Brown
Saviors
and
Their
Others

RACE, CASTE, LABOR,
& THE GLOBAL POLITICS
OF HELP IN INDIA

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Nagraj Kumar.

Contents

III: URBAN SAVIORISM

IV: DIGITAL SAVIORISM

DUKE

UNIVERSITY

PRESS

Preface: Encountering Saviorism

... I refuse to join them in performing the miracle—I will not say trick—of liberating the oppressed with the gold of the tyrant, and raising the poor with the cash of the rich.
—B. R. AMBEDKAR, *Annihilation of Caste*

The status of the "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*.—JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*

A sweaty concept: another way of being pulled out from a shattering experience.
—SARA AHMED, *Living a Feminist Life*

PREMISE ONE: GLOBAL SHADOWS

Nagraj was one of my favorite ninth-standard students in Adavisandra school.[1] He was a curious student—what I later understood as a curiosity rooted in suspicion—and he asked question after question until he knew nearly as much about my research as I did.

I explained to him that I had come to Adavisandra to observe the practices of the education NGO (nongovernmental organization) Sahaayaka from the perspective of those who were at the receiving end of their interventions. Sahaayaka is a Bangalore-based organization working in thousands of rural schools, mostly in Karnataka state but also in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Sahaayaka's leadership comprised a group I call *brown saviors*—globally mobile savarna Indian-origin technocrats who had garnered excess racialized value for their technological capacities within the twenty-first-century global help economies.[2] These individuals had benefited from a longer global legacy of

caste-colonial relations, with its intersecting (and sometimes contradictory) casteist and racist policies, which together facilitated the brown savior's eventual entrance into these help economies.[3]

I myself had landed in Adavisandra after traveling to a number of rural schools with my primary guide, Manoj, one of Sahaayaka's fieldworkers. The organization's fieldworkers hailed from Karnataka's villages and performed the daily tasks associated with Sahaayaka's form of rural uplift. Like Manoj, who had grown up just five kilometers away, Adavisandra's population is almost exclusively Hindu, "Kannadiga," and hailed from the Vokkaliga caste, the primary agricultural caste in South Karnataka and the second-largest agricultural caste in all of Karnataka state.[4] Adavisandra's economy is rooted in Karnataka's sericulture industry, producing silk cocoons that begin a silk commodity chain that leads to Muslim-majority factory towns in Bangalore's periphery before eventually connecting to the global silk market.[5]

In postliberalization and postautocratic India, agriculture is becoming less and less tenable for those living in Adavisandra, especially for those living on small plots of land. Because it is located only forty kilometers from Bangalore city, some of Adavisandra's agricultural land has already been bought up by the savarna global-urban middle class, who were taking advantage of the fact that many in the village were being forced to sell their land. For example, one Kannadiga brahmin family who had worked as engineers in Virginia for twenty years had purchased land in the village as a vacation home but had also started a "healthy, organic, sattvic" food business on their new property.[6] At the same time, *five* different NGOs were working in the village to support all those "in need." Based on these clashing phenomena alone, it seemed that Adavisandra was the right place to study the interventions of an NGO.

But as is the case with many fieldwork plans, my research agenda changed rather quickly when I arrived in Adavisandra. On my first day, the teachers at the school met me, heard that I was a former New York City schoolteacher, and said, without a hint of hesitation, "Oh, you are a teacher, we need some help, go teach." Their demand was jarring and made me exceedingly nervous, but I obliged. Over the course of the next year, even as I spent time with Sahaayaka staff and leadership, I also spent time in Adavisandra, filling in during periods in which students in the eighth and ninth standard did not have a teacher in their classroom. As a teacher, I began to take seriously that researching in this village might not be my most valuable purpose. While, at first, I did not know what to teach or how, eventually it became clear that I could use my training in visual anthropology and ethnographic film to teach students to use digital cameras, six of which I had brought with me during fieldwork. Over

time I came to think of this endeavor as a participatory photography and film project, which generated thousands of photographs, some of which hang in Adavisandra school, others of which students took home to their families and friends, and a few of which hang in my family home in California.

Nagraj's interest in my research led him to ask more about my interest in photography and film, and eventually the image-making bug caught Nagraj as well. When he finally decided to take photographs, he took hundreds of photographs of objects—a frothing pot, a stove, a calendar, ceiling fans, a cat, a pomegranate tree, rice, a window, a spider crawling on the pink wall, a bottle of Pond's moisturizer, portraits of Hindu gods, spools of thread—but *never* a single shot of people. Not one. The closest he came was the shot you see in figure P.1, of his own silhouette in shadow. This image was one that we spent many days discussing while in Adavisandra and one that he offered to me for my research primarily because it showed his creative prowess *and* maintained his anonymity.[7] There was a particular danger Nagraj seemed to sense in the image, a visibility that the camera brought with it that he was not entirely

FIGURE 1. *Global Shadows*. Photograph taken by Nagraj, ninth standard, Adavisandra School. (Photo by Arjun Shankar and Nagraj Kumar)

comfortable with, and he was careful, therefore, not to photograph anyone in his family.

When I look back at Nagraj and his image-making practices, they remind me that the work of the anthropologist is as much about heeding the refusals of those who seek to remain in the "global shadows," and the political resistance that their opacity might allow, as it is about transparently revealing them to our readers.[8] This is why, after this preface ends, Nagraj, and youth like him, will sit mostly outside the frame while casting a long shadow.[9]

One day Nagraj wanted to take me to the hill near his home. I met Nagraj, and we wandered to the top of the hill together with six other children and looked around. Nagraj stared to his left, pointed to a small group of houses approximately two kilometers away, and said, "See over there. That was my village." He asked me if he could take a picture of his old village from the top of the hill with the camera, and I quickly agreed. It was after this simple gesture toward his old home that Nagraj and I finally began to speak about his past.

It had taken a long time for Nagraj to open up about his family and home. When I eventually learned more about Nagraj's life, I would begin to see his reticence as a necessary safety mechanism, a means of keeping his own unique and difficult story from emerging too quickly into the foreground.

While Nagraj now lived with his mother and grandparents in Adavisandra, he had previously lived in a village about four kilometers away. After our trip, Sripriya (my research assistant) and I went to Nagraj's house for lunch.[10] When we asked about Nagraj's father, Nagraj's mother said only that he had "died earlier" and that they had lost all of their farmland soon after his death. We did not press any further, the vagueness hinting that she, understandably, was not interested in speaking anymore about their past. In contrast, Nagraj's grandmother answered readily when I asked about their hopes for Nagraj's future. She told me that agriculture should "end with our generation . . . let him [Nagraj] study well and get another job." Literally any other occupation would seemingly do.

Later, as we walked away from his home together, Nagraj explained that his father had died earlier by drinking poison, a telltale sign that his father was another addition to the ever-increasing number of farmers' suicides in India.[11] Farmers' suicides have taken on a special place in the global imagination as one of the starkest examples of social disparity and suffering in India, unsettling the congratulatory tones accompanying India's supposed emerging world power.[12] There have now been over a quarter million documented cases of farmers' suicides in India over the past thirty years, rendering it one of the

most tragic results of primitive accumulation in India's caste-colonial society.[13] During my own fieldwork, I encountered four instances of farmers' suicides, of which Nagraj's story was but one.

Suddenly and without warning, Nagraj began to reverse the flow of questioning and asked me about my own father, whom he knew by then had, like his own father, also committed suicide. He asked me to explain how and why my own father died, existential questions that connected the two of us. I felt nervous as Nagraj prodded further and further, feeling the weight of his questions and then feeling the weight of my earlier questions.

Nagraj smiled as he saw me sweat. He explained that he did not really want to focus on his life's tragedy any more than I did. Instead, he was more interested in telling me about his aspirations, and he told me that he wanted to be a lawyer so he could bring the people who caused violence like that done to his family to justice: suicide or not, he intuitively understood that something or someone else was to blame. The problem, as he conceived it, was systemic and social and not an individual pathology, deficiency, or failing.

Nagraj was also clear that he did not need "help" from anyone else in order to motivate himself. His life experience had given him the basis for his future goals. In fact, all this talk of help annoyed him.

"How did the thought of help come into your minds?" he asked.

He asked the question with irritation as much as curiosity. Nagraj was irritated because, for all the rhetoric of help, and even saving, no one seemed to understand what he was actually worried about or what he actually wanted for himself. Instead, Nagraj felt his reality was almost totally ignored because it was far too complicated, too implicating, and too systemic, not measurable in simplistic data analytics terms or scalable metrics, nor solved by poverty-alleviation strategies that reified a narrative of childhood incapacity and helplessness.[14]

Nagraj's critique also made me extremely nervous about what I was doing in the village and forced me to reflect on my own complicity in the projects that he was so ably critiquing. He compelled me to reframe how I conceptualized the politics of help in India by focusing far less on those who have been deemed in need or on the great benevolence associated with the savior class.[15] Instead, Nagraj's critique directed me to ask critical questions about who the individuals working for Sahaayaka actually were and why they were doing this form of help work in the first place. In the rest of this text, what I characterize as a *nervous ethnography*, I develop the analytic of the *brown savior* as a response to Nagraj's question, revealing the neocolonial capitalist regimes, racialized global histories, and graded caste stratifications that shape the politics of help in India.

This project is an experiment in nervous ethnography, a result of the twitchy, worried, agitated energy that has come with each stage of trying to tell the story of the brown savior.

This way of characterizing my experience of research might not be too surprising for those who know me best. My personality has been marked by nervousness, what doctors might view as an overactive sympathetic nervous system brought on by adolescent trauma that infuses the way I understand social interactions. Where others seem to make effortless connections and feel energized from sociality, I can recede into myself, perhaps performing enthusiasm but many times feeling isolated by the nerves that come with sharing myself with others. It has taken years to work through this, to recognize this instinct of mine and to enjoy the company of those whom I care about and who care for me. But it has also made my professional role as an anthropologist a kind of satire: How can one with all this nervousness do work that necessarily involves so much social interaction?

Nervousness, as Nancy Rose Hunt writes, "suggests being on edge. Its semantics are unsettled, combining vigor, force, and determination with excitation, weakness, timidity. Nervousness yields disorderly, jittery states, as in the *nervous wreck*, a *nervous breakdown*, or, as history has shown, a nervous national mood."[16] Thinking with Frantz Fanon, Hunt argues that an attention to nerves allows one to see our postcolonized world differently, as one in which the contradictions of colonization produced, in its aftermath, a jangling of nerves. This nervousness is a companion for those of us who recognize that we continue to live in neocolonial systems and want to combat them.[17] Worse yet, our nerves constantly fly out of control when we wonder to ourselves whether we might be loving and valuing all that which upholds this violent system.

I am thankful that ethnography has long been identified with neocolonial nerves, the embodied forms of emotional agitation that come with our body's somewhat awkward responses to the many stimuli associated with fieldwork in the aftermath of colonization.[18] Anthropologists are particularly nervous and sensitive about their craft given the discipline's neocolonial racist legacy, one that has been characterized by a radical Othering of and epistemic violence against peoples who did not fit into the neat confines of Euro-American epistemologies.[19] The constant drumbeat for more reflexive practice, for more considerations of power asymmetry, and for more critique of the entire anthropological project has served, at least for me, as a kind of balm, assuaging my nerves simply by calling out the very fact that we inhabit positions of

violence. We've also reached a moment when these histories of epistemic violence may not feel so insurmountable, especially in a global-digital age when those we work with will inevitably have access to everything we've written about them.[20] They might even be producing counternarratives and challenging whatever stories we tell before we even get done telling them.[21] For once, we anthropologists might feel just a bit of the nerves that come with being so exposed, our ideas and theories up for questioning by the very people who purportedly trusted us enough to give us all of this information in the first place.

What is required, given the changing political stakes of anthropology, is a reappraisal of what we hope to gain from ethnographic research. For, even though anthropology and anthropologists have called over and over again for a reckoning with our nervous complicity in a violent history, what seems to have happened is that reflexivity has become "an excuse for political inactivity."[22] What I see more and more are lists of identity markers and quick commentaries on racial and gendered locations that actually have done little to subvert the anthropological impulse to study the Other. In fact, if anything, these insincere reflexive listings have only facilitated new types of Othering, an Othering that actually requires a facile description of encounter in which the anthropologist is strategically visibilized and therefore does not experience or share the discomfort that comes with being truly exposed with all their warts and flaws. Perhaps as important, these strategies to foreclose on nervousness have actually short-circuited the kinds of insights that arise when we have to sit and sincerely reflect on our discomfort.

Nervous ethnography forces me to reckon with the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork as a masculinist, ableist, racist project and with my own role in upholding this tradition. During our training, most every anthropologist has been told a story that lionizes the ethnographer who goes into the field; sees abject violence, poverty, and inequity; and comes home to tell the story in the most awe-inspiring of ways. This story of the ethnographic fieldworker traffics in a hypermasculinist ideology that sees distanced observation as valuable, and emotional anesthesia as courage. For those of us who experience anxiety, depression, stress, or any other mental or physical ailment, this version of fieldwork is both unrealistic and exclusionary. It prevents us from seeing ourselves in the figure of the anthropologist, but it also prevents ethnographic work from producing the range of insights that it otherwise might. Such ableist anthropology is also by definition antifeminist because it requires us to eschew, even ridicule, the ethics of care that a truly relational and embodied version of ethnography requires.[23] While I am nowhere close to recognizing and challenging the many ways that I might still uphold patriarchal masculinist

values in my everyday life, a project that I know will continue till the end of my life, what I can say with clarity is that thinking with a feminist ethic of care while inhabiting a body assigned male at birth makes me nervous, especially as I become ever more aware of my own tendency toward valorizing hypermasculinist praxis and confront my own embodied (dis)abilities as central to how I can do my work.[24]

Here nervous ethnography takes its call from what Sara Ahmed has termed "the sweaty concept." For Ahmed, "sweat is bodily; we might sweat during more strenuous and muscular activity. A sweaty concept might come out of bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty. . . . Sweaty concepts are also generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world."[25] The task, as Ahmed has outlined here, is to be courageous enough to reveal those messy and vulnerable moments that made us sweat but also helped us to get closer to where we want to go personally and politically. Indeed, Ahmed is signaling to us that we are likely to have gone wrong, to have reproduced a politically unequal world in our research, when we feel too comfortable, when something resonates too quickly with us, or when our fieldwork somehow gives us too much pleasure or validates our worldview.

For me, sweaty concepts emerge when we, in the words of Bianca Williams, practice a "radical honesty" that renders us exposed, uncomfortable, and even ashamed as we push ourselves and our ideas in novel, politically grounded directions.[26] Nervous ethnography and sweaty concepts demand, as John L. Jackson Jr. has written, that we recognize that "the anthropologist is always a political actor in the everydayness of her practice (in a way that demands unpacking and explicit articulation) each and every time she sits at a community board meeting, watches a local rally, or asks the most idle of clarifying questions. The unit of analysis is not the anthropologist but instead the collision she is a part of—whether intended or not."[27]

All these collisions and the nerves they beget aren't meant to be set aside, nor should they freeze us, leaving us in a neurasthenic state. Nor are they supposed to become self-referential, a form of navel-gazing that keeps us so focused on who we are and what we are feeling that we forget that our job is to provoke difficult, politically transformative conversations. Our nervousness is supposed to produce in us a heightened sense of care as we reckon with how our positions shape what we can say about the social world, for better or for worse.[28] When we feel nervous, we must stop and try to figure out *why* we feel so damn nervous, and what might be analytically useful in these nervous encounters.

