

Introduction: Making Sense of Empire

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INTRODUCTION



Introduction: Making Sense of Empire

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ABSTRACT

This essay serves as an introduction to a special section on the senses in late colonial India. Participating in the act of decolonising sensory studies, this collection explores the intersections between post-colonial studies and sensory studies by paying particular attention to the sensorium of the colonised. In the historical and geographical context of colonial South Asia, the senses are embedded in acts of distinction across race, caste, class, and bodily and gender hierarchies. The collection intervenes by paying attention to the relationship between power and sense perception as it finds register in media, scientific practices and literature of the period. Across the section, we suggest that making sense of empire is also to make sense of the sensory regimes of empire that have resonances in the contemporary.

KEYWORDS

Decolonising; empire; India; post-colonial studies; power; sense perception; sensory regime; sensory studies

The imposition of one's sensibilities onto others is reflective of power relations at work.

Kelvin E.Y. Low, 'Theorising Sensory Cultures in Asia'¹

The entire human sensorium was engaged in the acts of making and accommodating and resisting empire.

Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses*²

As the opening quotes by Low and Rotter indicate, the senses are deeply implicated in structures of power, and this is particularly pertinent in the context of imperialism. In the historical and geographical context of colonial South Asia, the senses are embedded in acts of distinction across race, caste, class, and bodily and gender hierarchies: as a case in point, black and brown bodies, Dalit, working-class, disabled and menstruating bodies have often and variously been described as 'dirty', 'smelly' or 'noisy'.³ Colonial

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1. Kelvin E.Y. Low, 'Theorising Sensory Cultures in Asia: Sociohistorical Perspectives', in *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 43, no. 4 (2019), pp. 618–36 [620–1].
2. Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 1.
3. While the articles in this special section variously engage with the senses along the categories of race, caste, class and gender, one of the limitations of this special section is that it is unable to address the intersections between sensory studies and disability studies. Recent and important work on different sensory able-ness in the context of the (post)colonial has been done, for example, by Friedner and Tausig on value and deafness in

literature is replete with references to the senses that describe the colonised as visually ‘exotic’ and ‘unusual’, or as aurally ‘disorienting’ (as both Marlowe in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Adela Quested in Forster’s *A Passage to India* find the colonial sphere to be—to refer to just two of the better-known examples of the canon of English literature). These sensual experiences echo the overarching discourse of Orientalism and can thus be mapped onto hierarchies of power and control which contrast the sights and sounds of civilisation with the ‘savage sensualities’ of indigenous cultures. British rule attempted to impose the five-senses model dominant in the West in India. This sensory model, which placed the five senses in a hierarchy with respect to each other, differed from indigenous models of sensory and perceptual organisation that privileged, among others, the distinction between purity and pollution. As Kapoor points out, this sensory regime was predicated on caste-based discrimination.⁴ Other sensory models prevalent in India included those drawn from aesthetic theory in the *Natyashastra*, which privileged relationships between the senses and moods, as well as several religions’ (re)organisation of the sensory.⁵ In the colonial encounter, all these models were reconfigured as they rubbed against each other.

By and large, the sensory encounter with the colonised produced a two-fold response in the coloniser: firstly, of disgust and distance and, secondly, of the desire to ‘order’, ‘civilise’ and ‘modernise’ some of these repulsive sensorial orders. As Rotter argues, ‘[t]he effort to “civilise” Indians... by altering their sensory cultures was unquestionably about the exertion of power, by states and their agents, and about accommodations and resistance to it’.⁶ This ‘civilising’ mission also involved everyday objects such as personal hygiene products, and it included media—the radio, gramophone and cinema—along with everyday technologies such as the bicycle, and large-scale infrastructure like the railways. Across these technologies, existing sensory and perceptual regimes of looking, listening, smelling, tasting and touching were transformed. Through both these modes, the senses—especially of the colonised—were implicated and were used to maintain colonial hierarchies of power.⁷ However, as the contributors to this special section argue, senses and sensations not only confirmed

India and Thailand: Michele Friedner and Benjamin Tausig, ‘The Spoiled and the Salvaged: Modulations of Auditory Value in Bangalore and Bangkok’, in Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (eds), *Remapping Sound Studies* (Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 156–72; and by Nair on the social, medical, institutional and enumerative histories of blindness in British India from 1850 to 1950: Aparna Nair, ‘“They Shall See His Face”: Blindness in British India, 1850–1950’, in *Medical History*, Vol. 61, no. 2 (2017), pp. 181–99.

