion, manipulation, and control from colonial states must not be reduced to passive recipients of ready-made epistemic intentions by Western historical actors.¹⁷ Bearing this in mind keeps us vigilant about the need to acknowledge cross-cultural interactions, networks and circulations in the production of colonial bodily knowledge as well as to be aware of the heterogeneous, fissured and fragmented nature of the “colonial”.¹⁸ At the same time, a focus on bodies provides us with a concrete space to which colonial discourses were tethered so that we can assess

Press, 1994); Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Hans Pols, *Medicine and Dutch East Indies Colonial Government: Social History of Health Care* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Ari Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Miriam Silverberg, quoted in Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender*, 3.

¹⁵ Miriam Silverberg, “Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin, and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story”, in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997): 255.

¹⁶ Burton, “The body in/as world history”, 274.

¹⁷ Exemplary of this approach to body politics in the Chinese context is Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005), challenging earlier arguments by Fan Hong in *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women’s Bodies in Modern China* (London and New York: Routledge 1997) on the positive influence of Western missionaries in liberating passive Chinese women from the ‘backward’ practice of footbinding.

¹⁸ A classical exploration of this topic is Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). We draw on the arguments made by Ann Laura Stoler in *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), in which she emphasizes the ontological uncertainty, contradiction, and fragility of the colonial archive. A useful discussion on the colonial archive from eighteenth-century New Spain is María Elena Martínez, “Sex and the Colonial Archive: The Case of ‘Mariano’ Aguilera”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (2016): 421–43.

their material and corporeal effects beyond the solely discursive and literary realms and within historical reality and specificity.¹⁹

This volume challenges the notion of intrinsic separateness between Asian and Western bodies. In so doing, the chapters that follow adopt varied spatial frameworks, from the global and the national down to the micro-spatial level. Taken together, these divergent scales invite us to identify several interconnected nodes, as well as acknowledge the significance of wider analytical frames such as the regional, imperial, and global. Broader contexts and connections thus become visible, allowing us to capture the influence of translocal, transnational, and transimperial factors on processes that, at first sight, might seem merely locally rooted.²⁰ Finally, *Bodies Beyond Binaries* attempts to go beyond sharp boundaries between the colonial and postcolonial periods, which often prove more limiting than instructive. The volume's broad temporal approach makes visible continuities and discontinuities in terms of discourses and materialities surrounding the body and corporeal models. In this way, it sheds light on how individuals and communities deployed the body to assert their power, challenge authority, or define or hide their identities across colonial and independent Asia.

Gendered Bodies between Nations and Empires

One, and perhaps the main, *fil rouge* of this book is the feminist critique that bodies, and other intimate aspects of life, are deeply political.²¹ Exploring the everyday and embodied activities of states and political ideologies, a rich body of literature has revealed the embodied nature of nationalism, which could take cues from, inform, or reject colonizing cultures.²² An important insight of this research is that gender

¹⁹ For an insightful discussion, see Robert J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 408–10.

²⁰ Here we follow Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Marrying Global History with South Asian History: Potential and Limits of Global Microhistory in a Regional Inflection”, *Comparativ* 29, no. 2 (2019): 52–77.

²¹ Among many others see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jennifer L. Fluri, “Bodies, Bombs and Barricades: Geographies of Conflict and Civilian (in)Security”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 2 (2011): 280–96; and Teri Chettiar, *The Intimate State: How Emotional Life Became Political in Welfare-State Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

²² Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour, and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992); Patricia Hill Collins, “Producing the Mothers of the Nation: Race, Class, and Contemporary US Population Policies”, in *Women, Citizenship, and Difference*, eds. N. Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed, 1999), 118–129; Tamar Mayer, “Embodied Nationalisms”, in *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, eds. Lynn Staeheli, Eleonore Kaufman, and Linda Peake (New York: Routledge, 2004),

binaries are often central to nation-building, from the formulation of violent martial masculinity to forge and protect the nation, to a glorification of national motherhood to reproduce it. Public spheres become sites for deliberating and debating ideals of masculinity and femininity in nascent nations.²³ In this context, women, their bodies and sexuality became catalysts of the re-assertion of hegemonic masculinity and of the regulation of femininity. Rather than providing actual care or protection, this instead manifested as a projection of ongoing danger for women due to the figure of the “enemy”, who could range from Muslims in Hindu nationalist discourse or communists in the New Order Indonesia.²⁴ Oral histories and ethnographies confirm that an emphasis on nationalist masculinization often goes hand-in-hand with gendered violence.²⁵ This does not necessarily eliminate women from taking part in nation-building or violence but does force them to carve out a space wherein to cautiously negotiate their marginalized role. For example, women can successfully mobilize the condition of motherhood to stake their claim in national politics or can act as warrior citizens to protect their land and defend their bodies as symbols of the nation to be protected from dishonor.²⁶

As several studies have explicated, anti-colonial nationalist movements creatively incorporated the ideals and values of hegemonic masculinity introduced by, or in dialogue with, imperialism. Against this background is the cult of the body that gained global momentum in the early twentieth century in Asian (semi)colonial settings. This must be largely understood as a response to imperial hierarchies

156–161; Véronique Benei, *Schooling Passions: Nation, History, and Language in Contemporary Western India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 2014).