And then we might ask: What does all our nervousness generate? How do our nerves get us to care anew?

On Complicity

A nervous ethnography requires us to construct studies that hinge on an exploration of our complicity. Complicity makes us sweat because it forces us to acknowledge that the capital we've accrued has come at the expense of others.[29] Complicity requires that we cast aside our conceit of innocence, and, even more nerve-racking, it requires that we tell the story in a way that reveals our potential culpability.[30] A nervous ethnography, then, exposes the lost parts of us, when we misspoke or stayed silent, what that says about us and, only then, what that says about the world we are exposing in our texts. A nervous ethnography reveals more than we want to because we realize it is our ethical obligation to write about the power inequities we know best, because we benefit from them. In this sense, and in this sense only, nervous ethnography is an act of love that contributes to our liberatory impulses.

I have written elsewhere that it frustrates me to no end that we have so few white people who study their complicity in ongoing projects of white supremacy, and in anthropology we have very few people willing and able to study whiteness at all.[31] But when one thinks with nervous ethnography, it becomes obvious that these studies don't exist because such studies might implicate family and friends, because these studies feel too uncomfortable and do not allow for the psychic calming that comes with the belief (however constructed) that the people who are under our gaze are far away from who we are. Whether or not we eventually render "the strange familiar," it's the very notion that the strange is located elsewhere that traffics in "imperial pleasure," makes the research somehow more exciting and exotic, and short-circuits a reckoning with complicity, and therefore nerves.[32] In fact, for all the talk of reflexivity in anthropology, I rarely hear a story of why white people decide to study in China, or India, or Guatemala, or Sudan, even though these places seem so far from who they are. I've learned that these conversations don't happen because they would reveal that these people are complicit in our system of global racial capitalism, which, in turn, might mean they lose some of their capital in the process.[33] This is what allows the broader infrastructure of coloniality to remain comfortably hidden in anthropology (and many other fields as well), even now.

But I have also realized that the critique of the white anthropologist is also a kind of short-circuiting that has allowed too many like me to hide our

complicity and therefore keep our nerves from jangling out of control. This study, as I have noted, is about a brown, transnational, savarna class of Indians who emerge as the brown savior—a class of Indians who are very much like myself. The academy in India and the academy in the United States are also both dominated by folks like me and the brown saviors in my study, brahmins and other savarnas whose dominant caste position translates into economic and social capital in both contexts.[34] We even have an entire wing of postcolonial studies that might be understood, at least in one sense, as the project of the brahmin intellectual elite romantically excavating the history of their feelings of loss vis-à-vis the white colonizer.[35] When savarna anthropologists have focused their gaze on India, they have either neglected conversations on caste entirely or presented findings that perpetuate the myth that caste is pertinent only in relation to the caste oppressed.[36] Rarely have savarnas come under deep anthropological study as savarnas, especially not by savarna anthropologists.[37] Instead, when savarnas have been studied by savarna anthropologists, they have most often been characterized through their urban, cosmopolitan, middle-class, linguistic positions, which reflect their caste position but are not called out as such. The continued and persistent critique of savarnas has been left to anticaste intellectuals, especially Dalit and Muslim intellectuals from the subcontinent and its diaspora, who, in most cases, already inhabit far more precarious locations in the academy. In so doing, many savarna scholars in the United States (and in the United Kingdom and in India and wherever else savarna scholars rest their heads) have short-circuited their complicity and trafficked in a narrative centered on their oppression as "post-colonized scholars" without dealing with the far more difficult task of understanding their role in maintaining global caste and white supremacy.[38] This truth might make it easy to "be frozen in guilt" because being a caste traitor is a much more difficult and nerve-racking task, a never-ending process of recognizing the new ways that one traffics in the same old forms of neocolonial savarna capital.[39]

On the Allure of and Repulsion to Brown Saviorism

To be quite honest, even the inception of this project is a story of brown savarna capital. In 2011, while a grad student, I, along with a colleague of mine, was approached by two men working for one of the biggest NGOs in India. They had come to the University of Pennsylvania to recruit people to help in the job of reforming Indian education. When we met, the two leaders were incredibly cordial and charismatic; they were well spoken, respectful, and ready to talk about the issues facing India. I was drawn to their stories about

changing India, about *us* being keys to this change. "Come back and join us, we want you back there," they told us, almost matter-of-factly. I was intrigued, felt immediately connected to what these two savarna men were saying, and was uncritically flattered that they would think of me.

I had never, up till that point, had much interest in conducting research in India. I had gone to graduate school after being a ninth-grade teacher in New York City and was at the time more interested in studying the systemic inequities of the US education system than anything going on in India.[40] In fact, when I look back, it might be better to say that I was actually resistant to doing any work in India, as I had spent much of the fifteen years prior scrubbing India from my brain.

Up until the age of twelve, I lived an easy, middle-class savarna life in Northern California, part of one of the many savarna families who migrated to the Bay Area in the wake of Silicon Valley's technological explosion. While many of these families had moved to areas with large Indian and Asian populations, my family had moved to a town that was more than 85 percent white. Perhaps the sheer whiteness of the place produced a nervousness in my parents, because they were especially anxious to immerse me in "my culture," which amounted to a reproduction of brahmin life at home. At the time, I did not recognize the cultural norms I was being inculcated into as caste culture; however, that was indeed what it was.[41] These days I recognize myself as an embodied reminder that caste does not vanish in the United States. Instead, it travels with us, no matter how much some of those within our ranks would like that not to be so.[42] Mine, like that of so many savarna-born children of those who came to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, was an incredibly privileged journey.[43] At the time, however, I was more interested in trying to find a way out from all my phenotypic and migratory difference, struggling just to deal with my place in a school that was clearly not made for a brown boy like me.

All that changed radically when my father took his own life just before my thirteenth birthday. Besides all the anxiety and nervousness produced by this kind of adolescent trauma, the effect of my father's suicide on my life was a form of extreme compartmentalization that necessarily meant keeping my work life safely away from everything having to do with family and home. The less people knew, the better for me. I could hide in plain sight and not have to face their looks of pity or shock. It also meant a disidentification with my father and therefore, in an almost cruel way, a disidentification with so many of the things that I identified with myself. India was one of those things. It is why I eliminated so much—language, religion, music, film, relationships—and why India is almost like a trigger for my most visceral nervousness.

While I am extremely proud of how my family and I have overcome, grown stronger and closer, and found many different kinds of meaning in the wake of our loss, the truth is that my ability to disidentify and find comfort in a brown America that was *not* savarna was itself a by-product of my caste capital, especially in the way it allowed me to grasp on to elite institutions of higher education for upward mobility despite all that was happening inside. My own trauma also allowed me to conveniently sidestep my own complicity in caste, race, and class oppression by cocooning myself in my own pain, a problem that I have only begun to truly understand and excavate.

At the same time, my instinctive and undoubtedly masculinist response to trauma has been an intense, hidden need to control: to control my environment, my time, my balance. Part of my compulsion to control has been a public image that performs a calculated form of eagerness and ease that hides any sign of emotional discontent. My writing, too, suffers from this need to control. Indeed, many may read this text—one founded on nervousness—and wonder why it might feel so controlled, even calculated and confident. But this is perhaps the point: nervousness is at once about living in a fraught world, being unable to control any of it, and struggling still to find some means of attaining balance and stability. My technique for coping with my nerves has been to hold on to the possibility that I can mediate whatever meaning is taken from this text in order to shield myself from what is to come. All this despite the fact that I know that these words will spill far beyond anything I can imagine, based on all the nervous energy of my readers. It takes a lot of nerve to write about our nerves.

This kind of contradictory trauma narrative and trauma response is not so unique in the brown world. In fact, I have heard so many brown folks tell me tales of trauma, anxiety, and nervousness that I have come to think of these affects as constitutive of the sense of brown. As Moon Charania notes, "Brown is a site of tactile anxiety lodged in sensation." This tactile anxiety is a result of a racialized contradiction "that creates unsettlement, discomfort. . . . Brown tells its own story, many stories, too many stories from too many places, spaces, geographies, and temporalities. Brown demands a border (even as it dissolves it), a nation (even as it leaves it), a moment of sovereignty (even as it renders it porous)."[44] Over time, I, like many of those who live under the sign of brown, have come to realize that these kinds of brown nerves can also unleash an intense sort of critical self-reflection, opening up space for unexpected solidarities and futures rendered otherwise

But for all my supposed nervous disidentification, control, and critical self-reflection, when these two savarna men from India asked me to come back, the

entirety of my past came flooding forth again, maybe even flooded back with more force because of how long I had striven to erase it, and I immediately enjoyed the feeling of savarna paternal comfort that they were signaling could be mine. Perhaps what I saw in these folks who came to ask me to "go back and help" was that alternative path my life might have taken, one that might have led me back to India as a savior. It's certainly not that hard to imagine. Most of my extended family work in engineering, medicine, or finance, living the prototype of savarna-born Indian diasporic life. Many of them talk about going back to India to help the less fortunate, and a few have enthusiastically done so. And beyond my family, I know so many savarna-born Indian Americans, from California and elsewhere in the United States, who are ready to head back to India with their "marketable skills" to help those less fortunate than themselves. In another dimension, I, too, might have become one of these brown saviors, doubling down on the possibility of using my own skills to better the lives of those who were assumed to be ever so slightly like me.

Even in *this* dimension, as this project unfolded, there were many moments when I succumbed to the path of brown saviorism.[45] For example, I have noted already that even though I was supposed to have been studying the practices of the NGO Sahaayaka, my savarna instincts led me to work with those in rural India instead. The work of teaching in Adavisandra started as an unintended project in saviorism before changing as I was forced to reckon with all those in the school who refused my explanations for how and why I was there. Perhaps I might have completely succumbed to the compulsion to undertake brown saviorist research but for many people during my journey who stopped me and pointed out that I might be missing the point entirely and exacerbating harm. These included my students, teachers, friends, family, and colleagues, all of whom were able to see what was right in front of me and criticized that I was trying to fashion an alternative, more comfortable argument out of what should have been a story of brown saviorism. To all of you (and you know who you are), I say thank you once again.

These kinds of humbling, uncomfortable learnings have translated my nervousness into a form of critical engagement, reframing how I understood the rhetoric of folks like those NGO personnel who came to meet me during graduate school. I became intensely nervous about the insinuations attached to my body—my skin, my blood, my caste, my class, my professional skills—as a potential commodity in this help economy. And, over time, I have realized that it was precisely by following my nerves that I was able to identify all the sweaty concepts that have set the foundation of this project.

Most important, all this sweat and nervousness has led me to new ways of understanding my earliest encounters with Sahaayaka leadership, opening up conceptual space that foregrounds the complex raced, casteized, and gendered labor stratifications that emerged as brown saviors conducted their work. I turn to these complexities in the introduction to this book.

Introduction: Brown Saviorism

Racial capitalism—which is to say all capitalism—is a relation . . . that continues to depend on racial practice and racial hierarchy . . . and capitalism won't stop being racial capitalism if all the white people disappear from the story.
—RUTH WILSON GILMORE, in *Geographies of Racial Capitalism*, dir. Kenton Card

Poverty is not an effect of the brown world. The brownness of the world is partially known through the poverty that partially engulfs it.—JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ, *The Sense of Brown*

India is not yet a nation. . . . Ambedkar has presciently observed that each caste is a nation in itself as each caste has its own caste-consciousness that did not help to form a fellowship of national feeling.—SURAJ YENGDE, *Caste Matters*

Sometimes an ethnographic project springs to life during the most mundane of social interactions. I had decided to attend Sahaayaka's monthly board meeting in Bangalore, India. There I was, half-listening, sometimes doodling in my notebook, and trying my best to glean something useful from the proceedings.

I had traveled to Bangalore, the "Silicon Valley of India," to study the practices of Sahaayaka, an education NGO that, at that time, was working in over fifty thousand rural schools in Karnataka state. Sahaayaka is part of the massive proliferation of NGOs in India over the past thirty years, what some have termed the *NGOization* of the voluntary sector. As the Indian state enacted ever more stringent forms of market fundamentalism after its liberalization in the late 1980s, the voluntary sectors—especially education and health care—increasingly saw the rise of the NGO. As of 2015, there were over three million

NGOs working in India, up from two million in 2009 and only twelve thousand in 1988. India now has the largest number of NGOs in the world, double the number of schools and 250 times the number of hospitals.[1]

Sahaayaka's programming centered on a whole slew of motivational techniques for children in rural schools. For example, Sahaayaka's fieldworkers, called *mentors*, would give motivational lectures about the need to do well in school and hand out small gifts and prizes—pencils, stickers, notebooks—if students reached preset goals for attendance, cleanliness, testing, grades, and the like. However, in the past five years Sahaayaka had increasingly been integrating new digital tools, data analytics strategies, funding initiatives, and partnerships with state governments into its organizational strategy.

At the board meeting, Sahaayaka's leaders were discussing how to improve their motivational programming and better help Indian rural children, whom they had determined were "the least looked after." The rhetoric of "looking after" kept ringing nervously in my mind when I first spied these words on Sahaayaka's website and heard the phrase repeated during the board meeting. It felt too paternalistic and too neocolonial. It seemed to reinforce many of the most intransigent global framings—in text, image, and film—of rural peoples as helpless, without agency, and in need of saving. Yet, in the postneoliberal era, these ideologies had been revised to imagine that this paternalistic form of care would produce hyperindustrious, entrepreneurial agents whose resilience and hard work would supposedly benefit them, their communities, the nation, and the global economy writ large. The juxtaposition of "motivation" with "looking after" therefore seemed to do the work of both reentrenching the importance of those who were doing the "looking after" and also signaling the responsibility of the marginalized to uplift themselves by shifting their "unproductive" emotional states.[2]

Despite my own misgivings, the crew of other people at the helm of this meeting were enthusiastically moving forward with the discussion. Sitting to my left was Krish, the CEO of Sahaayaka, a Kannada brahmin who had spent almost thirty years in the United States working in the technology sector before selling his company to join this education NGO.[3] Across from me sat Ajay, a Sahaayaka funder and global venture capitalist, a Kannada brahmin whose ownings included a vegan coffee shop in Bangalore and a resort on the outskirts of the city; and Srinivasan, Sahaayaka's founder, a Tamil brahmin whose forty-year career as a chemical engineer saw him traveling between India, the United States, Germany, and Brazil and who now spent half his time in the United States visiting his two children and grandchildren, who lived there permanently.[4]

Besides Sahaayaka's all-male leadership, there were three savarna, brown, diasporic personnel from a global development advisory organization founded in New York City that Sahaayaka had hired to conduct an impact assessment of the NGO. Gaurav, the head of the group and the "regional director of Asia," was joined by two diasporic Indian women: Shivani, a University of Pennsylvania graduate who was also a Teach for India alumna, and Sweta, a Yale graduate who formerly worked for JP Morgan Chase and traveled back and forth between Mumbai and San Francisco, which was closer to her hometown of Irvine.[5] Everyone spoke English with one another, and the ideas and concepts they deployed were all part of the most generic technocorporatist sensibility. Terms like "added value" were thrown around during the meeting to describe how the impact of an intervention should be assessed, while partnering with business schools, for example, the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, was seen as a necessary asset.