4. Kapoor writes: ‘Caste is primarily experienced through a sensorial ordering of our perceptions and experiences of bodies, objects, and spaces according to the norms of purity and the threat of pollution’: see Shivani Kapoor, ‘The Violence of Odors: Sensory Politics of Caste in a Leather Tannery’, in *The Senses and Society*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (Mar. 2021), pp. 164–76 [73].
5. See, for example, James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
6. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses*, p. 12.
7. For more work on the role of the senses in the context of colonial encounters, see Elizabeth M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Elizabeth M. Collingham, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Todd A. Henry, ‘Sanitising Empire: Japanese Articulations of Korean Otherness and the Construction of Early Colonial Seoul, 1905–1919’, in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, no. 3 (2005), pp. 639–75; Xuelei Huang, ‘Deodorising China: Odour, Ordure and Colonial (Dis)order in Shanghai, 1840s–1940s’, in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 50, no. 3 (Feb. 2016), pp. 1092–122; and Kelvin E.Y. Low, *Scents and Scent-Sibilities: Smell and Everyday Life Experiences* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

differences and thus maintained hierarchies, they also often proved to be profoundly disorienting for the colonisers. Thus, sensual experiences held the potential to undermine the social and cultural hierarchies that the empire relied upon for its ideological and conceptual survival. Moreover, as the contributors to the special issue demonstrate, an examination of the sensory regimes inaugurated in or transformed in the colonial period have implications for the contemporary as well. Thus, making sense of empire is also to make sense of the sensory regimes of empire that have contemporary resonances.

To explore these complex issues in detail, this special section brings together six case studies on the topic of the senses in late colonial India. The authors in this special section unpack the sensory transnationalism that Low argues can be seen in cases of colonialism, migration and other cross-cultural encounters. Low identifies four modes of sensory engagement across the local and the colonial in these events: reception, rejection, regulation and reproduction. For him, these modes 'exemplify how sensory encounters, stemming from contrasting power positions, lend a different understanding of empire and its everyday lived constructions'.⁸ Authors in this collection, thus, trace the ways in which people in the past have tried, failed or succeeded in using their senses to make sense of power in the context of imperialism, and how colonised India in particular succumbed to, resisted impositions of, and altered Western knowledge and sensory habitus. Authors are especially attentive to the production of a new sensorium in late colonial India, which may not have mimicked the Western, even as it adopted 'Western' technologies and participated in new practices of work and leisure. Exploring the cultural landscape of colonialism through the everyday, quotidian, but ambivalent nature of sensual experiences is crucial to our understanding of colonial history and, more specifically, how hierarchies of power, negotiation and resistance operated in colonial spheres. To this effect, the articles in this collection address the following questions: firstly, how do we approach a history of the senses across different disciplines? Relatedly, how can a multidisciplinary perspective give us new ways to think through the topics addressed? Secondly, what does a sensual history contribute to our understanding of empire? Relatedly, in what ways were hierarchies of power mapped onto a sensual experience of colonialism and cultural otherness in the histories of imperialism? Furthermore, how did the hierarchies among the different senses (e.g. sight being considered superior to sound being considered superior to smell, taste and touch) play out in a colonial context? And, lastly, how did media such as print and advertising participate in, shape and alter uneven colonial sensual experiences?⁹

The articles in this special section address these questions by focusing on the sensory experiences and the implicit hierarchies of the imperial phenomenology of the British

8. Low, 'Theorising Sensory Cultures in Asia', p. 628.

9. Scholars of Indian media, particularly of cinema, have addressed at some length the transformed sensory ecology in the colonial period, including the circulation of filmic texts, the establishment of cinema halls (whether permanent or touring), and the intersection of other media with cinema (such as print, photography, the gramophone and the radio): for details, see Sudhir Mahadevan, *A Very Old Machine: The Many Origins of the Cinema in India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015); Debashree Mukherjee, *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); and Stephen Putnam Hughes, 'Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Drama, Gramophone, and the Beginnings of Tamil Cinema', in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 34 (2007), pp. 3–34.