²³ See the concise and insightful chapter by Barbara Molony, “Feminism and Gender Construction in Modern Asia”, in *A Companion to Global Gender History*, eds. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 2nd edition (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 527–544. See also Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997) and Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family”, *Feminist Review* no. 44 (1993): 61–80.

²⁴ For instance, Chandrima Chakraborty, *Masculinity, Asceticism and Hinduism: Past and Present Imaginings of India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011), 192–196; Alessandra Consolaro, “Alla ricerca del ‘vero uomo’: declinazioni della mascolinità di Narendra Modi”, *Kervan* 25, no. 2 (2021): 315–337; Saskia E. Wieringa, “The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia: Sexual Politics and Nationalism”, *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 70–92.

²⁵ See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Saskia E. Wieringa, “Sexual Slander and the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia: Political and Methodological Considerations”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 4 (2011): 544–565.

²⁶ Recent examples are the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina or the Mothers’ Front in Sri Lanka in the 1980s; Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism and Nationalism in India* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1–19. For an exploration of the feminization of violence in the Indian context, see Tanika Sarkar, “The Women of the Hindutva Brigade”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25, no. 4 (1993): 16–24.

and colonial ideologies, and as a project delineating claims to political autonomy from colonial subjects.²⁷ New ideas of “muscular” nationalism that emphasized physical culture as tied to political activism thus became powerful tools to challenge a supposedly superior masculinity, and to “perform” a nationalism based on a premise of hegemonic masculinity.²⁸ A substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated that the reinvention of the individual physique was increasingly viewed as vital to a grassroots regeneration of the collective national/communal body and, through it, to forging nations vis-à-vis colonial regimes and coloniality. Such developments were largely based on ideas that circulated globally—eugenicist ideas, fears of degeneration, and “survival of the fittest” mentalities impelled by Spencerian-organicist visions of society.²⁹ The fixation on male physicality—in terms of both strength and health—as a means to social revitalization is hardly surprising considering the centrality of the body in the colonial experience. Presenting their own bodies as sites and symbols of power deserving of deference from “their” colonial subjects, colonial officials across empires portrayed the colonized as having weak, effeminate, and inferior bodies.³⁰ That “the history of colonisation is a history of feminisation” explains not only the fact that gender identities and national identities developed in tandem, but also the powerful,

²⁷ Sebastian Conrad, “Globalizing the Beautiful Body: Eugen Sandow, Bodybuilding, and the Ideal of Muscular Manliness at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of World History* 32, no. 1 (2021): 95–125.

²⁸ Conor Heffernan, “What’s Wrong with a Little Swinging? Indian Clubs as a Tool of Suppression and Rebellion in Post-Rebellion India”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 7–8 (2017): 554–577; Joseph S. Alter, “Yoga at the Fin de Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a ‘Hindu’ Twist”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 759–776; Simon Creak, “Muscular Buddhism for Modernizing Laos”, *Journal of Lao Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 1–22; Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); and by the same author, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914–2004* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

²⁹ Among many others, see Joseph Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 3 (July 2004): 497–534; Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Hong Fan and Fan Hong, eds., *Sport, Nationalism and Orientalism: The Asian Games* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism*; Stefan Hübner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018); Harald Fischer-Tinè, “Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (circa 1900–40)”, *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2019): 512–559.

³⁰ A classic by now, Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) has influenced scholars working on several colonized regions.

explicit link between masculinity, physical culture, and anti-colonial political mobilization.³¹

This muscular nationalism, which established a connection between physical weakness and colonial humiliation, needed the feminine to articulate its manliness. As several chapters in this volume highlight, besides being symbolic bearers of tradition, honor, and identity, female bodies became a contested terrain where notions of morality, health, modernity, and national or communal belonging were negotiated. This contestation often created ambiguities that women could exploit, particularly in the case of physical culture and sport for girls and women.³² Overall, the fact that sport was identified with masculine prowess influenced not only women's access to sport and physical cultures but also the field of the history of sport, so that women appear, if at all, only *ex negativo*. Even the medical field, which opened up educational and employment opportunities for greater numbers of women in colonial spaces like Korea and India, still contracted women's identities around notions of "appropriate" gender roles.³³ While women doctors were aware of the man-made nature of women's perceived "weakness", they often subscribed to conventional views of women's roles in society to avoid being marginalized in a male-dominated society. In many ways, discourses around nationalism are essential to understanding colonial binaries and the limits placed on actual people living within them.

The India Question

One limitation of the present work reflects a broader challenge in the field: the dominance of India and the British Empire in contemporary thinking on colonial Asia. In fact, the origins of this study lie in an earlier project that was more limited in its spatial and chronological scope. From 2017 to 2018, "The body in colonial India" brought together historians of modern India in two workshops—the first one, co-organized by Teresa Segura-Garcia and Julia Hauser at the University of Kassel, and the second one at Goldsmiths, University of London. This earlier

³¹ Geraldine Meaney, "Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics", in *Irish Women's Studies Reader*, ed. Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 230–44, here 233.