At the time, I did not think much about *who* I was seeing in the room, perhaps because I was too much like those powerful people sitting all around me. I, too, am a savarna Indian American who has many relatives and friends doing similar types of help work. Being "too familiar" can sometimes prevent us from noticing that which is right in front of our eyes, especially when this familiarity is tied to capital.

Who, Exactly, Is in the Room? The Brown Savior Is in the Room

Now, as I look back, there was and is something quite striking in the fact that those who were doing this help work were all "brown" people from the global savarna class.[6] Moreover, during the entire meeting, there seemed to be a clear, if implicit, assumption that everyone in the room had a special "primordial" knowledge of how to save those in rural communities in India, even if many of us had spent the majority of our lives in the United States or the United Kingdom. In fact, when I initially began fieldwork, many of the members of Sahaayaka justified their work along these lines, especially through blood talk. They even sometimes remarked that I was justified in my research because "it was in my blood," assuming that I, as a savarna diasporic Indian, had a racial tie to the Indian nation-state even though I had been born and brought up in the United States. My own silence and complicity in these kinds of "hemopolitical" arguments made me increasingly nervous, and initially I averted my analytic gaze, hoping that active neglect would calm me.[7] Eventually, however, I began to understand that these moments were the grist of my ethnography

and that I would need to follow my nerves, no matter how difficult, if I was to figure out what was happening in the board meeting and how to understand the particular racializing processes that were unfolding in and through these help interventions. Over time, I began to develop a method of *nervous ethnography*, and with it I began to understand these hemo-political sentiments as a kind of racial compulsion that was driving global help work. At the very least, these hemo-political justifications, sometimes made explicit and sometimes not, served as part of a global racial common sense, a perception that fused "particular bodily traits, social configurations (national, religious, etc.), and global regions, in which human difference is reproduced as irreducible and unsublatable."[8]

In reality, how similar were the people at the board meeting to those they felt compelled to save? All of them were brahmins who had either grown up in the brahmin enclaves in South India before spending most of their young adulthoods learning, living, and working in the United States *or* been born and brought up in the United States as middle-class suburbanites. These groups, however different they might be, share racialized caste, class, and transnational linkages that place them within the growing global brown savarna class.[9] In contrast, the students these Sahaayaka personnel worked with in rural Karnataka were the children of relatively poor farmers whose ways of living were slowly being decimated as the city of Bangalore swallowed up its rural peripheries and as the privatization of education rendered government schools ever more devalued. Their lives, hopes, and experiences differed radically from anything that these Sahaayaka leaders knew while growing up with caste capital in India and were certainly far removed from what they learned while accruing more capital as brown elites in the United States.

Those who attended the Sahaayaka meeting were not exceptional cases. In fact, they epitomize the figure of the *brown savior*, part of a growing complex of savarna elites who are trying to use the social and monetary capital they have accrued during their time living, learning, or working abroad to start and run organizations that are intended to help those they see as less fortunate, most often in India but also sometimes in the rest of the postcolonized brown world. These actors have taken on a critical role in the reconstructed *help economies*, a term I use to describe the intersection of humanitarianism, development, and poverty-alleviation efforts.

Over the past fifty years, the question "Who is in the room?" has become one of the key representational vectors on which global multicultural, late liberal social change agendas have been constituted, assuming that those inhabiting particular racialized positions will solve the problem of global inequality by

their very presence in positions of decision-making power regardless of their class position, political interests, or specific training and skills.[10] In particular, the help industries have sought to replace white people with people "of color" as a primary strategy by which to rectify the historical legacy of colonial racial capitalism's structuring of help in the Global South. If at one time the *who* of help relied on white/Other, West/East, First World/Third World, Global North/Global South binaries, these new actors seem to subvert these premises.[11] Instead, part of their ability to do this kind of help work relies on their historical relation to those nation-states on the wrong side of the global "color-line."[12] For example, Sahaayaka leadership did not seem to carry the baggage associated with Western-led development efforts in the Global South simply because they were brown, not white, even though, as I show, they reproduce and uphold many of the same racialized values and ideologies associated with *who* and *how* to help that have been passed down from the colonial period into the late liberal capitalist period.

In Sahaayaka's case, this racial dupe intersected with the history of brahmin and savarna ascension during the post/colonial period, during which caste-based exclusions and complicities produced a unique form of postcolonial racial and caste (read: white-brahminical) capitalism that influenced their particular strategies of help. As such, the NGO leaders I am discussing here emerge at the nexus of two intersecting processes of racialization: one associated with racist global developmentalism and white saviorism and the other associated with a distinct form of racialized casteism in India.

Savarna Technoracial Labor Capacity in the Wake of Fascism

Sahaayaka's brown saviors did not explicitly consider or question any of the historical and systemic conditions that produced their ability to be in the room and enact change in the way they imagined. In fact, even though none of them had any experience or training in the help economies or the education sector, their interest in and ability to work in these contexts were built on a presumption of their "merit," the neoliberal ideal that sees individual success as based exclusively on intellectual capability and "hard work" rather than the accumulation of racial, gender, or caste capital.[13]

Even as they neglected any discussion of their own position as beneficiaries of systemic inequity in India and the United States, everyone in the room was excitedly encouraging Sahaayaka to change its interventions from the kinds of face-to-face encounters led by fieldworkers to a new phone app platform

that Krish had been developing over the past year. Through the app Sahaayaka fieldworkers could log student data in a central database, allowing the organization to collect and aggregate student and school data, such as attendance and test scores. Krish was bringing his organization—and the education and voluntary sectors more generally—into the big data and data analytics revolution, the newest iteration in a long line of neocolonial technocratic methods by which to quantitatively "categorize," "predict," and "save" the world.[14]

Technological interventions had several advantages for Sahaayaka leadership. First, digital tools have been overvalued in the current global racial capitalist order, dividing the haves from the have-nots. Within this global regime of value, the digital has been seen as a kind of panacea for the rectification of social evils of all sorts, and therefore Sahaayaka knew that funding would accompany technological interventions. Second, these technological interventions were perceived as "neutral," apolitical, universal solutions to India's problems, and therefore Sahaayaka could make a moral claim to changing the entire system without having to get into the messy politics of position, history, or capital. This perceived neutrality and universality also had the added benefit of allowing Sahaayaka to imagine its interventions as useful *beyond* India in the future. Third, technological interventions played to the Sahaayaka leadership's strengths as former engineers, whose prowess with these tools has been perceived as a preternatural *racial* capacity of the savarna castes, especially brahmins. As I explain in more detail in chapter 2, Sahaayaka's leadership had benefited from a colonial and postcolonial history that had allowed brahmins to take on roles in the technology sectors.[15] At the same time, these digital capacities were perceived as "in their blood," allowing them to take special and central positions in the help economies.

Critically, between 2013, when I started my fieldwork, and 2018, when I conducted the last phase of my fieldwork, many NGOs came under attack after the rise of the far-right Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) regime led by Narendra Modi.[16] Specifically, the government was targeting international NGOs that they claimed were working at odds with state economic development goals by pointing out the government's human rights abuses.[17] In addition, the Hindutva state has systematically sought to attack those journalists, activists, and organizations that are seen as too liberal, too left, and too secular. In fact, terms like *liberal* and *secular* have begun to collapse distinct groups—left activists, anticaste organizers, protesters against anti-Muslim racism, technocrats, NGO workers, government officials who refuse to allow the constitutional system to collapse—under the weight of the constant hostility from a right-wing cadre who deploy these terms as pejoratives for any group that disagrees with them.[18]

Moreover, the Hindutva state has implied that any of these forms of dissent are at the behest of the "West" and are meant solely to delegitimize India's attempts to gain economic power and/or find pride in the "cultural" practices of Hindus after years of colonization.[19] In other words, the Hindutva state has appropriated the rhetoric of anticolonial struggle to justify its authoritarian policies, including its repression of human rights groups, activists, and critical NGOs. In fact, some within the right-wing cadre use the pejorative *brown sepoy* to castigate those who criticize the Hindutva state, insinuating that such people may have "brown skin" but are actually merely puppets for their white colonial masters.[20] In turn, this has made any critique that focuses on the secular, the liberal, or even the neoliberal tenuous, as many fear that these critiques will only further the Hindutva agenda and be appropriated by supremacists as further proof of the inadequacies of secular, liberal, and constitutional politics in India.

I myself have struggled to maintain a balance between sustained critique of actors who for the most part fall into the category of "liberal" and "secular" and the recognition that in the current climate in India such critique could be misused. Even the small possibility of my work being taken up by the right wing makes me *extremely* nervous. However, part of my project in this text is to show the continuities between late liberal political orders and the rise of fascist autocracy. As such, I have found solace in those scholars who teach that the potential for right-wing appropriation cannot and should not deter critiques of late liberal society, especially given the way that late liberalism, as the past ten years has made clear, can and does feed into fascism intentionally or unintentionally (even as it is seen as its opposite). Undertaking this type of study requires (1) a recognition and careful tracing of the specific ways that colonial forms of governance and valuation have transmuted in the late liberal capitalist autocratic period *and* (2) a specificity to the "liberal" institutions and the secular actors under study.[21]

In this case, my critique focuses specifically on the institutional politics of an Indian education NGO with US economic, political, and cultural linkages, which serves as a very specific form of liberal intervention with extremely unique implications vis-à-vis the rise of the Hindutva state. For example, during the early period of Hindutva ascension (2014–19), Sahaayaka actually prospered, expanding into more schools, creating partnerships with states beyond Karnataka and even beyond India, implementing its digital intervention strategy, and accruing more funding from donor agencies. This was at least in part because Sahaayaka's particular version of "liberal" intervention did not challenge state ideologies at all: it was an NGO populated by those who were

perceived as "native" Indians, who effectively "browned" neocolonial technocratic development strategies even as they maintained strategically useful transnational connections to the United States. In fact, by 2018, shortly after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime initiated the Digital India campaign, with its rabid emphasis on digitized solutions for India's future change, Sahaayaka would be hailed by Karnataka state and in India's national news media as the future "IT backbone" of Karnataka's education system. In this way, the nation-state was able to mask its fascist visions by leaning into a seemingly altruistic, apolitical, nativist technophilia.

In sum, let me emphasize once again that my exploration of Sahaayaka serves as a reminder *not* to view far-right fascist elements as somehow de facto in opposition to the secular/(neo)liberal subjects that fill the majority of the pages that follow. Instead, as I return to many times over the course of this text, the project of brown saviorism in India required the characters in this story to make pragmatic and fatal pacts in order to garner funding, expand, and intervene, which, however well intentioned, may have facilitated the very fascist projects that, on the surface, they were purportedly against.

On the "Primordial" and Feminized Labor
of the Surplus Fieldworker

All the talk of technological innovation and integration during the board meeting was especially jarring for me, given that my day-to-day travels seemed to have very little to do with anything that the people in the room were discussing. Just the day before, I had traveled some forty kilometers south from Bangalore to the village of Adavisandra with Suresh, one of Sahaayaka's fieldworkers, to visit a rural school. I had followed Suresh on many past occasions as he drove his motorcycle from school to school, cultivating in children a desire to pass their exams, to learn, to aspire, or even just to raise their hands when they were curious.

Nearly all the Sahaayaka mentors had family who worked in Karnataka as farmers, mostly from the Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes (Karnataka's traditional agricultural landed-gentry castes). In fact, one striking and important revelation of my work was the extent to which Sahaayaka's organizational structure actually only reproduced a historically situated gradation of caste laborers in South India, with brahmin elites at the top, followed by Vokkaliga and Lingayat fieldworkers at lower rungs of the organization, with very few Dalits and *no* Muslims in the organization at all. This fact was especially striking given that Karnataka's Muslim population is at least 12 percent, and the

Scheduled Caste population is at least 18 percent, both numbers that are higher than either the Vokkaliga (8 percent) or Lingayat (9 percent) populations.[22]

The fieldworkers came from a spectrum of class backgrounds, primarily because some of their families owned land while others did not. However, Suresh's cachet as a fieldworker was tethered to his perceived "primordial" knowledge of his native home and therefore the expectation that he had a special ability to connect with rural students because of a shared linguistic and cultural identity. This is why, at least initially, the mentors were the integral connection between Sahaayaka's headquarters in Bangalore city and the rural areas in which they worked.

But Suresh also saw his work in Sahaayaka as part of his own aspiration for economic mobility in the wake of India's massive urbanization and agricultural dispossession. Bangalore city, for example, has increased its population by over three times in thirty years, from 4 million in 1990 to over 12 million in 2020, while also growing threefold in physical size in the past twenty years. With Bangalore's expansion, those in its agricultural peripheries who once believed they could count on joining their traditional family occupations could no longer be so sure. Suresh felt the strain of all this change, especially because he had seen so many from his community left jobless. Where was all this surplus labor to go? For Suresh, the answer, as I discuss further in chapter 1, had been to join an NGO.

Suresh felt uncomfortable at the board meeting. He was the only mentor who had been invited to the proceedings and was very much at the periphery of the action despite the fact that he was at the center of interventions at these rural school sites. Even though he spoke five languages, English was by far the one in which he was least adept, and he strained to understand what was being said. From time to time, he asked me to clarify what he had heard, and then he would shake his head in exasperation when he fully comprehended what was being proposed.

On reflection, Suresh would tell me that he felt as if he had been considered valuable *only* for his supposed local-specific "authentic" knowledge as a son of a Vokkaliga farmer, limiting what his perceived capabilities were, what he might aspire for, and what positions he could hold in the organization.[23] Even when he was struggling to make ends meet, Suresh was expected *not* to be driven by economic aspirations because his work was seen as a form of community uplift that might be corrupted by any individual ambitions. This moral prerogative differed substantially from how the brown savior's moral ambitions were justified, even though both were supposedly helping their "kin." In the case of the mentors, their kin connection was no longer lucrative because, unlike the

globality of the brown savior, their perceived skills and knowledge were inextricably linked to their knowledge of rural land and set the frame for the kind of affective labor they were expected to do.

Importantly, these racialized caste capacities for affective labor were also situated within a system of patriarchal capitalism, masculinizing the technocratic "rational" digital work of the brown savior while feminizing the relational, affective work of the mentor, rendering it less valuable and less translatable into monetary terms. This is why, whether or not brown saviors were assigned male at birth, in all the cases I observed, they reproduced masculinist values regarding technical capacity and patriarchal heteronormative hierarchies of labor value. At the same time, the feminizing of the labor of mentors was happening even as roles traditionally held by women were being replaced by this largely male NGO labor force. Indeed, Suresh's story pivots on Sahaayaka's organizational setup, which relied on the hiring of almost exclusively men, effectively invisibilizing the women who produce so much of the labor associated with traditional social reproduction (nurturing, caregiving, teaching, and the like). The few women mentors who joined Sahaayaka found themselves with even less possibility of upward mobility than mentors like Suresh.