tea frontier (Baruah); the racial politics of health and beauty ideals in commodity advertising (Hussain); the literary sensescapes of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and their potential to undermine colonial control (Basu); the revival of classical Indian aesthetics and the anti-imperialist politics of sensuous poetics (Hoene); and by analysing how the notions of (im)pure bodies are implicated with colonial and contemporary caste politics (Kapoor); and how the historical silencing of colonised voices distorts the contemporary archive (Bhowmik). Overall, this collection thus explores the intersections between post-colonial studies and sensory studies by paying particular attention to the sensorium of the colonised. It brings together scholars writing from within India with colleagues at institutions in Europe, all of whom focus on Indian case studies and thus contribute to the very recent scholarly endeavour to de-centre the field of sensory studies from its Western-centrism. As Low has noted, with some exceptions, '[s]ensuous scholarship that focuses on historical contexts has mainly examined Western societies';¹⁰ fewer researchers, still, have engaged with colonised India, and we will discuss these sources promptly and position the articles collected here vis-à-vis the topical, theoretical, methodological and disciplinary approaches of extant scholarship.

'Empire and the Senses' expands recent scholarship by Rotter, who traces a sensory history of the British in India from the formal imposition of their rule to its end (1857–1947), and of the Americans in the Philippines from annexation to independence (1898–1946). While similar in its topical focus, Rotter examines the colonisers' perspectives and perceptions. Where he is therefore coming from a Western perspective, we are approaching the topic from the perspective and perception of the colonised. When analysing the sensory in colonised worlds, Rotter predominantly borrows and cites from the writings of Western travellers, critics and scholars. We find that it is imperative to position this special section's work on the sensory not merely in terms of the perspectives and perceptions of colonised India, but also to use the position from colonial India to interrogate some of the assumptions of extant scholarship that, where it has engaged with sensory registers outside a Euro-American context, has put its emphasis mostly on the sensory encounters as experienced by the coloniser. Rotter himself acknowledges the limitations and challenges that a focus on the coloniser's sensorium brings, amongst which is 'to include in the analysis the sense perceptions not just those of the imperial powers but of Indians and Filipinos, and to treat all sides of their encounters with the balance they deserve'.¹¹ Rotter's recognition of the challenges posed by archives that are often themselves implicated in upholding colonial hierarchies of power and the senses 'highlights how much work remains to be done on the subaltern sensorium'.¹² The essays collected here meet this challenge by going beyond Western archives where possible and by challenging their colonial biases where not; by centring the sensorium of the colonised; and by analysing indigenous sensory practices.

Collectively, the articles in this special section approach the study of the senses on the one hand from the disciplinary vantage points of history, ethnography, political

10. Low, 'Theorising Sensory Cultures in Asia', p. 620. Among the exceptions Low lists are Adam Yuet Chau, 'The Sensorial Production of the Social', in *Ethnos*, Vol. 73, no. 4 (Dec. 2008), pp. 485–504; Xuelel Huang, 'Deodorising China'; and Mark S.R. Jenner, 'Tasting Lichfield, Touching China: Sir John Floyer's Senses', in *Historical Journal*, Vol. 53, no. 3 (Aug. 2010), pp. 647–70.

11. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses*, p. 11.

12. *Ibid.*

science, media studies, literature and cultural studies, and, on the other hand, engage with the histories and dis/continuities of empire. In this interdisciplinary approach to studying the senses, 'Empire and the Senses' shares its point of departure with Michaels' and Wulf's edited collection, *Exploring the Senses: South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity*, which offers a transdisciplinary and trans-cultural approach to understanding the senses by exploring sound, sight, smell, taste, touch and movement as expressed through aesthetic, perceptual, religious and spiritual experiences.¹³ The contributors to *Exploring the Senses* demonstrate the integral relationship of senses to each other as well as to allied notions of the body, emotion and cultural memory. In the contributions to this special section, questions of embodiment and the sensory are imbricated with politics, whether articulated in personal memoir (Baruah), folk tale (Basu), songs (Bhowmik) and poetry (Hoene), or through socio-political registers such as gender, class and caste (Hussain, Kapoor). In this way, the essays take on different senses of the political. The special section thus shares much of Michaels' and Wulf's theoretical framework and interdisciplinary approach, but we also depart from them by going (far) beyond their topical focus on the senses in rituals and performativity.

Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses, edited by Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Low, offers a range of detailed case studies which present social perspectives on sensory experiences in Asia.¹⁴ The contributors focus on topics such as the sensory experiences of space and place, tradition and the senses, cross-border sensory experiences, and habitus and the senses. The geographical focus on Asia and the topical focus on sensory explorations of space make this volume relevant to our special section. However, our geographical focus is much more specific and our topical and theoretical focus is on the (post)colonial intersections of the senses, culture and society. *Senses and Citizenships: Embodying Political Life*, edited by Susanna Trnka *et al.*, examines the intersections between sensory phenomena and national and supranational forms of belonging, introducing the new concept of sensory citizenship.¹⁵ The contributors reveal the multiple political effects of the senses by rethinking relationships between ideology, aesthetics, affect and bodily experience. The volume presents ethnographic case studies from around the world, including Asia. Combined with the contributors' political reading of the senses, this makes the volume an interesting companion to this special section which, however, is much more interdisciplinary.

Similar in title but different in its geographical and historical focus, *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America*, edited by Daniela Hacke and Paul Musselwhite, introduces new approaches to the history of European imperialism in the Americas by questioning the role that the five senses played in framing the cultural encounters, colonial knowledge and political relationships that built New World empires.¹⁶ The contributors to this volume share our topical concerns with the

13. Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf, *Exploring the Senses: South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017).

14. Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Kelvin E.Y. Low (eds), *Everyday Life in Asia: Social Perspectives on the Senses* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016).

15. Susanna Trnka *et al.* (eds), *Senses and Citizenships: Embodying Political Life* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013).

16. Daniela Hacke and Paul Musselwhite, *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2017).

intersections between post-colonial and sensory studies, albeit concerning a markedly different time and place. Lastly, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*, written by Constance Classen and David Howes, explores the cultural, historical and political dimensions of the world of the senses.¹⁷ The book spans a wide range of settings and makes comparisons between different cultures and epochs, and the papers reflect on topics such as the tactile appeal of medieval art, the healing power of Navajo sand paintings, the role of the senses in the courtroom, and the branding of sensations in the marketplace. The authors consider how political issues such as nationalism, gender equality and the treatment of minority groups are shaped by sensory practices and metaphors. While they do include case studies from outside the West, Classen and Howes' geographical approach is comparative and thus necessarily broad, whereas ours is specific and thus necessarily in-depth.

Albeit necessarily brief, this overview exemplifies that the last two decades have seen a rise in scholarly engagement with the question of the sensory from differing disciplines, including media studies, anthropology and history among others. In order to further broaden such readings, this collection aims to intervene in South Asian Studies from the perspective of sensory studies and vice versa in order to offer a reconsideration of the late-colonial moment from the perspective of the sensorium of the colonised—and to offer a reconsideration of the sensory from the perspective of the (post)colonial. Particularly in post-colonial contexts, senses and their perception constitute hitherto under-appreciated forms of cultural heritage. Moreover, sensuous histories hold the potential to narrate the stories of disenfranchised and marginalised groups and identities. The articles in this collection will explore these topics from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on the plurality of customs, traditions and heritages that have historically been part of the Indian subcontinent. In today's political scenario, these diverse cultural inheritances are being compelled into forgetfulness in everyday life by forces that propagate homogeneous identities and disparage the plural legacies of the subcontinent. Thus, to focus on the sensory and on the contemporary repercussions of the colonial becomes a political act in and of itself.

However, a recovery of pluralistic sensory practices to challenge the homogenising impulses of the present is not our only stake in the political. Questions of power and politics have always been shot through with the sensory, as seen in the writings of several scholars noted above, but have often been separated from the experiential and from technical know-how. Through a combined focus on the sensory and the (post)colonial, in this collection, we bring together these questions of power and politics with the analysis of indigenous knowledge, technology and systems of practice and thought. To this extent, Baruah shows how indigenous hunting expertise challenged the hierarchy of imperial phenomenology; Hussain analyses how local knowledge enabled Indian entrepreneurs to capitalise on the popularity of floral and herbal scents to create homogenised, nationalised and identifiable symbols of Indian-ness; Basu explores the literary sensescapes of local festivities and customs in colonial Calcutta as sites of potential resistance to colonial power; Hoene analyses the role of the senses in English-language Indian poetry in order to distil an anti-imperialist politics of aesthetics;

17. David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013).

Kapoor examines the sensory politics of caste, particularly in 'polluting' occupations such as leatherwork and Bhowmik challenges us to rethink the very nature of the archive due to the institutional silencing of colonial voices.