³² For two further recent examples see Elena Valdameri, "Training Female Bodies for New India: Women's Physical Education between Global Trends and Local Politics in Colonial South Asia, c. 1900–1939", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 39, no. 11 (2022): 1240–1264; and Claire Nicolas, "On the Field: Race, Gender and Sports in Colonial Ghana", *Gender & History* (2024): 1–15.

³³ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2005); Sonja M. Kim, *Imperatives of Care: Women and Medicine in Colonial Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

project was born out of the realization that, over the previous decade, the body had received increasing academic attention in research on the history of colonialism in India. By the late 2010s, scholars had examined the interplay between the body and several areas of enquiry—most notably gender and sexuality, science and medicine, physical training and sports, and the consumption of food and stimulants. Collectively, their findings foregrounded the impact of colonialism on the bodies of colonizers and colonized alike. In this way, scholars established the centrality of the body to the colonial experience in India. What had been assessed to a lesser extent was the degree to which the body emerged as a discursive contact zone between Indian and European actors in the colonial period. The workshops advanced the historiographical debate by examining the role of knowledge in shaping bodily understandings and practices in colonial India. They did so in relation to a specific set of variables—gender, race, class, caste, and religion.

“The body in colonial India” went beyond an initial binary, that of “traditional” Indian versus “modern” European knowledge. In blurring this dichotomy, we highlighted the emergence of what Harald Fischer-Tiné has termed “pidgin knowledge”—that is, knowledge that is shaped by variegated, multidirectional processes of appropriation and reappropriation across several spatial settings. The existence of this diffused knowledge on the body in colonial India forced us to confront a far more complex, far-reaching picture that could hardly be addressed from an exclusively South Asian perspective. In this way, “The body in colonial India” was ultimately a call to challenge further binaries, from “colonizer” versus “colonized” to “India” versus “Europe”. It is the disruption of these dichotomies that led us to consider the role of the transimperial, the transanticolonial, and the transnational in and beyond the Indian subcontinent. *Bodies Beyond Binaries* thus expands our earlier inquiries beyond South Asia to explore the entanglements in terms of notions, practices, and epistemes across Asia.

Historians of colonial South Asia have explored the role of the body across a wide range of often overlapping analytical categories—from nationalism and anticolonialism to physical culture, from scientific theories to medical practice, from the consumption of food and stimulants to sartorial and bodily self-presentation. Spanning both corporal ideas and practices, these contributions have collectively established that the body was an important site of encounter, conflict, and resistance in colonial India. Joseph S. Alter has convincingly established that M. K. Gandhi’s concern with bodily concepts and practices—from sex and celibacy to diet reform, fasting, and naturopathy—are key to understanding Gandhian politics as well as Indian nationalist politics as a whole.³⁴ Hindu nationalists, as Meera

³⁴ Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

Nanda has shown, sought to reconcile what they identified as “Vedic” concepts of the body with supposedly Western scientific theories.³⁵ They sometimes encountered these Vedic ideas in the writings of Theosophical authors, who had in turn obtained them from supposedly canonical Hindu texts. Hindu nationalists incorporated these concepts into their discourse, arguing that the Vedas had discovered revolutionary theories thousands of years before European scientists. In the realm of bodily practices, physical culture—including newly created disciplines such as modern postural yoga—became tools to strengthen Indian bodies, often placed at the service of national renewal in the face of colonial rule.³⁶

If food was central to the colonial encounter in India, it was also a key site where tensions around Indian and European bodies were played out. E. M. Collingham has established that while in the early colonial era Europeans partook in local foodways, by the second half of the nineteenth century they predominantly drew sharp distinctions between what they understood as European and Indian food.³⁷ This argument has been confirmed by Parama Roy, where she has proposed that disgust and rejection became part and parcel of the colonial culinary encounter in India.³⁸ Cecilia Leong-Salobir’s comparative research on India, Malaysia and Singapore has broadly pointed towards the same conclusion.³⁹ Historians have also examined, however, Indian attitudes towards European foodways. As Utsa Ray has demonstrated, while some Indians were attracted to Western cuisine, others condemned it. Those who were opposed to the consumption of “polluting” European food included orthodox Hindu communities as well as members of the lower castes in search of upward social mobility.⁴⁰ These shifts around food were, as Collingham has pointed out, part of a much wider shift in bodily prescriptions that also included dress, domestic spaces, symbolic displays of power, and the social lives of the British in India. Food

³⁵ Meera Nanda, “Madame Blavatsky’s Children: Modern Hindu Encounters With Darwinism”, in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. Jim R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Brill: Leiden, 2010), 279–344.