One of Suresh's closest colleagues, Lakshmi, for example, had fought against the constraints of widowhood within the cultural politics of brahminical patriarchy in village Karnataka to achieve her position with Sahaayaka. She was now the sole breadwinner in her household in a village thirty kilometers south of Bangalore, taking care of her two elderly parents and providing for her nieces and nephews. Lakshmi, like Suresh, had imagined that working for Sahaayaka would be a stepping stone to further upward mobility rather than an end to her aspirational possibilities. However, as I discuss further in chapter 8, Lakshmi struggled to maintain her role in Sahaayaka given that, unlike Suresh, she was not able to drive a motorcycle up and down the rural hinterlands of Karnataka or into Bangalore city because of concerns for her perceived safety while on the road and instead had to take the bus, which limited both her ability to work at Sahaayaka's Bangalore headquarters and her exposure to Sahaayaka's leadership.[24]

But what irritated Suresh and Lakshmi the most was how quickly they were being pushed aside as Sahaayaka continued to integrate digital tools into their educational interventions. In their own framing of their situation, Suresh and Lakshmi expressed frustration and critiqued the fetishizing of these forms of digital labor that so profoundly influenced their perceived capacity to help. Regardless of how these new technologies were framed by the brown savior, Suresh and Lakshmi were certain that they were only incurring the wrath of

the technological gadget. If they were to use any of these new technologies, they would merely input data based on the scripts they were given rather than learn how to use these technologies creatively. Whether explicitly stated or not, this capacity for technological work was not perceived as "in their blood," reinscribing a racialized caste hierarchy of labor: the brahmin transnational hailed for his intellectual and technical capacities as brown savior; the Vokkaliga agriculturalist recognized as useful for her bodily capacity and connection to the land as fieldworker.[25]

When I would reflect on this particular relation, I could not help but feel the shadows of the traditional colonial "native informant," whose role was almost entirely rooted in the binary opposition to the affective capacities expunged from the "technical," distanced, rational colonial master.[26] Yet now these colonial racialized relations were being reproduced within a global caste order in India, one that linked the "global" brown savior to the rural mentor. In this sense, Sahaayaka's praxis perpetuated a neocolonial form of stratification that allowed those with technical skills to accrue excess global value at the expense of all those people who performed the relational forms of affective labor that were necessary for organizations like Sahaayaka to subsist and grow in the first place.

Over the next few years, I continued to observe what was happening to Sahaayaka's fieldworkers, like Suresh and Lakshmi, in Bangalore and its peripheries, spending time in village schools across the region, while also meeting the Sahaayaka leadership when they were in Bangalore and in the United States: in, for example, Palo Alto, California; Boston, Massachusetts; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the juxtaposition between my urban-rural travels and transnational meetups, I began to see new theoretical starting points for my project. I started to understand what was happening in India's help economies in ways that moved beyond a reductive nationalist frame and instead situated these efforts within the current system of global racial and caste capitalism.

On the Racial Capitalist Politics of Brownness

For some, India and the savarna Indian subject might seem like a strange site for the study of *racial* capitalism, given that race as an analytic has rarely been associated with those from the subcontinent.[27] Part of the reason has been that critical analyses of race have been overdetermined by a "methodological nationalism" that focuses almost solely on the United States, and at best the Americas, and renders race "foreign" to places like India.[28] These boundaries have been reified through neocolonial academic disciplining and funding

patterns that continue to neglect projects that transgress national borders to reckon with global racialized unfoldings and movements induced by colonialism that continue into the twenty-first century.[29] At the same time, the scholarship on postcolonialism in India, undertaken mostly by savarna scholars,[30] has focused on "the colonial wound" as an almost all-encompassing framework to understand postcolonial nation-building projects *without* incorporating a robust conversation on the ongoing impact of colonial racial categories on the subcontinent, especially as they intersect with caste in India.[31] As a corrective, I follow scholarship that takes seriously the colonial constitution of race and recognizes the continuities between the franchise colonial order and the racial dimensions of current inter- and intranational governing strategies, economic relations, and categories for differentiating populations.[32]

In particular, my study of global racial capitalism begins with W. E. B. Du Bois's classic insights in *Black Reconstruction in America*. While focusing on the historical potential of Black workers to bring about a worker-led democracy out of the violent plantation economies in the United States, Du Bois also understood that the freeing of labor was a global project. He wrote, "Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black."[33] Du Bois's theorizing of surplus value and its extraction takes as a given that the primary labor force under colonial capitalism was "that dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States."[34] In fact, for Du Bois, the so-called humanitarian impulses of the liberal West that were given by the colonizer as the reason for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade (rather than the long and sustained rebellion of Black peoples in the Americas) actually propelled the exploitation of labor and the expropriation of land and resources across the world.[35]

In contemporary analysis, Du Bois's insights require that studies of labor focus on how specific peoples within the "dark proletariat" were and are produced and divided and come to occupy particular slots within global racial capitalist systems. Here I lean on Lisa Lowe's excellent characterization of racial capitalism, which suggests that "capitalism expands not through rendering all labor, resources, and markets across the world identical, but by precisely seizing upon colonial divisions, identifying particular regions for production and others for neglect, certain populations for exploitation and still others for disposal."[36] In Lowe's definition, colonial categories are always already racialized,

linking particular bodies to a perceived (in)capacity for labor and therefore determining their potential exploitability and/or disposability.[37] In this sense, a study of racial capitalism captures specific dynamics related to the racialized stratifications of labor set in motion during the colonial period, including in places like India.

For me, placing *savior* in relation to *brown* opens up some of the contradictions associated with the quickly changing contours of the global racial capitalist stratification of labor as it relates to the help economies. While it is an underacknowledged aspect of the coloniality of power, colonial racial capitalism actually required an economy of salvation that demarcated racialized and gendered difference and hierarchy along the savior/saved binary. These racialized distinctions took on specific valences in the "brown world," which pivoted on questions of poverty and the regional distinctions that produced the (im)possibility for assimilation that continues to influence the trajectories of saviorism in these places. The racialized geographies of "brown" both set the conditions for ascension *and* occlude the operations of regionally specific forms of racialized power that produce brown saviors and their Others.

In fact, while I focus on the specific example of India and later show how current global racial orders occlude the operations of caste power in the Indian case, one of the most interesting phenomena I have noticed since beginning to write and speak on the brown savior is how many people from disparate places—Turkey, Pakistan, Algeria, Iran, Cuba, and Brazil (among many others)—find their own regionally specific versions of the brown savior. This is partially because the brown savior as analytic allows us to see how and why specific elite actors emerge from the postcolonized fold as those who are imagined to bring salvation even as others in the brown world remain "in need."

The particular racial descriptor *brown* has been used as part of the self-fashioning narratives of people from areas as disparate as Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Controversies over *brown*, especially with regard to *who* is brown, continue into the present primarily because the term is tethered to German, Spanish, Portuguese, British, and American strands of racist discourse that have brought much of the colonial world under their remit in contradictory ways.[38] As such, I draw from the work of Nitasha Tamar Sharma, who argues that understanding brownness requires us to follow the historical and political economic processes through which the category takes on racialized meanings.[39] As one example, in many parts of the Spanish and British postcolonial Caribbean, terms like *brown* and *browning* refer to the postplantation histories of miscegenation that resulted in a class of racially mixed peoples. Those who had undergone this

process of browning sometimes found relative economic and political mobility within the Caribbean's colorist hierarchies that emerged out of the vagaries of violent colonial desire.[40]

By contrast, in the case I am concerned with, "brown" was first linked to India when late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific racists began to include South Asians in the German color-based racial classifications of the late eighteenth century. This delineation as "brown" peoples became central to the self-fashioning narratives of savarna Indian elites as they began traveling beyond the confines of the Indian subcontinent during and after British colonialism.[41] In fact, because of the legacy of British colonialism and the ongoing emphasis on English education, terms like *brown* circulate quite often, especially in popular culture, and *brown* is an operative and expanding category both on the subcontinent and in the diaspora, especially (though not exclusively) among anglophiles.[42]

Despite these regional specificities and contradictions, because the coloniality of brownness impacted so many all over the world, it has connected these realms in imagined, if tenuous, ways. My conceptual framing of brownness draws, therefore, from the work of José Esteban Muñoz, who writes that "Brownness is vast, present, and vital. It is the ontopoetic state . . . of a majority of those who exist, strive, and flourish within the vast trajectory of multiple and intersecting regimes of colonial violence."[43] Muñoz is describing a capacious sense of brown that pivots on regionally specific, historically situated, yet affectively connected encounters with colonial and imperial power; the colonial wounds inflicted by these encounters; and the senses of self that emerge in and through these histories of encounter. Here brown is a racialized affective geography associated with the social, cultural, economic, and political "intimacies" of those living on continents touched by colonialism.[44] As one example from India, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, argued that "the brown, yellow and black races of Asia and Africa, [are] all hunched up more or less together. How far we of the last of these classes are from the heights where our rulers live."[45]

Brownness, in this conception, is not solely about phenotype, although that certainly is one dimension. Instead, I want to briefly evoke the idea of *brown blood* to bring focus to certain intimate dimensions of colonial racialization that are often overlooked and yet are constitutive of the sense of brown. One's blood is browned because of those intimate colonial encounters that create, in the words of Moon Charania, "unsettlement, discomfort . . . too close to dirt, mud, earth, shit, animals, nature" and too far below the heavenly racial purity associated with white colonizers.[46] In this sense, brown blood is the marker

of distance "from the heights where our rulers live." However, unlike race-as-phenotype, race-as-blood evokes what is hidden, and therefore is exceptionally amorphous, easily mapping onto other markers of belonging along which global power operates, fixing unseen, yet predetermined, capacities for labor. The very invisibility of brown blood makes it so close, so intimate, so familiar and familial, so rigid, yet fluid, and so dangerous because of the potential that people might pass over to the other side unbeknownst. As I argue in chapter 2, my understanding of brown blood draws attention to the blood politics that began in the Old World, congealed in the New World, and continue to shape processes of racialization all over the postcolonized brown world.[47] In fact, as I discuss later in this introduction, these associations with brown blood are central to the purity/impurity politics of caste in contemporary India.

At the same time, within the current racial capitalist order, brown blood represents the possibility that the romantic ideas associated with assimilation might eventually come true. Here I am drawing directly from the work in anthropology that argues that midcentury discourses on racialization, especially in North America, sought to solve the problem of race through the romantic ideology of blood mixing that could, over time, "whiten" the blood of the body politic.[48] This ideology intersected with a global pedagogical assimilationist logic, most famously framed by British viceroy Thomas Macaulay, who in the 1830s endeavored "to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[49] That is to say, the inclusion of those with brown blood was actually intended to produce a global class of subjects who worked at the behest of white-colonial power. In this sense at least, brown blood is one way of making sense of the paradoxical position of those in the brown world who have ascended within (neo)colonial economies of salvation. I turn to some of these paradoxes in the next section.

On the Economies of Brown Salvation

As Nehru's statement earlier hints at, the postcolonized brown world was deeply enmeshed in the politics of saviorism, already seeing themselves as an underclass in need of development. Indeed, colonial racial capitalism required that the fetish of liberal modernity,[50] with its ideals of universal rights, technocracy, and the like, be tethered to a paternalistic "imperial initiative" that saw the colonized as not yet quite ready to govern themselves.[51] In this sense, the coloniality of power functioned by emplacing salvation as the never-achievable future potential for the brown colonized subject.[52]

These colonial roots of salvation found unique new forms in the post–World War II American reordering of things, in humanitarianism and development in particular, which initiated new powerful, capital-intensive international governing technologies. To justify outsider-led economic oversight of newly independent postcolonial nation-states, supranational organizations, like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, further naturalized the rhetoric of impoverishment, intellectual incapacity, and civilizational lack through distinctions of developed/underdeveloped, Global North/Global South, and First World/Third World, thereby executing the trick of transmuting explicitly racist global discourses into cultural dog whistles and reifying the boundaries between saviors and those in need of saving.[53] In these conceptions, the discourse on poverty was an invention of the West meant at once to locate the problem in the postcolonized subject and also to erase the legacies of colonial exploitation/expropriation that had resulted in much of their lack. In this context, "the sense of brown," as Muñoz writes, is a racialized sign of economic and cultural impoverishment—*to be brown is to be poor; to be poor is to be brown*—and is marked by a flourishing despite the perceived deficiency and underdevelopment emplaced by (neo)colonial racial ordering.[54]

The Indian case is one stark example of the intransigent linkage between brownness and poverty. The British famously justified their rule in India and the extraction of its resources because of what they deemed extreme destitution and uncleanliness. The mark of abject impoverishment has continued ever since, with India continuously being characterized as one of the poorest and most unequal nations in the world. India's own 2012 Below Poverty Line benchmark places the number at 22 percent, a metric that has consistently been critiqued for arbitrarily lowering the perceived poverty rate while neglecting to address the massive increases in income and wealth inequality.[55] The poverty rate continues to be a brown smudge that cracks India's dreams of ascension to global superpower status. It is also a de facto justification for saviors who see themselves as having the appropriate skills to solve this problem once and for all.

Saviorist strategies continued to shift as part of the rise of neoliberal capitalism as the dominant mode of accumulation—which privatized social goods, facilitated the movement of elites, and saw a reentrenchment of inequality and protection of class power through mass militarization.[56] These reconfigurations also created the conditions for the major redeployment of financial resources to a growing circuit of capital, which I have characterized here as the *help economies*, producing niche markets that reproduced neocolonial racialized

difference in order for funds to circulate and for interventions to be justified.[57] The rise of NGOs like Sahaayaka can be directly linked to this neoliberal rearrangement, which encouraged those elites from outside of the voluntary sectors to join and "fix" the social sectors.

These international rearrangements were linked to intranational unfoldings that had allowed certain classes of the previously colonized to take on central roles in the saviorist project. This class of global brown elites, drawn from the "old tyrants" of precolonization, was imagined as the inheritors of the project of salvation because they had appropriately assimilated into the ideology of modernity, liberal universalism, technocracy, and accumulation (what might be termed their "trickle-down" inheritance).[58] Frantz Fanon famously argued that elite colonized subjects sought to rectify their own feelings of deficiency by traveling to the metropole and imbibing the language, cultural norms, and values of the colonizer—that is, "they begin to speak like the white man" primarily because they understood that "you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich."[59] These brown elites were "deified" by those within their national contexts precisely because they had embraced the project of colonial modernity and therefore were expected to bring salvation to all their country people and, in some cases, to other postcolonized peoples perceived as "lower" on the racial hierarchy.[60]

In the Indian case, brown nationalist leaders were caste elites who had benefited from colonial rule, espoused colonial values, and made pacts with the colonizers to maintain their accumulative potential.[61] During the postindependence period, some of these figures—Nehru and the like—were deified as the fathers of the nation and undertook projects of "national development."[62] At the same time, these elites were sometimes criticized for their neocolonial developmentalist visions. For example, they were pejoratively called *brown sahibs* to denote their internalization of Western values, linked to a particular British education, English proficiency, and aspiration for civilizationalism.[63] The aforementioned brown sepoy updates the brown sahib figure by continuing to focus on elitism, English education (likely associated with the United States), and a supposed subservience to the West while suggesting these people are not authentically Indian enough and are, at best, misguided fools or, at worst, villainous traitors working against the rise of the Hindu state. These pejoratives foreground that "brown" as a shared neocolonial racial imaginary was fraught from its inception and continues to be so today.

