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## Editor's Introduction: Memory, the Postcolony, and the Origins of the Global South

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

## Memory, the Postcolony, and the Origins of the Global South

The global south, rather than a fixed geographic location, is better understood as a metaphor for global and interstate inequality. It can be located in between objective circumstances of global injustice and the subjective responses of people to these. On the one hand, realities like the unfair world trade regime lay the conditions for political struggle and social change. On the other hand, responses to these conditions create the political and social movements for whom the term “global south” becomes relevant.

As a provisional project, intellectuals and activists on the ground are continually redefining the global south. It would be remiss for an academic publication to limit the term's political and intellectual potentialities by defining it *a priori*, because it evolves alongside multi-scalar political developments (from local to global). As such, like its antecedent terms, the term “global south” may one day lose its currency. However, as long as global and international inequalities of wealth and political power exist, terms like it will remain relevant. Hence this journal—which is not only a journal about the global south, but one published within it—aiming to represent its diverse voices.

An articulation of the global south requires a phenomenology of those who locate themselves in it and its histories. It is the goal of this publication to uncover the various ways in which people make sense of, resonate with, and embody the global south. In the coming issues, we will not only be publishing empirical work on social transformations as they occur in sites of marginality and inequality; we will also feature work that interrogates the meaning of change in the world's underdeveloped countries and regions. Doing this requires revisiting beginnings and origins.

If the global south refers to a collectivity, what common experiences hold it together? This maiden issue of *Social Transformations: Journal*

*of the Global South* locates the genesis of the global south in the experience of colonization. States associated with the “third world,” the “developing world,” and the “global south” have almost entirely had to contend with the legacies of a political project that began when the Spanish and Portuguese empires subjugated the peoples of New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In many ways, the Western gaze produced the global south, as the colonial project created now underdeveloped nations in Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa.

Solidarities among the countries of the global south have also emerged largely as reactions to colonialism, its vestiges, and its reinventions. The birth of “Third Worldism” in the Bandung conference of 1955, for instance, was a reaction to the “neocolonialism” of the Cold War superpowers and their allies. And while the divisions of the Cold War no longer exist, “antiglobalization” activists continue to decry as “neocolonial” the policies of institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The articles in this issue examine mnemonic frames deployed to negotiate the traumas and dislocations of postcoloniality. Studying colonialism through the lens of “memory,” however, is not a simple revisiting of the colonial past. Memories, especially those produced and nurtured by collectives of people, are not frozen in time. Rather, they are discourses about the past that structure contemporary life.

The violences of history continue to reconfigure contemporary subjectivities. In their article on Congolese hip-hop in Belgium, for instance, Mertens, Goedertier, Goddeeris, and de Brabanter reveal how the already divided colonial subject bifurcates further in the diaspora. This process is evident in hip-hop songs that telescope the colonial trauma of the homeland via the metropole.

The most basic impulse of postcolonial memory is to challenge the assumptions of colonial logic. However, these challenges are already prefigured by the discourses they react to. Rizwan Akhtar’s reading of Anita Desai’s novel *Clear Light of Day* as a “counteractive” mnemonic strategy can only be conducted alongside an analysis of a colonial novel like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In the postcolony, where the colonial past is embedded in the social concerns of the present, reading against the imperial grain is tantamount to retelling the stories of the past.

There are commonalities in the counternarratives of the postcolony simply because they react to similar phenomena. And yet the methodologically nationalist bent of much postcolonial writing

has prevented many scholars from parlaying their observations about specific geographies into broader observations about the postcolony. If we are, however, to interpret broad, unifying categories such as the postcolony or the global south, we require more works like Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas's, which show how mnemonic frameworks can transcend their places of origin. Through her analysis of the work of visual artist Pritika Chowdhry, Micieli-Voutsinas reveals how memories of partition in South Asia occur within the same historical continuum as other partition memories across the world.

The ghosts in the global south, however, are not only those of the direct experience of colonialism. Even after independence, many postcolonies operated under fragile political conditions, largely produced by the contradictions of the colonial period. Vanessa Hearman's unearthing of collective memory during the repressive Suharto period in Indonesia and Meynardo Mendoza's analysis of transitional justice in post-Marcos Philippines point to another experience shared by many postcolonies and countries of the global south: violent domestic authoritarianism. Both Suharto and Marcos, argue leftwing analysts, served as puppets of Western capital, thus perpetuating third world dependence on foreign powers. In this sense, authoritarian rulers such as Marcos and Suharto are signifiers of the interstate inequality that subtends imaginings of the global south.

All the articles in this issue, as such, elucidate various ways in which subjectivities of resistance are articulated in the global south. They represent the origins of the concept, which this journal seeks to unpack.

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Associate Editor