Thus, in the exploration of the sensory, the special section invests in delineating the bodily practices and techniques adopted by colonising and colonised subjects that placed them in conflict with one another but also produced tensions among the elite/non-elite and ideologically opposed indigenous subjects. In this way, empire also forms the environment in which and through which the sensory was and is formed. This allows us to recast how we consider the framing of empire without forgetting its oppressive histories. In this vein, we also focus on a mode of writing history and ask fundamental questions about both the nature of writing the past as well as the kinds of archives and sources that would be required for this form of telling: how do we write the sensory, particularly when narrating the past? It encompasses the ephemeral, the experiential and the embodied in ways that often exceed the capacities of the written word. To this end, Bhowmik's essay turns to sound-based archives of old field recordings to be able to write these histories. The essay imaginatively recasts the limits of the archive, turning to the recorded voice as sound to write these sensuous histories. In doing so, she draws our attention to the importance of a multisensory reinvention of non-traditional archives and queries the limits of the archives and sources that have thus far been used to write sensory histories in Euro-American contexts.

The concern with the nature of colonial sources and archives is also born of our desire to think about what sensory theory would look like when articulated from outside Euro-American contexts. Critically, the philosophic frameworks of much Euro-American writing (with some notable exceptions, as mentioned above) focus on phenomenological interpretations of sensory formations. In writing these interpretations, they often draw upon extant files of corporations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including designs, patents and scientific papers. How do we narrate the histories of the sensory in the absence of such documents, sources and archives? And what are the theoretical frameworks that we can draw upon? In other words, what kind of sensory theory can be generated across the files of colonial governance, vernacular writings and popular cultural forms including print media? Not only do the empirical sources of the contributions to this special section differ from Western-centric ones, but the very nature of these sources changes, offering new challenges and possibilities of theorising the senses.

In the opening paper of this special section, Manjeet Baruah explores how a Western-colonial hierarchy of the senses—that privileges sight over the other senses—is mapped onto the social order of the tea plantation in colonised Assam—that privileges the white coloniser over the indigenous colonised. Taking as his case study A.R. Ramsden's memoir, *Assam Planter: Tea Planting and Hunting in Assam* (1945), Baruah shows how the sensory experiences of the 'sahib' and the 'native' are organised in an imperial narrative of tea and frontier-making. Baruah also analyses how hunting encompasses a range of sensory experiences such as sight, smell and taste. On the tea frontier of British Assam, such a sensory world of hunting was closely connected to the ideas and practices of empire, as well as to the production of the global commodity of tea. In this regard, Ramsden's memoir provides a rich illustration of sensory

experiences in the making and unmaking of such a tea frontier and a global commodity. In his analysis, Baruah shows that sensory experiences of both ‘sahib’ and ‘native’ have the power to undermine the colonial hierarchies they are supposed to uphold, particularly in the context of late imperial crisis.

In the next paper, Mobeen Hussain continues this discussion of a colonial politics of the senses by analysing how different senses mark the intersections of race, gender, class and caste in early twentieth century advertising of personal hygiene products such as soap and skin-whitening cream. Hussain traces the evolution of branded commodity advertising and consumption from corporeal health concerns to the racialisation of beauty through skin-lightening cosmetics in late colonial India. Contrary to claims that multinational corporations permeated Indian markets after the economic liberalisation of the late 1980s, she shows that there is a much deeper genealogy to the racialised imperial economy operating in European colonies. Hussain argues that the imperial economy tapped into and commodified ideals of cleanliness, beauty and fairness through marketing—ideals that continue to pervade contemporary South Asian communities. She also examines the phenomenological underpinnings of imperial whiteness in colonial encounters to demonstrate how certain commodities appealed to Indians as ‘modern’ consumers, as well as how middle-class Indians and local entrepreneurs became active participants in the demand for, consumption and production of personal hygiene commodities. As Hussain shows throughout the essay, the colonial gaze, Western tastes in fashion and bodily practices, smell and the politics of health permeated and upheld racist conceptions about health and beauty that cast the colonised body as perpetually unclean and unhealthy.