Part of the operations of power that brown racialization masked was the fact that the promise of mobility and assimilation within white supremacist imperialism also required projects of brown expropriation rooted in anti-Blackness.

In this vein, Charania conceives of brownness as a peculiar and fraught *in-betweenness* in relation to both whiteness and Blackness.[64] She offers "brownness as a racial formation trapped in its own shifting specificities as one that, yes is 'coexistent, affiliates and intermeshes with Blackness' . . . but one that can also remain aloof toward, dismiss and extract from the global and diasporic field of blackness."[65]

Even during the postcolonial moment, the tense relationship between brownness and Blackness was already present in both its idealized form of solidarity and its fraught reinscription of racialized hierarchy. For example, the Asian-African (Bandung) Conference in 1955, for which Nehru was one of the primary organizers, was branded as the first significant attempt at creating solidarity across previously colonized countries in Africa and Asia. However, this particular attempt at global Afro-Asian solidarity was already enmeshed in racist and masculinist nation-building ideologies that relied on narratives that positioned Indian (and/or Asian) civilizations "above" African civilizations.[66] Famously, in one of the bulletins published during Bandung, the "brown man's burden" was enshrined as one articulation of the brown world's responsibility to help and support African nation-states along with exploited brown peoples from places like "Goa, Irian, Malaya, Guiana, and Cyprus."[67] Here the outlines of a specifically brown form of salvation began to take shape, imagining new spheres of influence in the formerly colonized world through which particularly well-positioned brown peoples could consolidate their racial and economic power.[68]

However, unlike in this postcolonial version of brown racial in-betweenness, which remained grounded in the discourses on newly independent nation-states, in the case explored here the brown savior's rapid ascension sits at the nexus of the migratory patterns facilitated by the legacies of anticolonial struggle and the end of the Cold War, US multicultural imperialism, the rise of Third World superpowers, and the global connections forged in the digital age. This new racial capitalist order required a further reification of racialized difference. Brown, as indexing a historical struggle against colonization and the fight against a perceived essential underdevelopment, inadequacy, and impoverishment, does the work of "phenotypic [and blood type] homogenization."[69] This commodifiable form of brown a priori legitimates the brown savior as culturally authentic and therefore valuable, facilitating their power to determine the course of salvation for "their communities" and other postcolonized ones as well.

The brown savior's value has been further enhanced in the global-digital age, when technological prowess has been linked to global ascension and has

produced its own racialized politics. In fact, as I discuss extensively in part IV of this book, digital solutions are understood in mainstream discourse as morally superior, universal solutions that can be implemented anywhere in the world to solve the problem of global inequality.[70] This is why brown saviors chose digital projects as their method of salvation and why they were hailed within Indian nationalist discourses *and* in global ICT4D (Information Communication Technologies for Development) discourses.[71] In this sense, the brown savior's digital capacity provides further moral legitimacy and commodifiable value within the help economies.

As a result, the brown savior is a harbinger of a new global racial capitalist order that locates itself in the imaginary of a global transnational class, untethered from the racial topography of the West, who will purportedly sanitize late liberal global capitalism through their technological prowess. This new savior class is positioned to develop newly "browned" digital solutions to the problem of poverty while also supporting the fight against all those illiberal, "bad" brown Others deemed unassimilable. As I explore further in chapters 2 and 6, the US imperial war on terror intersected with the rise of Hindu supremacy in India to reinforce anti-Muslim racist ideologies. The false global perception of the "liberal Hindu" and the potentially "illiberal Muslim" shaped who the brown savior could be and what being a brown savior means for different religious groups on the subcontinent.[72]

As a reminder, India, and South Asia more broadly, is a place of immense regional, linguistic, ethnic, and migratory diversity, and there is a near-infinite number of ways to enter into the study of South Asian racialization. As a few examples, Sonja Thomas has analyzed the racialization of Syrian Christians in Kerala; Dolly Kikon has written on the racism experienced by northeasterners in relation to India's settler colonial regime; Mythri Jegathesan has located her study of Hill Country Tamils in Sri Lanka within the intersections of racial, gender, and caste histories of global "Coolitude"; Mariam Durrani has explored how Pakistani-origin youth negotiate the overlapping global histories of anti-Muslim racism; and E. Gabriel Dattatreyan has focused on the anti-Black racism experienced by African migrants in Delhi.[73] In migratory contexts, Vivek Bald has excavated the early migrations of Bengali Muslim sailors to the United States and their racialization upon arrival; Stanley Thangaraj has analyzed the racial politics of desi basketball players in the United States; Nishant Upadhyay has pointed out the complicity of the savarna diaspora in the North American settler colonial order; and Sareeta Amrute has revealed the racialized cognitive capacities that inhere in Indian bodies as they perform technocapitalist labor in Berlin.[74] Given my ethnographic context, I focus on

the processes of brown racialization associated specifically with savarna Indians and their migrations to the United States, linked to their particular class and caste positions.[75] This particular form of brownness has become nearly hegemonic because of the immense capital accumulated by savarna Indian Americans and their ability to dictate the commodified form of brown that circulates globally. As such, in the case I present here, brownness should be understood in relation to specific processes of racialization associated with the global Indian "at the intersections of caste supremacy, brahmanism, coloniality, Islamophobia, and Hindu fundamentalism, all of which are calibrated through shifting capitalist political economies."[76]

On the Brown Occlusions of Caste

Commodified forms of brownness necessarily occlude other forms of racialized stratification that actually produce the brown subject's value. In the Indian case, this obfuscated form of value is related to their dominant caste positions. For example, Dalit feminist Thenmozhi Soundararajan has argued, "In embracing brownness as the key identity, they make their privileged positions of caste, class, immigration, and race— which would situate them in a position of not only oppression but also privilege — much harder to interrogate."[77] Soundararajan is pointing specifically to the legacy of caste supremacy, which has continued to allow for dominant-castes to maintain their social and economic positions.[78] This ongoing legacy of caste largely accounts for the brown savior's excess value in both India and the United States.

As I have already noted, most of Sahaayaka's organizational members were *savarna*, a term denoting those who came from any one of the four castes of the varna system (the Shudras, vaishyas, kshatriyas, and brahmins), as opposed to those from Dalit castes, who were the oppressed communities considered outside of the caste system, and therefore termed "avarna." In South India, in which this study took place, the primary divisions are typically among brahmins, Shudras (in Karnataka, these were mainly the Vokkaligas, Lingayats, and Kurubas, who were considered the "productive" agricultural castes, primarily as farmers and shepherds), and Dalits.

The relationship between race and caste has had a long and contested history. This makes sense, given that both race and caste have been technologies used to fix divisions and hierarchies of labor. In the Ambedkarite tradition, caste is understood as a precolonial system of brahmin supremacist legal-religious justifications for a hierarchic gradation of laborers codified in Hindu

religious texts, maintained through hyperendogamy, and rooted in the exclusion and persecution of Dalits, especially through ritual untouchability.[79] In contrast, race emerged during the racist legacy of settler colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, which sought to fix labor slottings by tying labor to notions of biologized bodily capacity linked to "blood" and "skin," and maintaining these racist slottings in legal frameworks rooted in anti-Blackness and Indigenous genocide.[80] The overlaps and tensions between caste and race were articulated in the 1930s by an anthropological school termed the "racial caste" school, led by anthropologists Allison Davis, Hortense Powdermaker, James Dollard, and Gunnar Myrdal, who sought to understand the race problem in the American South as an intransigent "caste system." In *Caste, Class, and Race* (1948), Oliver Cox famously rejected this school of thought by arguing that race and caste *should not* be taken as commensurable categories of social differentiation given their very different historical emergences and regional enactments. He argued that race relations in the United States were better understood within the world historical emergence of capitalism and its tripartite system of labor-capital-profits.[81] In the context of India, B. R. Ambedkar argued just as forcefully that caste in India *should not* be understood through the logics of race because the "object of caste" was not to preserve "purity of blood."[82]

The debate regarding race and caste has returned to prominence recently with the acclaim for popular texts such as Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents*, which posits yet again that caste is a better way of understanding American racism than the category race while also arguing that it works in the much same way as caste in India and caste in Nazi Germany.[83] In works such as Wilkerson's, caste is used to evoke an invisible foundation for intransigent and inheritable hierarchies within national boundaries. While her text re-opens a useful and important conversation on caste as a global phenomenon, literature like Wilkerson's suffers from several shortcomings. First, this literature again fails to account for the way that class and labor play exceptionally important roles in theorizing *both* race and caste.[84] Second, Wilkerson's work (and Cox's earlier work as well) reifies a static and very limited notion of caste in India that does not recognize its dynamism and change, nor does it account for the fact that the very notion of caste has been forever changed by postcolonization.[85] Third, and related, this work maintains a simplistic nationalist view of how race and caste function and therefore neglects the far more complex, situated colonial and postcolonial histories of transnational movement that shape how race and caste have functioned in tandem.[86] In fact, such facile and rigid nationalistic boundaries between caste and race may actually facilitate casteist agendas that refuse to recognize the ways that Dalit activists

have sought to position caste in relation to conversations on race in recent years.[87]

Let me be clear that I believe that a global caste critique can provide essential insights regarding the maintenance of intransigent and graded hierarchies of labor in many societies. Such an analysis would recognize the way that caste is founded on valuing/devaluing particular laborers based on the politics of purity/pollution and would focus on specific historical, migratory, and sociocultural instantiations of caste.[88] However, rigid, ahistorical, and nationally bounded ideologies of caste and race do little to help understand subjects like those in my study, who carry with them markers of India's caste system as they intersect with multiple histories of global racialization. The British in India determined which communities would play specific roles in the colonial bureaucracy based on what they perceived as the immutable labor capacities of different castes, effectively "racializing caste." Moreover, the word *caste* is a colonial term derived from the Portuguese term *casta*, which was used in the seventeenth century to describe the system of social stratification the Portuguese encountered in India. This term collapsed the dual systems of varna and jati and positioned them in relation to early European racial understandings of *limpieza de sangre*, or "blood purity."[89] Seen in this way, the preceding discussion of hemo-politics can be read as an example of the historical legacy of colonial encounter and the way conversations about kinship, caste, and the like have been refracted through processes of colonial racialization through blood purity/impurity discourses. Caste-as-blood took the question of caste "inside," the danger of caste impurity further tethered to maintaining the kinds of hyperexclusionary ritual and marriage practices that could prevent the potential pollution of dominant-caste blood. In turn, the legal and religious institutionalization of caste-based oppression was justified on the grounds of maintaining the blood purity of dominant-caste people who were supposedly "Aryan" and therefore actually white by ancestry.[90] Popularly termed the *Aryan myth*, this ideology proposed that brahmins and other dominant castes were actually just Europeans who had migrated to the subcontinent many years in the past.

While caste-as-blood purity became a justification for the maintenance of savarna supremacy in the Indian national context, it also reentrenched global hierarchies between white and brown. In, for example, the infamous case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), which was meant to determine whether brown Indian migrants could receive citizenship in the United States, the court ruled that Thind's brown blood delegitimized his claims to citizenship. Thind claimed that he was "a high-caste Hindu, of full Indian blood, born at Amritsar, Punjab, India, a white person," despite the fact that he was actu-

ally Sikh, participating in the collapse of all South Asians into the category of dominant-caste Hindu in the United States.[91] However, US Supreme Court justice George Sutherland argued:

> It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity. . . . The type may have been so changed by intermixture of blood as to justify an intermediate classification. Something very like this has actually taken place in India . . . the vaunted purity of blood which the caste rules were calculated to perpetuate can scarcely have remained of more than a relative degree even in the case of the Brahmin caste.[92]

First, the "blond Scandinavian" and the "brown Hindu" are acknowledged to have a shared ancestry tethered to Aryanness. Second, the court enshrines the racialized category of "brown Hindu," which implies that brownness is separate from the category Hindu and can be attached as a descriptor for other ethnic or religious groups as well. Third, brownness is ontologically linked to the racial impurity associated with blood mixing, and, as I return to in chapter 2, the caste rules of brahminism are linked directly to an (unsuccessful) attempt at maintaining purity of blood.

Most important, the court case reflected the way that the dominant-caste pact with colonial white supremacy served to lock the dominant-castes into their position of brownness within global colonial cosmologies despite their best attempts to "purify" themselves of perceived brown blood and therefore maintain caste supremacy.[93] In turn, a blood-based discourse on caste stratification became a means for dominant castes to filter their own self-fashioning in and through the colonial logics of brown blood within which they experienced themselves as marginal. This feeling of marginality tethered to the blood is one way of reading the persistent need to "prove" dominant-caste Hindu ascension vis-à-vis the West.

At the same time, this global rearticulation of caste-as-blood actually occluded the materiality of caste oppression in India, which was based on the enshrining of graded labor divisions and exclusions through religion and law.[94] In fact, the protections emplaced by Ambedkar in the Indian constitution were intended to ameliorate this *material* legacy of caste violence and inequality, including through reserved quotas in education and government employment (this was itself a forced compromise owing to Gandhi's intransigent resistance to anything more).[95] However, these protections have largely rendered caste as a category perceived as pertinent only to nonsavarnas, and particularly Dalits, in popular media discourses. As a result, as I discuss further in chapter 5,

savarnas, especially those at the higher rungs of the caste hierarchy, have been able to skirt discussions of their own caste positions, rendering themselves as the normatively unmarked "casteless" communities whose educational and occupational mobility has nothing to do with caste and is instead based solely on their merit.[96] This phenomenon has been especially true for those Indians who traveled to the United States, where caste has not been recognized as an operative form of discrimination until quite recently.[97] Mimicking this public erasure of caste position, scholarship on/in India has mostly neglected explicit excavations of savarna castes and their reproduction of casteist power asymmetries. In response, Gajendran Ayyathurai has argued for the field of critical caste studies, which "is committed to examining diverse cultural, religious, political, and economic mechanisms by which caste-power is produced and dispersed through a putatively inviolable caste structure."[98]

My project draws from and contributes to the critical caste studies school by revealing the ways that the NGO sector refracts problematic caste illusions/elisions, tracing the linkages between caste and racialized ideologies regarding who is capable of taking on global help work and who is still perceived as in need of help. As illustrated above, the brown savior most often emerges from the "casteless" globally mobile brown savarna capitalist class. Suraj Yengde explains, "The development-related model reinforces the unequal donor-receiver relationship, thereby permanently putting Dalit people at the receiving end— the lower end. . . . The handlers of such agencies and country/mission heads are invariably dominant-caste people."[99] Sahaayaka's leadership is one stark reflection of this caste- and class-based stratification within the global help economies.

Other caste communities, for example, those from agricultural castes who took on positions as Sahaayaka fieldworkers, were racialized quite differently within (neo)colonial systems of categorization. As I explain in more detail in chapter 8, the differentiations along urban/rural lines as they intersected with racialized caste position are yet another dimension by which to analyze the course of brown saviorism and the types of stratified labor that emerge in the help economies.