³⁶ Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Harald Fischer-Tiné, *The YMCA in Late Colonial India: Modernization, Philanthropy and American Soft Power in South Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

³⁷ E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); and, by the same author, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Cecilia Y. Leong-Salobir, *Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

⁴⁰ Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

was also relevant for the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies within the caste system, and the biases and material inequities of military recruiting.⁴¹ In this way, the body emerges as an agent of historical change with a leading role in the making of (colonial) inequalities along the lines of race, gender, caste and class.

In terms of another type of consumption, that of drugs and stimulants, both upper-caste Indians and Europeans were active in anti-vice movements.⁴² Through these tools of social control, they attempted to shape the bodies of several social groups, including European soldiers and Indian laborers.⁴³ The British colonial preoccupation with the consumption of stimulants extended well beyond the disciplining of Indian bodies. As Harald Fischer-Tiné has established, British administrators were concerned by the white “subaltern” communities of the Indian subcontinent, whose bodies threatened the “colonizer” versus “colonized” dichotomy that ideologically underpinned imperial rule.⁴⁴

While this survey of the historiography of the body in colonial India cannot be all-encompassing, it is worth pointing out that dress has constituted another important domain of historical research on the body in colonial South Asia.⁴⁵ Emma Tarlo has explored the role of dress in the making of imperial authority in nineteenth-century India, as well as in the mass nationalism of the interwar years.⁴⁶ Nira Wickramasinghe’s findings on colonial Sri Lanka have similarly underscored the symbolic meaning of dress in the island’s nationalist politics in the late colonial period.⁴⁷ These contributions have established that, through fashion and clothing, the body emerged as a cultural artifact that expressed and bolstered both the imperial and the nationalist political projects.

⁴¹ Harald Fischer-Tiné, Julia Hauser and Ashok Malhotra, “Introduction: Feeding Bodies, Nurturing Identities: The Politics of Diet in Late Colonial and Early Post-Colonial India”, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2021), 107–116; Kate Imy, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁴² Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurennev, eds, *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ Jessica R. Piley et al., eds, *Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890–1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and ‘Immorality’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴⁴ Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and White Subalternity in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009).

⁴⁵ Charu Gupta, “Fashioning’ Swadeshi: Clothing Women in Colonial North India”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 42 (2012): 76–84; Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka* (Orient Blackswan, 2003).

There is another area of historical enquiry in which South Asian scholars have dominated the field, beyond the history of the body. This is the history of emotions. Scholars working on this area have stressed that emotions, rather than being universal, are the products of specific cultural environments. The relationship between the/a body and the culture and environment which surrounds it is critical to this production. Emotions play a critical role in ideas about “civility”, “modernity” and “progress”, suggesting that certain culturally-constructed emotions were woven into the process of colonization. Margrit Pernau’s work has highlighted the ways in which this is necessarily a complicated narrative. Rather than being controlled or contained, in many respects emotions intensified and came to the fore in nineteenth century India.⁴⁸ Razak Khan has argued for the centrality of the category of “space” in the history of emotions, underscoring the importance of local dynamics vis-à-vis often homogenizing units such as “nation” and “region”.⁴⁹ Véronique Benei has explored how emotions such as pride, resentment, nostalgia, and belonging are manifestations of an embodied “banal nationalism” that are negotiated, mobilized and expressed from a very early age within the educational sphere in contemporary western India. Such emotions, Benei has argued, shape individuals’ perceptions of their own identities and their relationships with broader collective identities, such as linguistic and regional communities.⁵⁰ In this way, the study of emotions has much to offer to the closely interlinked project of the study of the body, especially in terms of embodiment and performative emotional practices.

The history of the senses also sheds light on the all-pervasive nature of political and socialization processes. In his comparative study of India and the Philippines, Andrew Rotter has highlighted how race was constructed in part through senses with inferior-deemed races. Rotter has explored the senses of smell and sound as embodied cultural phenomena.⁵¹ meLê Yamomo’s sound history of colonial Manila and the broader Asia-Pacific region has examined the performing bodies of circulating musicians—transimperial, transnational bodies on the move that generated and disseminated new forms of cultural consumption under the

⁴⁸ Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Margrit Pernau, Benno Gammerl and Philipp Nielsen, eds., *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity* (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

⁴⁹ Razak Khan, *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and, by the same author, “The Social Production of Space and Emotions in South Asia”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 5 (2015): 611–33.

⁵⁰ Véronique Benei, *Schooling Passions: Nation, History, and Language in Contemporary Western India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁵¹ Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses. Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press 2019).

umbrella of “modernity”.⁵² Anticolonial politics can also be productively studied through the senses, as explored by Kama MacLean in her project on the sounds of mass mobilization—including the political speeches of nationalist leaders such as Gandhi—in colonial India.⁵³ Together, then, histories of emotions and of the senses are particularly fruitful tools for thinking about bodily materiality in relation to other bodies, space, and the environment.

Towards a Trans-Imperial History of Bodies

As discussed, the earlier “body in colonial India” frame still pointed towards the role of the global and the transimperial in producing a nuanced, sophisticated understanding of corporeal concepts and practices within and beyond the Indian subcontinent. *Bodies Beyond Binaries* also addresses the scholarly gap around the body across Asia in a transimperial perspective. This transimperial approach must necessarily consider research on the body produced in a variety of spatial and temporal contexts. This ambitious undertaking, of course, is still limited by differing access to archives, language training, research travel, and other material inequities across the historical profession. As a result, while this volume does not capture each colonial and postcolonial space context equally, it does highlight the benefit of a broader geographic scope and the avenues for further research.