While the first two papers thus substantiate an imposed colonial hierarchy of the senses that is as effective as it is vulnerable to subversion, the third and fourth papers look at two Indian writers—Kaliprasanna Sinha and Sarojini Naidu—and analyse how senses and sensations in their texts by and large undermine the imposition of an imperial phenomenology. Priyanka Basu focuses on *Hutom Pyanchar Naksha* (or, *The Observant Owl*), written by Kaliprasanna Sinha and published in 1862, in order to draw out the sensory world of colonial Calcutta and to show how indigenous sense-scapes of festivities, night-time and the railway can undermine colonial control and order. All these sense-scapes are multisensual—from the noise and spectacle of festivals to the sounds, smells and tactile sensations of collective railway travel—and all these sense-scapes, Basu argues, have the potential to variously counter, escape or undermine measures enacted to exert colonial order and control, such as official linear time and martial law to impose quietude and visibility. Christin Hoene, then, analyses the role of the senses in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. As with *Hutom*, Naidu’s sense-scapes are multi-sensorial, and as with *Hutom*, the aesthetics of these sense-scapes become political when considered in the historical context of colonised India and the personal context of Naidu’s own involvement as one of the leaders of the national independence struggle. The implicit politics of Naidu’s poetics are evoked, Hoene argues, through the Indian aesthetic principle of *rasa*, which literally translates into English as ‘juice, essence, or taste’ and which, in the context of aesthetic theory, denotes the emotive essence of and response to a piece of art. The early twentieth century saw a revival of classical Indian aesthetics, including *rasa*. Translating this ancient Indian aesthetic

principle into modern poetry in English, Naidu harks back to a pre-colonial cultural idea(1) in order to form a national identity that is independent of the coloniser's political and cultural imperialism. Hoene argues that understanding the role that the senses play in Naidu's poetry gives us a key to understand her poetics in the context of her anti-imperialist politics.

In the fifth paper, Shivani Kapoor analyses how colonial sensescapes intersect with caste and class. In her essay on caste and the sensory politics of leatherwork, Kapoor examines how British intervention influenced the sensorial politics of caste in the leather industry in northern India. Kapoor makes this argument by focusing on two related ideas: the introduction of 'Western' notions of science into the field of leatherwork, and the subsequent induction of management as a practice in the tanneries. Examining archival debates on leatherwork as well as drawing on her own interviews with leatherworkers, Kapoor argues that these processes involve a negotiation between two distinct yet overlapping sensorial arrangements: the sensory politics of caste, particularly in 'polluting' occupations such as leatherwork and the British debates on the sensorial management of work and labour. As a result, Kapoor concludes, leather-work came to be framed by a complex multisensorial orientation in the subcontinent, and understanding this sensorial politics has important consequences for our understanding of caste.

To conclude this interdisciplinary exploration of senses in colonised India, Moushumi Bhowmik's paper listens to two recordings of colonial prisoners of war: Keramat Ali, a colonial soldier from Mymensingh in Bengal, was among the hundreds of voices recorded by the Prussian linguist Wilhelm Doegen in the Halfmoon POW camp in Wunsdorf, Germany, in 1917–18; Sawabali, an oilman from Sylhet, was recorded in 1934 by the Dutch ethnomusicologist Arnold Bake on board a ship sailing to Europe. Closely listening to these archival recordings in conjunction with each other, Bhowmik's paper considers the dual possibility of writing about sound and silence as historical evidence of empire, while writing microhistories of the worlds held within the recordings as worlds unto themselves, independent of the global and imperial. This paper reflects Bhowmik's own background as a practice-led researcher. As such, it is as much a piece of research as it is a piece about that research, which in some ways marks it as different to the other papers. But these differences provide a fruitful lens through which to shine a light on the methodological assumptions and potential disciplinary biases of the other, more academically-minded papers. Bhowmik openly reflects on the practices of research and on research as practice, particularly when it comes to sound recordings and the multiple ways of 'reading' them. Moreover, she pushes us toward thinking of the senses as cultural heritage that is both ephemeral (sound) and material (recording) which, in the political and historical context of (post)colonialism, also raises questions about the decolonisation of the archive and the extent to which that is even possible given the historical silencing of the colonised voice.

Taken together, all the papers explore tensions of representation that are at the heart of both sensory studies and post-colonial studies. Of all the sources available to capture sense impressions, the written word still takes precedence in the archive, which automatically privileges the visual as the sense of perception and reception. However, all

the papers also engage with senses other than the visual; in fact, the presumably more ephemeral senses of sound and particularly smell often prove to be more effective in countering the colonial gaze in particular, and the imposition of imperial phenomenology more generally. Analysing the written and thus visual traces of the non-visual senses, then, creates a tension of representation that is intrinsically productive when exploring the tensions of representation—political and otherwise—of the late colonial period in India.

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