In Sum and What's to Come

What this discussion reveals, I hope, is that an excavation of brown saviorism requires careful attention to the overlapping and interlocking systems of power that produce brown subjects, whose positions are far more fraught than a simple rendering of the colonial wound can address. As Naveen Minai and

Sara Shroff write, "This is not just about whiteness. This is also about the ways in which racial, gender, [caste] and class privilege travels between global north and global south: white saviors, brown saviors."[100]

In the rest of this text, I provide seventeen short chapters, split into four parts, that rely on my sweaty, nervous ethnographic encounters to shed light on the story of brown saviorism in India and its role in racial and caste capitalist accumulation.[101] Through a process of unfixing, unsettling, and reframing, *Brown Saviors and Their Others* encourages a critical attention to the material histories, power asymmetries, racialized and casteized relationships, geographies of scale, and ethnographic unfoldings that tensely link the visions of transnational NGO leaders like Krish to the aspirations of fieldworkers like Suresh and the rural students who are at the receiving end of interventions. As with this introduction, I end each part with a short section called "In Sum and What's to Come" to transition to the next part of the book. While the short chapters and each part of the book can be read independently of one another, it is my hope that as you read, the synthetic distinctions I have made between parts and chapters melt into a series of overlapping, interconnected, and mutually constitutive arguments.

Part I, "Theorizing Saviorism," situates brown saviorism and the help economies within the workings of global racial capitalism.[102] In chapter 1, I explain how the help economies have become the solution to the problem of surplus labor in racial capitalist systems by functioning as markets for the saving of the dispossessed while also becoming potential sources of employment for some from within these dispossessed classes. In chapter 2, I situate the story of brown saviorism within a history of race, religion, and caste. I show how the bodily capacities of the Hindu and, more specifically, the brahmin are racialized with cognitive, technical, and spiritual capacities. These racialized capacities allow for the emergence of a class of savarna Hindus who ascend to the role of savior.

Part II, "Neocolonial Saviorism," foregrounds ethnographic examples that locate my analysis at the interface of neocolonial race, caste, and gendered relations as they influence Sahaayaka's praxis. In these chapters I focus on the way that particular racialized categories associated with colonial and postcolonial governance in India—poverty, nation, caste, gender, and religion—reemerge in Sahaayaka's institutional arrangement and, therefore, how brown saviors, mentors, and those who live in the villages outside of Bangalore imagine who should be helped and how. Chapter 3 excavates the long-standing racialized problem of poverty in relation to Malthusian population control theory. I show how, inadvertently, a neo-Malthusian logic is reproduced in and through the motivational strategies deployed by Sahaayaka. Chapter 4 focuses on the

decisions made by Sahaayaka's brown saviors to partner with American universities and global funders, which allow the organization to accumulate resources only within the parameters of their global racialized slotting as brown Indians. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focus on the neocolonial caste, gender, and religious hierarchies that hide in plain sight in the brown savior's supposedly universal technocratic interventions. Specifically, these three chapters focus on intraorganizational caste tensions, gendered stratifications of labor, and anti-Muslim organizational structurings that complicate the technocratic, data-driven operations of the NGO. Together, these five chapters show how Sahaayaka's interventions reinscribe neocolonial hierarchies within the governing structures associated with help.

Part III, "Urban Saviorism," focuses on the racializing processes produced as the brown savior travels along the urban-rural interface. Spatializing and territorializing my study in this way allows for a more concrete exploration of how the help economies function as part of the contemporary workings of primitive accumulation. In Karnataka the expansion of Bangalore has systematically led to the expropriation of rural land.[103] As I argue in chapter 8, the education NGO is a central terrain on which dispossession is negotiated. To reveal this unfolding process, I focus on the mentors, who sought ways to use the NGO as a form of mobility even as they were racially slotted into positions that rendered them largely immobile. Each of these chapters reveals the fraught position of the mentor, who challenges the brown savior even as they may actually reinforce the very same values in their strategies for mobility. That is to say, in some sense, the mentors wish to become brown saviors, too, and may produce new neocolonial cycles of stratification themselves.

Part IV, "Digital Saviorism," focuses on brown saviorism at the interface of digital proliferation. Each chapter in this part focuses on the ways that digital integration functions to (re)produce racialized division and allows brown saviors to accumulate ever more capital as they intervene in rural communities. Sahaayaka's excess value emerged as part of the powerful and totalizing imaginary of the digital as the solution to poverty in India. At the same time, the savarna diasporic Hindu has been perceived as having a preternatural capacity for technological innovation and therefore has taken on a leading role as the appropriate savior in this push toward digital versions of poverty alleviation. As I show in each of these chapters, Sahaayaka's digital solutions were never divorced from their historically constituted position. In fact, the digital future they anticipated had the potential to reinforce colonial, racial, postcolonial, postliberalization, and postautocratic structurings of help.[104]

I conclude by returning in "Against Saviorism" to my humble hope for this text: to unsettle, if ever so slightly, the project of global help in places like India by reframing it within the racial and caste capitalist enterprise. To consider the help economies as part of a global racial and caste capitalist system calls into question the foundation of global late liberalism's version of the moral good and, perhaps, opens space for a different way of relating to one another, one that is not founded on the necessary precondition that some people have excess value (to accumulate and to help) while others do not. I end by positing what a different "nervous" imaginary for change might be, especially at a moment when the power of the far right continues to gather steam in India and elsewhere.

Notes

PREFACE: ENCOUNTERING SAVIORISM

1 I have anonymized the names of the villages in which I worked, along with all the names of the individuals and organizations with whom I worked.

2 See the introduction for a discussion/definition of *savarna*. I have chosen not to capitalize *brahmin* throughout this text in order to follow those critical anti-caste scholars who refuse to recognize, valorize, and contribute to the power asymmetries and violent exploitation of the caste system emplaced historically through brahminical patriarchy. I also do not capitalize the kshatriya and vaishya castes, whose positions within the caste hierarchy facilitate its ongoing violence. However, I do capitalize some specific caste groups within the Shudra castes in Karnataka, specifically that of the Vokkaliga and Lingayat caste groups, and Dalit, the general term chosen by those who were deemed "outside" of the varna system. This is intended to draw from the Bahujan tradition which sees caste not simply as a "Dalit problem" but links the struggles of "the majority of the people" in India, comprised of Dalits, Shudras, and Adivasis. This decision is itself fraught. I recognize that there are a number of fissures between and within these caste groupings as well, and some of the complicities of Vokkaligas and Lingayats emerge during the rest of the text.

3 I elaborate on the specificity of caste and race and the sometimes contradictory relationship between them in the introduction. Also see the introduction for a definition of the help economies.

4 *Kannadiga* is a term used to describe those who speak Kannada and is also associated with a shared set of cultural practices. Kannada is one of the four primary South Indian languages and is the official language spoken in Karnataka state. It is spoken by approximately 65 percent of the state's population.

5 For example, nearly 50 percent of the population of Ramanagara city, also known as the "silk city," is Muslim. This religious distribution differs quite dramatically from villages in South Karnataka, which are predominantly Hindu.

6 A *sattvic diet* is one that includes only vegetarian recipes without onions or garlic. Such recipes are viewed as spiritually pure within one version of brahminical Hindu cuisine.

7 See A. Shankar, "Participation, Reception, Consent, and Refusal," for a thorough exploration of my thoughts on consent and ethics, including how I negotiated questions of consent with my participants during fieldwork.

8 Ferguson, *Global Shadows*. I am drawing explicitly from the theoretical work in Simpson, "Consent's Revenge"; Jackson, *Thin Description*; and Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, which, in very different contexts, theorize the ethics of refusal and opacity. John Jackson Jr. critiques the history of "thick description" in anthropology, which traffics in a colonial ideology that requires the complete transparency of postcolonized, mostly brown and Black, subjects. Audra Simpson writes that Indigenous peoples' refusal emerged as "the very deliberate, willful, intentional actions that people were making in the face of the expectation that they consent to their own elimination as a people, that they consent to having their land taken, their lives controlled, and their stories told for them." Simpson, "Consent's Revenge," 327. Édouard Glissant argues that the previously colonized have "the right to opacity" and should be allowed to exist without the demand for transparency imposed by the colonizer. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

9 Muñoz, *Sense of Brown*.

10 My research in Adavisandra would not have happened without Sripriya Pratinidhi, a former student at Azim Premji University, where I briefly taught university courses during my time in Karnataka. While she did not always accompany me on my trips to Adavisandra, when she did join, her careful and caring questioning changed what and how I learned while there.

11 Thirty-one districts in four states (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala) have been characterized as suicide-prone, and Karnataka has the second-highest number of farmers' suicides, behind Maharashtra. The term *farmers' suicide* is itself highly controversial given that the patriarchal capitalist definition by which the government determines who is a "real" farmer is based on title to land. This leaves out all but landowning male heads of agricultural households. See Nagaraj, *Farmers' Suicides in India*, 5–6.

12 I am deeply indebted to the work and teachings of Palagummi Sainath, with whom I had the opportunity to take a Media and Inequality class while a PhD student. Sainath's continuous focus on the tragic results of capitalism and agrarian crisis has guided some of my own attentions in this project. See Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*.

13 For a more elaborate explanation of the phenomenon and its sociohistorical antecedents, see Münster, "Farmers' Suicides and the State in India." In addition, Suraj Yengde points out that the question of farmers' suicides in India is not just related to the neoliberal economic restructuring of the nation-state but also must be understood vis-à-vis India's caste society. See Yengde, *Caste Matters*, 18.

14 Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent make the powerful point that children are typically seen in social science, and in broader imaginaries in neoliberal societies,

as incapable of thinking for themselves, of reasoning, and therefore of changing the world in which they live. See Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, *Small Wars*; and Hecht, *At Home in the Street*.

15　Similarly, Liisa Malkki shifts the focus "from humanitarian intervention and its effects on the *recipients* of aid to a more intimate set of questions about 'humanitarians' themselves." Malkki, *Need to Help*, 2. I return to Malkki's argument at the end of chapter 1.

16　Hunt, *Nervous State*, 5.

17　My thoughts on nervousness also have a strong relation to the conception of postcolonial disorders in Good et al., *Postcolonial Disorders*. Nervousness can be understood as a historical category of medicalized pathology, especially for women and the colonized, related to affects like "hysteria." See also Briggs, "Race of Hysteria."

18　For example, see Taussig, *Nervous System*.

19　Madison, *Critical Ethnography*.

20　Ginsburg, "Parallax Effect."

21　Simpson, "Consent's Revenge"; Jackson, *Thin Description*; and Dattatreyan, "Waiting Subjects."

22　Jackson, "On Ethnographic Sincerity," S284–85.

23　See M. Gonzalez, "Methods of Motherhood."

24　I am also drawing from Zurn, "Cripping Curiosity," in Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*. Zurn critiques an intrusive curiosity that objectifies those with disabilities. In turn, those with disabilities are not recognized as practitioners and critical questioners from whom we should learn. Beyond the fetish of those with disabilities as objects consumable for entertainment, Zurn also writes, "Such curiosity deeply informs the social construction of disability—perhaps especially in the case of supercrip narratives—as well as its analysis. With supercrip narratives, certain people with disabilities are singled out as exemplars of resilience, while disability itself is reinscribed as something to be overcome." See Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 149. As a response, Zurn argues that cripping curiosity "resists the compulsion of ablebodymindedness. It is an insistent refusal to comply. . . . It celebrates the 'unnatural' bodymind and disrupts the repeated enforcement of its normate counterpart. And it does so across multiple temporal vectors." See Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 159.

25　Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 13.

26　Williams argues that radical honesty hinges on three key foci—telling the truth, valuing narrative and personal experience, and acting—that seek to challenge racist and patriarchal institutional cultures in the academy. See B. Williams, "Radical Honesty," 73. In her 2021 American Anthropology Association meeting comments as part of the panel "Beyond Crisis," Williams noted that many of her graduate students challenge the framework of radical honesty by pointing out that this kind of emotional openness is being conscripted and commodified within the university, only further reinforcing emotional labor regimes that disproportionality impact women of color, especially Black feminist scholars. B. Williams, "Beyond Crisis," 2021. This insight reminds me that nervous ethnography cannot be and should not be enacted in identical ways by all scholars but must emerge from

our situated positions within institutional power regimes. As another example of a very different decision when it comes to personal narrative in writing, Max Liboiron explicitly argues that they will not be telling stories of self because of the way that neocolonial academic violence is invested in forcing those who have been violated to reveal themselves. See Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism*. I've decided on a different approach here partly because I am embarking on an excavation of the complex registers of complicity and partly because I am unable to make a stark distinction between the academy and the rest of the world, especially when nearly every social relation that I am part of is no more "outside" the colonial than is academia.

27 Jackson, "On Ethnographic Sincerity," s284–85.

28 Ahmed reminds us, "Caring is anxious—to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future, where the future is embodied in fragility of an object whose persistence matters. . . . But we would not end up with a liberal notion. . . . To attend to something that has become more easily breakable is to attend to its history, with love, and with care." Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 266.

29 Ahmed writes, "We need to start with our own complicity. . . . To be complicit should not become its own reproductive logic: that all we can do is to reproduce the logics of the institutions that employ us. In fact those who benefit from unjust systems need to work harder to expose that injustice." Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 263.

30 Here I am thinking with two scholars. First, Gloria Wekker shows how claims to white innocence allow for the ability to perform racist violence, while also allowing the performer of such violence to claim "innocence" and therefore shun any culpability for their acts. Second, Dia Da Costa argues that savarna academics traffic in caste innocence as they pretend to be progressive scholars but still find ways to invisibilize their caste position and/or utilize their powerful academic positions to sidestep their participation in explicit or implicit caste violence. See Wekker, *White Innocence*; and Da Costa, "Caste-Ignorant Worlds of Progressive Academics."

31 See A. Shankar, "Silence and Privilege Renegotiated." Some notable exceptions include Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*; Walley, *Exit Zero*; Hartigan, "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness"; and Pearson, "Prickly Skin of White Supremacy."

32 The "problem of pleasure" has been well documented in visual research, especially when focused on Black and brown Others. In Deborah Poole's work, the violent power of colonial pleasure, what she refers to in Edward Said's terms as "the pleasure of empire," becomes embedded in the imagination of imperial subjects. See Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 17.

33 See also Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

34 See Ayyathurai, "It Is Time for a New Subfield"; Rawat and Satyanarayana, *Dalit Studies*; and S. Thomas, *Privileged Minorities*.

35 For example, Subramanian Shankar writes, "Postcolonial theory is peculiar. In startling ways it is not postcolonial at all. Consider, for example, caste and how little postcolonial theory has to say about it. On the one hand, caste has been the

object of intense scholarly scrutiny for centuries. At least from the time of the British entry into India as a colonizing power, it has been steadily made into the very identity of India—its essential nature. Yet in *The Weapon of the Other*, Kancha Ilaiah records his sense that 'caste was not a category of socio-historical analysis' in contemporary scholarship. . . . Certainly, in the tens of thousands of pages of 'postcolonial' commentary on India (that is, from within institutional postcolonialism, or the academic formation known most frequently as 'postcolonial studies'), caste is largely absent." S. Shankar, *Flesh and Fish Blood*, 28.