Historians of early modern and modern European empires in Asia have examined the interplay between the body and colonialism across various chronological and spatial contexts. This includes the contributions of scholars of women and sexuality who have explored how the arrival of Iberian colonizers and missionaries from Portugal and Spain to Southeast Asia led to transformations in the gendered bodily practices of local populations, as well as how early Iberian perceptions of gendered difference contributed to emerging discourses of racial otherness.⁵⁴

⁵² meLê yamomo, *Sounding Modernities: Theatre and Music in Manila and the Asia Pacific, 1869–1946* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and idem, “La Sonoridad del Mundo en Manila del siglo XIX: A Synesthetic Listening to Early Globalization in Manila”, in *Transnational Philippines: Cultural Encounters in Philippine Literature in Spanish*, eds. Axel Gasquet and Rocío Ortuño Casanova (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024).

⁵³ Kama MacLean, “(What) Can the Subaltern Hear? The Sounds of Mass Mobilization in Interwar India” (paper presented at German Historical Institute, London, 21 February 2023).

⁵⁴ For the role of the body in early modern gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia, see Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); and Carolyn Brewer, “Baylan, Asog, Transvestism, and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines”, *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 2 (1999), 1–5; and, by the same author, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521–1685* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). For the construction of

Research on the body in Europe's early modern empires has also gone well beyond Asia, with explorations on the encounter between Jesuit missionaries and local populations in the Mariana Islands, in the Western Pacific. Blending historical research with archeological fieldwork, scholars working on this setting have established the centrality of the body in the making of gender identities, as well as in the dynamics of cultural contact and colonial domination.⁵⁵ For the modern period, historians of France's colonial ventures in Southeast Asia have convincingly established that imperial policies deeply impacted gender and sexuality in the region. Imperial gender politics instituted a framework of domination that empowered white sexual desire over the commodified bodies of both local and—in a transimperial connection—Japanese women in French Indochina.⁵⁶

colonial visions of difference in the early modern Philippines, see Sebastian Kroupa, "Reading Beneath the Skin: Indigenous Tattooing in the Early Spanish Philippines, ca. 1520–1720", *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 3 (September 2022): 1252–1287; and Greg Bankoff, "Big Men, Small Horses: Ridership, Social Standing and Environmental Adaptation in the Early Modern Philippines", in *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Edwards, Karl A. E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 99–120. For the Portuguese case, see Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, "Gendering Practices and Possibilities in Portugal and Its Empire during the Early Modern Period", in *Gendering the Portuguese-Speaking World: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 49–70; and Amélia Polónia and Rosa Capelão, "Women and Children on Board: The Case of the Carreira Da Índia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in *Privacy at Sea: Global Studies in Social and Cultural Maritime History*, ed. Natacha Klein Käfer (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 41–76.

⁵⁵ Sandra Montón-Subías and Boyd Dixon, "Margins are Central: Identity and Indigenous Resistance to Colonial Globalization in Guam", *World Archaeology* 53, no. 3 (2021): 419–434; Sandra Montón-Subías and Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "A Body Is Worth a Thousand Words: Early Colonial Dress-Scapes in Guam", *Historical Archaeology* 55, no. 2 (2021): 269–289; Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "Sexual (Mis) Encounters in the Mariana Islands: Tracing Sexuality in Spanish Policies and CHamoru Responses to Contact and Colonization, 1521–1769" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2022); Verónica Peña Filiu, "Foodways, Missionaries, and Culinary Accommodation in the Mariana Islands (1668–74)", *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9, no. 2 (2022): 263–280; Verónica Peña Filiu and Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "Sexo, comida y colonialismo en las islas Marianas", in *I estoria-ta: Guam, las Marianas y la cultura chamorra*, ed. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura y Secretaría General Técnica, Centro de Publicaciones, 2021).

⁵⁶ Pascal Blanchard et al. (eds), *Sexe, race & colonies: La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018); Michael G. Vann, "Sex and the Colonial City: Mapping Masculinity, Whiteness, and Desire in French Occupied Hanoi", *Journal of World History* 28, no. 3–4 (2017): 395–435. See also the special issue "Commodified Women's Bodies in Vietnam and Beyond", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012)—in particular, Christian Henriot, "Supplying Female Bodies: Labor Migration, Sex Work, and the Commoditization of Women in Colonial Indochina and Contemporary Vietnam": 1–9; Frédéric Roustan, "Mousmés and French Colonial Culture: Making Japanese Women's Bodies Available in Indochina": 52–105; and Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze": 10–51.

