Editors’ Note

Timothy Mitchell and Anupama Rao

This issue begins by revisiting the interwar as a formative period for understanding transnational histories of Islamic modernism and addressing postapartheid South Africa as a place of unfinished business, political and existential. We consider political histories of internationalism and anticolonialism under the rubric of an occasional section titled “Provocations.” The first of two essays on the topic appears in this issue and will be followed in subsequent issues by a set of responses and critical engagements.

Two essays in the section “Heresy, Religious Freedom, and Muslim Renewal” consider the case of the Ahmadiyya, the transimperial movement that emerged in north India in the late nineteenth century. Sadia Saeed argues that the Ahmadis skillfully managed charges of heresy by taking refuge in liberal imperialism’s commitments to religious freedom and through deterritorial challenges to colonial jurisdiction. Teena Purohit questions entrenched theological critiques of the Ahmadis by contrasting the writings of Muhammad Iqbal with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and reflecting on the idea of heresy as a sociological phenomenon.

The essays in the section “Apartheid Reckoning” ask what it means to be living in “post” apartheid times as a period haunted by the unresolved ghosts of apartheid. This is an issue we hope to examine on an ongoing basis, and we invite contributions that add to our understanding of the event of apartheid and its ongoing reverberations in South African society.

Lucy Graham’s reading of Jacob Zuma’s rape trial in conjunction with Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If” shows how colonial patriarchy persists in contemporary South African iterations of masculinity and power. Robin Turner’s article on rural land and natural resource struggles in the Limpopo and North West provinces locates apartheid-era forced removals in a longer-term history of racial dispossession. Neville Hoad shifts our focus to an urban context and analyzes Lauren Beukes’s dystopian speculative fiction novel Zoo City and its allegories of environmental disaster, HIV/AIDS, xenophobic violence, and belonging.

Clare Counihan’s interview with artist Nomusa Makhubu reflects on the role of the artist in the context of apartheid and postapartheid with specific attention to the medium of photography. Counihan directs our attention to the ways in which Makhubu’s work deals with the black body and specters of violence unleashed by colonial pasts as these bleed into the present. Like Hoad, Graham, and Turner, Makhubu examines the racial and economic fault lines that persist beyond the “rainbow nation” narrative by reading public spaces and sociality in South Africa.
In our new section titled “Provocations,” Partha Chatterjee explores the complex relationship between nationalism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism from the perspective of South Asia. In our next issue, volume 36, number 3, a companion essay by Christine Philiou will consider similar themes through the prism of the demise of the Ottoman Empire. We invite our readers to submit responses for publication.

This issue’s Kitabkhana discusses Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *The Calling of History*, which considers the institution of history in late colonial India through the prism of the intense, lifelong friendship between Jadunath Sarkar and S. G. Sardesai. Contributors respond to Chakrabarty’s call for critically reexamining the present and past disciplinary history in India by reflecting on the nature of writing history, the epistolary relationship between Sarkar and Sardesai, and the centrality of intellectual friendship to the social life of history. Others respond to Chakrabarty’s writing on positivism and scientific history by asking whether there is a historical ontology of “truth” or if the quest for knowledge is inevitably fractured along geographic and disciplinary lines.