36   See Ambedkar Age Collective, *Hatred in the Belly*, for a critique of the savarna position in telling stories of Dalit-Bahujans. The term *Dalit-Bahujan* references movements that recognize that caste is not just a Dalit problem. Valliammal Karunakaran writes, "For example, I believe the term *Bahujan*, simply meaning 'the majority of the people,' brings to attention to the reality that caste is not a 'Dalit problem.' While Dalit and Adivasis are some of the most vulnerable communities in a caste society, the majority of the people of the subcontinent are caste-bound and ruled by "upper"-caste minorities. The term *Bahujan* refers to present day Scheduled Castes (Dalits), Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis/indigenous) and Shudra (peasant) castes—cutting across religion, ethnicities and geographies." Karunakaran, "The Dalit-Bahujan Guide to Understanding Caste in Hindu Scripture." Similarly, see Guru, "How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?," for a critique of the dichotomy between "theoretical brahmins" and "empirical shudras" that assumes brahmins as somehow solely capable of theoretical contributions, even when it comes to the lives of the oppressed castes. My text emerges from these considerations.

37   Here I take seriously the critique made by Shailaja Paik, who writes that savarna scholars, while focusing quite a bit of attention on Dalit communities, are "remarkably silent on Suvarna anxieties about caste sociality, which serve to mark other Indian communities as violent, anti-national, and foreign. They are thus complicit in perpetuating the myth of perceived unmarkedness as castelessness and thereby becoming casteless and burdening Dalits with caste." Paik, "Dalit Feminist Thought."

38   Manan Ahmed Asif writes, "The majorities of the subcontinent have accumulated power to govern, and they have condemned the minorities to be marginalized or to be expunged. . . . The majoritarian Sunni or Hindutva projects ask that we, as historians, consider them inevitable and immutable. . . . Undoubtedly, as postcolonized historians we have inherited the colonial episteme. . . . It is our collective task to re-imagine the past." Asif, *Loss of Hindustan*, 225.

39   Sharmila Rege writes, "Except for a few notable exceptions, women's studies scholars did not seriously engage with dalit feminist critiques. . . . This lack of engagement cannot be dismissed easily, either by savarna feminist justification of being 'frozen in guilt' . . . or by a resigned dalit feminist position that sees a 'fit of caste identities and ideological positions' (brahman and 'upper caste' women will be brahmanical). The former assumes that caste is solely the concern of dalit women. . . . The latter resigns itself to assuming the impossibility of transcending

caste identities." Rege, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender*, 4–5. See also C. Gupta, *The Gender of Caste*, for the possibilities of new ways of thinking and researching when one takes seriously "auto-critique" (xi).

With regard to being a caste traitor, I draw on the terms instantiated by Noel Ignatiev and the journal *Race Traitor*. See Ignatiev and Garvey, *Race Traitor*. I see caste treason similarly to the way that they argued as the slogan for each of the issues of their journal that "treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity." This set of ideas resonates with ideas emerging from anticaste scholars. For example, Yengde calls for savarnas and Ambedkarite brahmins to serve as "a 'cultural suicide bomber' willing to blow up the oldest surviving edifice of discrimination." Yengde, *Caste Matters*, 30. While I agree with his sentiment, given my own relationship to suicide, I am less eager to use this phrasing to describe the work of annihilating caste.

40 The story of this project might actually start after college, when, not having any career direction, I joined Teach for America (TFA), thinking that I might enjoy teaching. A nonprofit organization, TFA recruits college graduates who have attended elite institutions in the United States to teach in many of the United States' most underresourced schools. At the time, I knew absolutely nothing about just how problematic TFA's project of salvation was, and my time at TFA was an absolute disaster. I left after teaching in New York City having no love for that organization but having cultivated a real love for teaching and an understanding that the education system was horrifically unequal. I came back to study at a graduate school of education with a conviction that I needed to know more about the systemic inequities perpetrated by these kinds of institutions.

41 I owe a great debt to Gajendran Ayyathurai, who, while I was an undergraduate student, pulled me aside to mention that my use of Tamil (one of the South Indian languages) marked me as a brahmin. He then handed me a copy of Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I Am Not a Hindu*. I devoured the text and suddenly was able to recognize why I had been so disturbed by the brahmin community I had grown up in. Professor Ayyathurai, in no uncertain terms, changed my life.

42 Zwick-Maitreyi et al., "Caste in the United States."

43 Let me not get into the endless savarna stories of struggle, rags-to-riches, and "coming to the USA with only $5 in their pockets" that give the illusion that the savarna in the United States fits snugly within the brown immigrant story.

44 Charania, review of *The Sense of Brown*.

45 I was inspired by a tweet by Discourse Hacker (@shudraism), who reminded on Twitter, "The most difficult Savarna Savior to combat with is the one within me." January 8, 2021, https://twitter.com/shudraism/status/1347459654624768003.

INTRODUCTION: BROWN SAVIORISM

Early versions of certain sections of this text were published in "The Making of the Brown Savior: Race, Caste, Class, and India's (Global) Help Economy," *Current Anthropology* 63, no.4 (2022): 431–53; "On Brown Blood: Race, Caste, and the Bhagat

Singh Thind Case," *Ethnic Studies Review* (2023): forthcoming; "Air-Conditioners and the Talk of the Middle Class," *City and Society* 33, no. 1 (2021), https://anthro source.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ciso.12379; "Participation, Reception, Consent, and Refusal," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Ethnographic Film and Video*, ed. Phillip Vannini (London: Routledge, 2020), 204–13.

1   Nundy, "Accelerating Family Philanthropy."

2   Women and girls have been one primary target for these types of interventions in the brown world. See, for example, Khoja-Moolji, "Death by Benevolence"; Wilson, "Towards a Radical Re-appropriation"; A. Sharma, *Logics of Empowerment*; and Bernal and Grewal, *Theorizing NGOs*.

3   Kannada brahmins are brahmins whose mother tongue is Kannada.

4   Tamil brahmins are brahmins whose mother tongue is Tamil. For more on Tamil brahmins, see Fuller and Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmans*.

5   Teach for India is modeled on Teach for America and also recruits college gradu- ates to work for two years in India's most underresourced schools. Teach for India was founded by Shaheen Mistri, who was born in India but who moved along with her father, a senior manager for Citigroup, to Lebanon, Greece, Britain, Indonesia, and the United States. She, too, might be considered within the conceptual frame of the brown savior.

6   See Irani, *Chasing Innovation*, 11, for a discussion of the "global Indian." See also Radhakrishnan, *Appropriately Indian*.

7   Jacob Copeman and Dwaipayan Banerjee excavate blood politics in India. Es- pecially important to my own work here is their recognition of the historical inter- sections of nation, race, caste, and blood. In the Indian context, they show how blood mixing is seen as a way of transcending caste—"using blood to go beyond blood"—even though it constantly coagulates around these very same racialized categories of nation and caste. See Copeman and Banerjee, *Hematologies*, 37.

8   Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, xix.

9   As Amy Bhatt has written, this migration of Indians was part of the massive reconfiguration of the global system of racial capitalism that accompanied the end of World War II and continued in the postneoliberal era of H1B visas for educated workers from India. See Bhatt, *High-Tech Housewives*.

10 Sara Ahmed writes that those "who embody diversity . . . are assumed to bring whiteness to an end by virtue of [their] arrival." Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 5. See also Táíwò, "Identity Politics and Elite Capture," on "elite capture"; and Haider, *Mistaken Identity*, on the commodification of "identity politics" in a way that completely strips the term of its radical, intersectional, anticapital- ist meaning as set forth by the Combahee River Collective. Jared Sexton has characterized this phenomenon as "people-of color-blindness." See Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness."

11 Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

12 See Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk,* 13. Du Bois wrote, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line; the relation of the lighter to the darker

races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 13.

13   Subramanian, "Making Merit."

14   See also Jobson, "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn."

15   Amrute, *Encoding Race, Encoding Class*; and Subramanian, *Caste of Merit*.

16   I began my first phase of fieldwork in March 2013 and continued in the field until June 2014. I took follow-up trips during the summers of 2015, 2016, and 2018. I also traveled to Bangalore in the winters of 2016/17 and 2019/20.

17   Bornstein and Sharma, "The Righteous and the Rightful."

18   The terms *liberalism* and *liberal* can be ambiguous in their usage and meaning. Traditionally, *liberalism* has been used as a catchall term for a set of Western governance ideals that are associated with the ambiguously defined values of liberty, freedom, individuality, equality, rationality, rule of law, separation of church and state, and the like. Secularism, in particular, is an ideology that maintains that the state can govern without a formal affiliation with a particular religious doctrine/majority; it functions as a fulcrum for liberal governance strategies because it opens up the constant negotiation of majoritarian versus minoritarian rights claims. I prefer the term *late liberalism* when thinking about current liberal-secular projects, which, as Elizabeth Povinelli argues, are the "formal or informal policies of cultural recognition (or cognate policies such as multiculturalism) as a strategy for addressing the challenge of internal and external difference." Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, 25. In other words, managing difference became key to the economic and political projects in the late liberal state, bringing into its ambit institutional actors as diverse as government technocrats, market researchers, scholars, and humanitarian actors. *Liberals* in this definitional context might best be understood as those tasked, either formally or informally, with managing difference in neoliberal, secular societies. See also Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; and Jobson, "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn." One way of understanding the relationship between "liberals" and "fascists" is that liberals—whether pursuing profit, care, or oppression—reproduce categories, oftentimes colonial, to manage difference. These, in turn, become the very same categories that are reappropriated by fascists toward their own draconian ends. However, many scholars have reminded that these ideologies need to be studied in culturally and historically specific contexts precisely because they come to mean very different things in, for example, the United States versus a place like India. For example, liberalism and secularism in the Indian case pivot on the postcolonial condition initiated by the end of British colonialism and the beginning of a constitutional democracy founded against the backdrop of religious violence (Hindu/Muslim), caste violence (dominant caste/oppressed caste), regional variation (North/South India and urban/rural), and the obvious fact that those building this so-called liberal democracy were part of a Western-educated elite minority.

19   In this narrative, both British colonialism and previous Mughal rule are conflated to produce a mythology in which all Hindus have been oppressed by outside invad-

ers for the past five hundred years, while also erasing the fact that India's caste society existed before these imperial regimes and continues to violently oppress Dalit communities.

20   Calling someone a brown sepoy is meant to suggest that a person looks Indian but is actually colonized with a white Anglo mindset. Historically, the sepoy was a soldier serving in the British army. However, it has come to be used for anyone perceived as elite, including anyone who may have been part of colonial bureaucracies or who currently inhabits positions that likely require interfacing with communities outside of India and involve the use of the English language. Primarily, however, the pejorative is focused on those who critique the erosion of Indian democracy and the rise of supremacist elements. I, for example, would be a classic example of the brown sepoy for Hindutva given my politics and the fact that I live in the United States.

21   See Kelley, foreword to *Border and Rule*; and Walia, *Border and Rule*.

22   Scheduled Caste is the government-sanctioned term to characterize those castes who had previously been considered "untouchable." People from these castes generally prefer the term *Dalit*. Rupa Viswanath writes, "'SC' and 'Dalit' simply refer to different sets of people. Where 'Dalit' refers to all those Indians, past and present, traditionally regarded as outcasts and untouchable, 'SC' is a modern governmental category that explicitly excludes Christian and Muslim Dalits." See Viswanath, "Textbook Case of Exclusion."

       With regard to the percentages of populations in Karnataka, these numbers are shrouded in controversy, and the populations of Muslims and Scheduled Castes could actually be even higher. A Caste Census report in 2018 suggested that the Muslim and Scheduled Caste populations in India were both higher than the Vokkaliga or Lingayat populations, creating extreme concern for dominant-caste politicians. See Satish, "Dalits, Muslims Outnumber Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka?"

23   Povinelli has termed this phenomenon liberalism's "cunning of recognition." See Povinelli, *Cunning of Recognition*.

24   See Annavarupa, "Risky Routes, Safe Suspicions," for a slightly different, middle class women's perspective on the potential for sexual violence while in cabs and on roads in South India.

25   B. R. Ambedkar argues that caste as a division of labor is accompanied by a "gradation of labourers." Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 234.

26   I am drawing from and extending Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of colonialism through the excavation of the native informant. She writes, "I shall docket the encrypting of the name of the 'native informant' *as the name of Man*— the name that carries with it the inaugurating affect of being human. . . . I borrow the term from ethnography, of course. In that discipline, the native informant, although denied autobiography as it is understood in Northwestern European tradition (codename 'West'), is taken with utmost seriousness. He (and occasionally she) is a blank, though generative of a text of cultural identity that only the West (or a Western-model of discipline) could inscribe. The practice of some

benevolent cultural nativists today can be compared to this, although the cover story there is of a fully self-present voice-consciousness. Increasingly, there is a self-marginalizing and self-consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a 'native informant.'" Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 5–6.

27 See Robb, *Concept of Race in South Asia*, for a general overview of various conceptions of race in India. Most recently, Jesús Cháirez-Garza and colleagues developed a conceptual framework for the study of India and global racialization in "Rethinking Difference in India through Racialization."

28 Wimmer and Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism."

29 Mariam Durrani argues that methodological nationalism constrains how researchers construct their studies, binding their field sites in ways that prevent analyses that reveal interlocking forms of imperial power. See Durrani, "The Imperial Optic." However, Durrani has also pointed out to me on many occasions that grant-conferring agencies facilitate these rigid, conservative, unimaginative, bounded projects by funding only those whose work fits into neat national boundaries and already existing religious, ethnic, and linguistic ways of seeing particular communities. For example, while my own project has changed quite a bit from its initial articulations, it was funded by the Fulbright-Hays Program precisely because it fit the simplistic criteria of nation-centric research that also seemed to focus on already fundable categories associated with India, including rurality and poverty.

30 On Twitter, historian Isabel H. Alonso wrote, "I have to say this bc it has to be said and bc waiting for tenure will kill something in me: South Asia-related US academia is not diverse: it is Brahmin (and upper-caste) and white, and the gatekeeping is so strong. For those facing it, I am here for you. YouAreNotAlone" (@tarikhistorias, July 8, 2020).

31 This critique of postcolonial theory has been made many times over. See S. Shankar, *Flesh and Fish Blood*. See also Good et al., *Postcolonial Disorders*; McClintock, "Angel of Progress"; and Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-colonial Studies." Finally, I would be remiss if I did not at least mention the elitism of subaltern studies, which supposedly opened up a sphere of discourse critiquing colonialism from below, while safely maintaining all of the simplistic strictures of nationalist savarna ideologies of difference.

32 Texts that have greatly influenced my thinking on the colonial inception of race thesis include Harrison, *Decolonizing Anthropology*; Hesse, "Im/plausible Deniability"; Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; D. Thomas, *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation*; Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*; and Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*.

   The term *franchise colonialism* is used here to distinguish it from other forms of colonialism, such as settler colonialism. Franchise colonialism, especially as it was practiced by the British in India, is marked by its extractivist orientation, in which the colony is perceived as a site for resources (diamonds, spices, textiles, etc.) as well as a site to sell manufactured goods (therefore extracting hard money from the colonies as well). Utsa Patnaik argues that the British extracted nearly

$45 trillion from India from 1765 to 1938, a number that she also cautions is a massive underestimate. U. Patnaik, "How the British Impoverished India." I am also drawing from Deborah Thomas's framing of the history of global racialization: "The 'settling' of the New World . . . saw the twin transformative processes of racial fixing (of diverse African peoples into *negros* and diverse indigenous New World populations into *indios*) and racial flexibility (the various configurations of creolization, transculturation, and hybridity that emerged). . . . The initial racialized elaborations of what it means to be human would be subsequently mobilized to serve late nineteenth-century projects of indirect imperial rule throughout Africa and South Asia, as well as the emergent imperialist project of the United States." D. Thomas, *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation*, 3–4.