As this research suggests, attitudes about sexual intimacy and gender binaries flowed between empires and evolved and regressed across time and space. Barbara Watson Andaya and Michael Peletz have argued that sexual intimacies and kinship networks between local communities and traders in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries depended on a multiplicity of gender identities long before European presence. These forged and maintained transnational familial connections.⁵⁷ However, as Dutch and British economic interests dominated the social and economic landscape of Asia, a growing number of troops and traders commodified and extracted women's sexual labor through enslavement and coercion.⁵⁸ For Indrani Chatterjee, this was the result of trading companies' emphasis on heredity inheritance and natal legitimacy to bolster plantation economies and supplant existing networks of devotion, education, and exchange.⁵⁹ Coerced sex became a common feature as European empires seized control over much of Asia in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ By the twentieth, Japanese occupation forces in East and Southeast Asia similarly conscripted *ianfu*, euphemistically referred to as "Comfort Women," for sexual enslavement.⁶¹ For Takashi Fujitani, this was in part to counter the potential fragmentation of Japan's multiethnic army by encouraging Korean conscripts to overcome ethnic differences through shared power over women.⁶² This pattern continued with an increased American military presence across East and Southeast Asia during the Cold War, as narratives of soldiers' "saving"—or controlling—women with their sexual prowess proved common.⁶³ In this way, a

⁵⁷ Kate Imy, "Transactions: Sex, Power, and Resistance in Colonial South and Southeast Asia", in *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, ed. Chelsea Schields and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Routledge, 2021), 78–93.

⁵⁸ Michael G Peletz, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 87, 91; Barbara Watson Andaya, "From Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 11–34, at 12, 15, 17.

⁵⁹ Indrani Chatterjee, "When 'Sexuality' Floated Free of Histories in South Asia", *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (November 2012): 945–62, at 951.

⁶⁰ Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

⁶¹ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Muta Kazue, "The 'Comfort Women' Issue and the Embedded Culture of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Japan", *Current Sociology* 64, no. 4 (2016): 620–636.

⁶² The Japanese terms *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) and *ianfu* (comfort woman) are most common. Katharine McGregor, "Emotions and Activism for Former So-Called 'Comfort Women' of the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands East Indies", *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (2016): 67–78.

⁶³ Gregory Daddis, *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure Magazines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.

trans-imperial frame elucidates the continuities and disjunctures between colonial powers as they navigated binary thinking across time and colonial spaces.

The (binary) framework of inclusion and exclusion is often a central organizing feature of empires. However, the myriad ways these categories were, and are, defined and redefined across empires is particularly relevant to this study. Moreover, a transimperial comparison with, for example, the Japanese empire or the American empire in the Philippines, helps elucidate the ways in which ideas or practices crossed imperial boundaries, transforming or transmuting as they went. As Hanscom and Washburn highlight in *The Affect of Difference: Representations of Race in East Asian Empire*, while the Japanese empire rebuffed Western notions of biological racism, it nevertheless constructed a racialist ideology which produced notions of difference—they utilize the framework of “affect” to describe this construction of a colonial shibboleth.⁶⁴ The close attention paid by the imperial state to personal matters such as “language, dress, romance, family and hygiene” was common to imperial formations or regimes which sought to produce or provoke difference through these systems of inclusion or exclusion.⁶⁵ In their volume, and in work which followed, historians of Japanese imperialism have examined constructions of neo-racism (along lines outlined by Etienne Balibar) as well as the layers of internal colonialism as the Japanese imperial state constructed the racial and sexual frontiers which shaped relations with groups such as the Ainu in what is now northern Japan.

Another challenge to colonial binaries is that many people existed at the intersection of colonial power structures. For Indrani Chatterjee, the English East India Company initially encouraged relationships between white men and Indian women to reproduce a labor force of mixed race civil servants, plantation workers, domestic servants, and soldiers in the eighteenth century. The categories of “legitimacy” and “orphan” reflected the commodification of sex to delegitimize women’s rights as mothers.⁶⁶ Separating “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children assigned unequal values to the identical labor of childbirth performed by both enslaved women and wives. For Ann Stoler, Dutch colonial leaders similarly oscillated between supporting and rejecting interracial unions. Initially, they supported marriage with Asian women to prevent paying Europeans the higher wages to support European wives. At the same time, Eurasian and Indo-European children were widely stigmatized within and beyond colonial Asia.⁶⁷ Metis children—including Eurasians—had to fight to

⁶⁴ Christopher P. Hanscom and Dennis Washburn, *The Affect of Difference: Representations of Race in East Asian Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ Chatterjee, Indrani. “Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India”, *Subaltern Studies* 10 (1999): 49–97, at 50–51, 59.

⁶⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134–61, at 143.

claim their Europeanness through a combination of “physical features of race” and a “moral certainty” derived from a child’s name, clothing, education, and upbringing.⁶⁸

Even identities considered transgressive by modern actors have had shifting relationships to power over time. Evelyn Blackwood has discussed cross-regional identities of ritual practitioners such as the *banci* and *waria* (Indonesia) and *paway* (Malaysia) that were part of priestly classes adopting multiple gender roles and performances for ceremonial purposes. Unlike in European contexts, these roles were at the center, rather than the margins, of society. However, as European colonial powers, and reformist religious groups, criticized such performances, gender transgression increased to resist colonial sexual regimes.⁶⁹ Similarly, Adnan Hossain and Anjali Arondekar note that the gender-nonconforming *Hijra* community in India, to be discussed further by Howard Chiang, served powerful roles such as tax collectors for the Mughal empire in India. While this added to justifications of an “extermination” campaign under the British, Hossain notes that *Hijra* in Bangladesh continue to challenge binaries by interpreting Islamic knowledge through Hindu and Muslim rituals and mythologies.⁷⁰ In this way, non-binary thinking ebbed and flowed before, during, and after formal colonization across vast geographic distances and became vehicles for resisting and justifying colonial power.

Thematic Sections and Chapter Overview

The chapters in this volume speak to and build upon many themes raised by other scholars, providing a fresh and innovative approach to the history of the body and colonialism “beyond binaries”. To do justice to the vibrancy of the field and its diverse approaches, we have divided the chapters into four thematic sections. The first, “Ruled and Unruly”, tackles the colonial binary of ruler/ruled to interrogate the limits of colonial governance on dictating the meaning and value of diverse bodies within and beyond colonial spaces. Howard Chiang takes readers through the conceptual challenges of interpreting trans histories in Asia without relying on

⁶⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 3 (1992): 514–51 at 515–16, 521, 525, 532–3.

⁶⁹ Evelyn Blackwood, “Gender Transgression in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 4 (2005): 849–79, at 851, 852, 864–865.

⁷⁰ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), Chapter 2, 67–96; Adnan Hossein, “De-Indianizing Hijra: Intra-regional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space”, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 321–31; Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c.1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

frames and terminology from outside Asia. As a result, Chiang offers “transtopia” as an interpretive alternative to what contemporary observers might consider exclusively transgender identities. This frame helps us understand the multiplicity of gender transgressions that existed in, among other places, China, India and the Ottoman Empire.

Samiksha Sehrawat continues to interrogate the ungovernability of bodies through a case study of colonial clinics in India. By showing South Asian patients’ embodied actions to resist, question, or challenge medical practices, Sehrawat shows the limitations of colonial control. At the same time, the influence of colonial medical practices had a profound influence on postcolonial India, blurring the boundaries of colonial and postcolonial bodily surveillance. Chie Ikeya’s study of the Burmese Muslim similarly transcends the colonial/postcolonial divide by interrogating discourses and legal definitions of Burmese Muslims. British legal codes that demonized Muslim bodies as outsiders continued to shape postcolonial definitions of the “true” Burmese body and the inability of Burmese Muslims to truly belong. Such framing enabled colonial and postcolonial state violence, destabilizing and undermining, rather than confirming, state power.

The second section, “Emotional and Trained”, shows the dichotomy between institutional regimes that sought to discipline and suppress emotional instincts that would challenge colonialism, while also enabling students to gain tools that could embolden anticolonial resistance. Margrit Pernau examines the influence of global New Education movements in colonial India’s Jamia Millia Islamia, to demonstrate how education functioned beyond a simple colonizer-colonized binary. Focusing on the prominent Muslim minority community in India and the global, especially German, influences on education and training, Pernau argues that students and administrators constantly sought new methods and models to sate physical and emotional needs. These could include, but often went beyond, dominant colonial or nationalist imperatives.

Sara Legrandjacques similarly considers the impact of global educational movements on the minds and bodies of those who imagined themselves to be global students rather than colonial subjects. Examining Indochinese students traveling within and beyond the French Empire, Legrandjacques establishes that students simultaneously engaged with bodily practices that could frame them as Western, nationalist, anti-colonial, or pan-Asian. In turn, Chinese students who visited the educational hub of Hanoi became agents of diplomacy that could strengthen or undermine French imperial agendas. Likewise, Julia Hauser shows that Aurobindo Ghose and Mirra Alfassa used a French colonial space in Pondicherry to offer ways of thinking about the body that could challenge British colonial rule in India. Yet their goals were often framed as humanitarian rather than nationalist, offering multiple models for using and reframing gender to challenge dominant norms

about gender and the body. In so doing, an institution created in the high tide of colonial rule simultaneously could appeal to radically different political ideologies, from communism to Nazism. This gave Indian spiritual and physical culture leaders an international appeal that went beyond, but was still connected to, colonialism.

The third section, “Mobility and Confinement”, explores the paradoxical ways in which colonial states commanded the right to move, or limited the mobility of, people, without ever fully controlling the meaning of these journeys. Teresa Segura-Garcia’s examination of Catalan travelers through India traces how well-connected men from Barcelona navigated their proximity to, and distance from, whiteness and Europeaness. Throughout their travels in elite spaces with British and Indian companions, they alternated between identifying with, and distancing themselves from, the diverse Indian residents that they encountered. In turn, residents and colonial administrators questioned where these southern European men fit within colonial categories of whiteness and masculinity.

While mobility exposed men to a variety of ideas about race and gender, many women felt like objects of debate because of their seclusion. For Elena Valdameri, many medical authorities saw *purdah*, or female seclusion, as detrimental to women’s health. This was especially important in debates over the size and shape of a woman’s pelvis and the perception that *purdah* severely curtailed women’s reproductive potential. Many nationalist leaders and medical professionals saw women not only as the keepers of tradition but as builders of the next generation, making limitations to their reproductive abilities harmful to the nation. Women, in turn, rejected these restrictions by creatively establishing their own norms for physical fitness. Kate Imy, meanwhile, explores the uncertainty of confinement for white, Asian, and Eurasian internees in Singapore during the Second World War after British colonial leaders quickly surrendered to the Imperial Japanese Army. While white internees tried to retain their power in Japanese camps, South Asian soldiers and Eurasian civilians struggled to understand where to invest their trust and loyalty. This proved challenging in the midst of contending colonial agendas that shared a penchant for racism and violence.

The final thematic section, “Respectability and Deviancy”, shows the often arbitrary lines between licit and illicit bodily performances under colonialism. Erica Wald’s examination of pig-sticking explores how a pursuit of elite Indian rulership became a mark of imperial pride and masculinity for British leaders. This depended on multiple hierarchies and binaries between ruler/ruled and hunter/prey. It also showed British dependence on Indian bodies, their inability to fully control animal species, and the often meaningless yet forcefully policed boundaries between the permissible and the illegal.

For Denise Lim, the figure of the European “vagrant” was equally problematic in colonial Singapore, existing at the boundaries of acceptable masculinity and

racial humiliation. If race was a marker of colonial rule and class privilege, then the migration of destitute Europeans called colonial racial hierarchy into question. By contrast, Laura Díaz-Esteve examines how westernized performances of elite masculinity by Filipino revolutionaries came under criticism during the Spanish-American War. Americans initially saw such men as modern representatives of liberation for resisting Spanish rule. Over time, the same men became “wild” and “savage” for protesting American intervention. In this way, these chapters show how identical behaviors could be deviant or respectable depending on who performed them.

New Directions

As this discussion makes clear, historians of the body, like historians more broadly, must act as disciplinary magpies, drawing extensively on interdisciplinary research, to speak to the broad range of issues that embodied histories of colonialism entail. One example of this (among many) can be drawn from related work on the mingling and embodiments of human and nonhuman interactions. Here, the work of Donna Haraway, working across science and technology studies, has been particularly influential. Haraway has explored the entanglements of human and nonhuman—suggesting that there has always been an interspecies dependence. More than this, Haraway has demonstrated that it is folly to suggest that we are *singularly* human, just as it is to suggest that any animal is singularly animal, “every species is a multispecies crowd.”⁷¹ Joining Haraway, more recent work has suggested an “animal turn” in history, with particular focus on the relationship between animals and empires⁷². Sivasundaram has reminded us of the ways in which race, so central to our understanding of empire, “can be conceived differently if the human and nonhuman are integrated: to be an imperialist necessitated the working out of the boundaries of the human”.⁷³

⁷¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 165.

⁷² Rohan Deb Roy, *Malarial Subjects: Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in British India, 1820–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani (eds.), *Animalia: An Anti-imperial Bestiary for Our Times* (Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 2020); Jonathan Saha, *Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Sujit Sivasundaram, “The Human, The Animal and the Prehistory of COVID-19”, *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 (November 2020): 295–316.

⁷³ Sujit Sivasundaram, “Imperial Transgressions: The Animal and Human in the Idea of Race”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015): 156–172.

Recent work in the history of emotions, fat studies, and disability studies has similarly suggested the myriad ways in which we might continue probing embodiment in colonial Asia.⁷⁴ Kathleen LeBesco has urged us to rethink the ways in which we understand and study fatness. Fat, she reminds us, is political, not to be confined to studies of medicine or aesthetics.⁷⁵ Writing of disability histories through literature, Erica Fretwell has argued the ways in which “limitation” of the/a body opens up new possibilities. “Disability”, Fretwell writes, “is the lived reality of marginalization and an inherently creative activity.”⁷⁶ As Matthew Kohrman’s work on disability in modern China indicates, these questions are tied not only to access to public space and political engagement in modern nation states, but how states define themselves.⁷⁷ The chapters in this volume represent an effort, though incomplete, to track not only the interconnectedness of colonial and postcolonial thinking about the body, but to push the disciplinary, geographic, and temporal boundaries that limit our understanding of human change and continuity.

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⁷⁴ Margrit Pernau, Benno Gammerl and Philipp Nielsen (eds.), *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); May Friedman, Carla Rice and Jen Rinaldi (eds.), *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (eds.), *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁷⁵ Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolt Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Erica Fretwell, “How to Read Disabled Bodies in History”, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Literature and the Body*, ed. Travis Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 167. For more on disability and empire, see Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: Impairment and Otherness Across Britain and Its Empire, c. 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

⁷⁷ Matthew Kohrman, *Bodies of Difference: Experiences of Disability and Institutional Advocacy in the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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