33 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 16.

34 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 15.

35 Du Bois wrote, "Americans saw throughout the world the shadow of the coming change of the philanthropic attitude which had dominated the early nineteenth century, with regard to the backward races. International and commercial imperialism began to get a vision. Within the very echo of that philanthropy which had abolished the slave trade, was beginning a new industrial slavery of black and brown and yellow workers in Africa and Asia." Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 632. See also Khan, "Indebted among the 'Free,'" for one example of how the abolition of slavery produced new circuits of exploited, bonded coolie labor from India.

36 Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 150.

37 I also find Sareeta Amrute's definition of *racialization* helpful here. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, she writes that racialization directs our attention to how "the capacity to labor in particular ways and cultural knowledge are 'epidermalized'—mapped onto the skin, clothing, smell, and mannerisms of living bodies." I would add essentializing discourses regarding blood, DNA, and national belonging to Amrute's definition of that which is epidermalized. See Amrute, *Encoding Race, Encoding Class,* 14.

38 Moon Charania makes the excellent point that scholars come to "brownness" from a number of different intellectual traditions which shape how they understand its valences. She writes, "I come to brownness through women of color feminisms and queerness, thinking here of how Muñoz—learning from Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua, Barbara Christian, Combahee River Collective to name a few—furthered the notion of a queerness that is always and already in relation to blackness and brownness. And this route to brownness versus other routes (say W.E.B Dubois's color line, Stuart Hall's floating signifier, Gayatri Spivak's subalternity) is another sort of reckoning." Charania, review of *The Sense of Brown*. I come to brownness most directly through Du Bois and Spivak.

39 Sharma writes, "Brown's work as an adjective ('brown bird'), verb ('to brown'), and noun parallels its references to multiple groups of people, including those from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Pacific, and Latin America. Given that many people have 'brown' skin, 'Brown' of course refers to much more than skin color and

phenotype . . . The unsettled and untethered uses of 'Brown' illustrate the ambiguity and contestation that define its history." N. Sharma, "Brown," 18.

40   See Mohammed, "But Most of All Mi Love Me Browning." As another example, writing from a perspective that is rooted in Filipino, Mexican, and Latin American racial theorizings, Anthony Ocampo argues that "Brown is not a fixed racial label, but rather an indexing of a shared relationship to a dominant order." Ocampo, *Brown and Gay in LA*. See also Guzman, "Brown."

41   Indians migrated to a vast number of places based on specific histories of movement. They traveled to the United Kingdom, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mauritia, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Belgium, France, and the United States, among many other places. Each of these migratory patterns has specific relations to caste, class, religion, language, and labor.

42   In much of the Orientalist scholarship on India, *brown* has been perceived as "foreign" to the subcontinent because it is an "English" term. As such, brown has not often been considered a useful category for analyzing Indians or South Asians more broadly, except as it pertains to a narrow diasporic population living in the United States. However, because English became the language of the elite after British colonialism in its colonies and has continued to accrue value with the rise of American imperial regimes, there is an expanding association between brownness, mobility, and the speaking of English.

43   Muñoz, *Sense of Brown*, 122.

44   Here I am evoking Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*; and Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

45   Nehru, *Autobiography*, 500.

46   Charania, review of *The Sense of Brown*.

47   For a further elaboration on the politics of Red and Black blood in the United States, see TallBear and Tuck, "Red and Black DNA, Blood, Kinship and Organizing." See also Hannabach, *Blood Cultures*. With regard to the politics of blood in relation to Blackness and Indigeneity, Flores writes, "In the United States. . . . there is the well-known black-white binary with its infamous 'one-drop rule,' enacted during the era of slavery and continuing well into the twentieth century, stipulating that anyone with African ancestry, however remote, is considered Black. Although these attitudes might suggest that miscegenation is anathema, the US American position toward Indigenous Americans has been starkly different. As opposed to the 'expansive' understanding of Black, 'Native Americanness is subtractive.' The disappearance of the Native was sought at all costs because 'the goal of settler colonialism is to diminish claims to land over generations (or sooner, if possible).'" Flores, "Latinidad is Cancelled," 58. In this quote, Flores is citing Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 12.

48   Lee Baker argues that in the context of North American racial politics, a supposed progressive racial agenda required that "the Negro needed to amalgamate by 'encouraging the gradual process of lightening up this large body of people by the influx of white blood.'" Baker, "Racist Anti-racism of American Anthropology," 127. Here I want to argue that the ideology of assimilation can be understood as

browning one's blood, even as the values, ideologies, and understandings of self were rendered white. In Latin America, especially, the romance of mixing has been used to argue that Spanish colonialism was less, or even not, racist because they were not concerned with blood purity. See Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 8.

49 See Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education." However, lest we imagine that the ideology of assimilation was a purely British notion, Walter Rodney reminds us that assimilationist ideologies and civilizing educational projects were also central to French, Portuguese, and Belgian colonialism. See Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 302.

50 I draw on Deborah Thomas's definition of *modernity*: "By 'modernity', I mean to signal the particular arrangement of political and economic life that emerged during the late 15th century as mercantile capitalism came to dominate new understandings of the relationship between economic activity and social and political hierarchies, and as imperialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade became the foundation of new political and juridical arrangements." D. Thomas, "End of the West," 124.

51 Du Bois famously outlined the way that British colonialism in India was inherently racist. He wrote, "The situation in India is another case of racial conflict. . . . The basic reason for this, openly or by inference, is the physical difference of race which makes it, according to British thought, impossible that these peoples should within any reasonable space of time become autonomous or self-governing." Du Bois, "Prospect of a World without Racial Conflict," 451.

52 Sylvia Wynter discusses how neoliberal, secular, biologized ideologies regarding humanity replace earlier religious forms *and yet* remain as intransigently dogmatic and self-assured in the belief that all humans, for any hope of salvation, must follow in line. See Wynter and McKittrick, *"Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?,"* 26. See also Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 14; and Rist, *History of Development*.

53 The Bretton Woods institutions were initially created to help with the post–World War II reconstruction of Europe. In that capacity, their policy suggestions were largely geared toward rebuilding infrastructures and national economies in Keynesian-style redevelopment terms that also restricted the flow of speculative capital. By contrast, the same institutions famously imposed structural adjustment policies for those nation-states that were emerging in the "Global South" and/or the "Third World," placing them in unequal financial relationships with the Global North and preventing the kind of institutional developments necessary to begin to join and prosper in a world economy.

I also want to note that the history of the term *Third World* is quite a bit more complicated than its pejorative connotation vis-à-vis developmentalist discourse. Third Worldism was a project of postcolonized nation-states to generate unity among themselves and challenge their position in the global racial and economic order. See Prashad, *Darker Nations*.

54 Muñoz is speaking primarily about the Latinx populations in the Americas when he is describing the poverty of brownness. However, in taking up his concepts and placing them in relation to the production of the "Third World," I see the relation

between poverty and brownness as a global postcolonized condition. See Muñoz, *Sense of Brown*.

55 P. Patnaik, "Why Is India's Wealth Inequality Growing So Rapidly?"

56 See Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted*, for an excellent discussion of this shift in developmentalist reason.

57 Ananya Roy coins the term *poverty capital* to discuss the circulation of financial resources as they pertain to microfinance. Erica Caple James uses the term *compassion economies* to discuss the way that Haitian people, especially women, reorganize themselves into the category of *viktim* as a strategy to partake in international aid. Kalyan Sanyal argues that the "need economy" is the NGO-state solution to the problem of surplus population. See Ananya Roy, *Poverty Capital*; James, *Democratic Insecurities*; and Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

58 "Old tyrants" is from Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 43.

59 Fanon writes, "The more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets. . . . Going one step further we shall enlarge the scope of our description to include every colonized subject. All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root . . . —position themselves in relation to the civilizing language. . . . After a fairly long stay in the metropole, many Antilleans return home to be deified." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2–3.

60 While Fanon is speaking specifically about Black Antilleans who have been colonized by the French, his analysis lends itself to reconsidering these elites as being *browned*, as his "phenotype undergoes an absolute mutation" that indexes an ascension within the colonial racist hierarchy but that *can never achieve whiteness*. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 3.

61 Gajendran Ayyathurai writes, "Colonial racial capitalism depended for its success (and stability) on comprador privileged caste groups. . . . The brahmins—who are not even five percent of India's population, then and now—through the propagation of their caste-power and by predominantly working the British colonial apparatuses reaped maximum benefits. Such caste groups not only viciously appropriated the labor and land of the oppressed communities but also normalized their dependency on the colonialist-casteist structures." Ayyathurai, "Emigration against Caste," 46. See also Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, for an example of a work that hails racial solidarities between civil rights activists in the United States and independence leaders in India in ways that can obfuscate material differences between Black civil rights activists and savarna elites like Nehru and Gandhi in India.

62 There has been a robust discussion on development in India, both as it began postindependence and as it has been reshaped in the postliberalization period. Three books that have influenced my work are Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted*; A. Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*; and A. Sharma, *Logics of Empowerment*.

63 Algerian feminist scholar Melyssa Haffaf mentioned in conversation with me that the "brown sahib" figure reminded her of a similar figure called the Harki in Algeria. *The Harki* is a term for those Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French army during the Algerian War of Independence from 1954 to 1962, but

it can also be glossed as a term for any Algerian Muslims who supported French Algeria during the war. What strikes me about this figure and the discussion we had was the way that various colonial encounters produce different versions of brown in-betweenness that reflect the specific ways that colonized people, especially elites, imbibed colonial values, ideologies, and the like.

64 Charania, review of *The Sense of Brown*. Nitasha Sharma also makes this point, arguing, "As a racial category forged through racialist ideologies and colonization, Brown often reflects the intermediary hierarchal position of those who are neither Black nor (fully) White." N. Sharma, "Brown," 18.

65 Charania, review of *The Sense of Brown*.

66 Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*.

67 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Brown Man's Burden," 16. This discussion was included in the first *Asian-African Conference Bulletin*, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of Indonesia, in March 1955.

68 One important outgrowth of this brown man's burden was a massive post-1947 bursary project in India to bring East African students to India to study. African students continue to migrate to India for educational opportunities and, when they do, face the intense anti-African, anti-Black sentiment of Indian nationals. See Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*; and Dattatreyan, "Desiring Bollywood," for more on this subject.

69 Rosa, *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race*, 3.

70 Ruha Benjamin argues, "Tech advances are sold as morally superior because they purport to rise above human bias and are therefore considered neutral solutions to global problems that occlude the histories of exclusion and discrimination" that get encoded into new digital technologies. See R. Benjamin, *Race after Technology*, 11.

71 Ajantha Subramanian writes of this phenomenon in her study of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), stating, "Such patterns of racialization for the market are strikingly evident within the global 'knowledge economy.' The 2003 episode of *60 Minutes* is just one example of the current fetishizing of the IITian as today's 'global Indian.' IITians themselves have been particularly adept at forging diasporic networks that shore up the value of Brand IIT." Subramanian, "Making Merit," 315.

72 See Rana, *Terrifying Muslims*.

73 S. Thomas, *Privileged Minorities*; Kikon, "Hello Chinky"; Jegathesan, *Tea and Solidarity*; Durrani, "The Imperial Optic"; and Dattatreyan, *Globally Familiar*.

74 Bald, *Bengali Harlem*; Thangaraj, *Desi Hoop Dreams*; Upadhyay, "Making of 'Model' South Asians on the Tar Sands"; and Amrute, *Encoding Race, Encoding Class*.

75 See Wilson, "Re-centring 'Race' in Development."

76 Cháirez-Garza et al., "Rethinking Difference in India through Racialization," 194.

77 Soundararajan, "How Brown Girl Solidarity Harms Us." Similarly, referencing the hashtag #Unfairandlovely, which was meant to challenge white beauty standards, Shaista Patel writes, "Claiming pride in our shades of brown skins is admirable, and urgently needed. . . . However, we have to center the fact that lower caste and

Dalits, associated with impurity, dirt and inhumanity have informed our fear of Blackness and Black or dark brown skin in South Asia." S. Patel, "Complicating the Tale of 'Two Indians.'"

78 Subramanian explains that B. R. Ambedkar set educational reservations in place to rectify the historical legacy of untouchability in India, which included a 20 percent reservation of seats in educational institutions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In 1979, after the Mandal Commission Report, reservations were expanded to include Other Backward Classes. The expanded reservations were met with protests by savarnas against the "unfair" advantages received by the oppressed castes despite the fact that dominant castes were still disproportionately attending India's most prestigious institutions. This shift was occurring at the very moment that the reservation system was producing some upward mobility for the oppressed castes in the public sector, resulting in brahmin (and savarna) migrations to urban centers and abroad for private-sector jobs, in which caste was not a protected category. Ultimately, what emerged was a cultural politics related to educational attainment and caste that further marked the lower castes while allowing the dominant castes to see themselves as meritorious entrants into higher education despite their massive historical accumulation of caste capital. This version of racialized merit discourse propelled savarna men into global roles as the techno-cognitariate by transforming caste capital into modern forms of "casteless" capital while perpetuating the myth that savarna Hindus, especially brahmins, had a primordial disposition toward service and the unique cognitive capacities to fix any of society's ailments. See Subramanian, *Caste of Merit*.

79 Ambedkar wrote, "The caste system is not merely a division of labourers—which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other." Ambedkar, *Essential Writings*, 263. "Untouchability" is rooted in ideas regarding occupations that were deemed "polluting" and therefore spiritually "impure" and therefore outside the varna system. By contrast, in trying to argue for a cross-cultural approach to caste, Berreman defined a caste system as "a hierarchy of endogamous divisions in which membership is hereditary and permanent." Berreman, "Caste in India and the United States," 120.

80 See, for example, Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*.

81 See Thomas, "Cox's America: Caste, Race, and the Problem of Culture" for a thorough discussion of Oliver Cox's ideas and its relation to the "racial caste" school. See also Berreman, "Caste in India and the United States" for a comparative perspective.

82 Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 236.

83 For discussions of both Wilkerson's text and the relation of race and caste, see Burden-Stelly, "Caste Does Not Explain Race"; Carby, "Limits of Caste"; Dutt, "Feeling Like an Outcast"; and A. Rao, "Work of Analogy."

84 See Burden-Stelly, "Caste Does Not Explain Race," for an excellent racial capitalist critique of Wilkerson's book as it pertains to the United States.

85 See D. Thomas, "Cox's America"; and Berreman "Caste in India and the United States." See also Visweswaran, *UnCommon Cultures*.

86 Chinnaiah Jangam, for example, argues, "One of the limitations of Ambedkar's understanding of caste is that he doesn't investigate the role of colonialism in strengthening . . . caste and also strengthening . . . Brahminism. Jyotiba Phule . . . sees this interconnection between Brahminism and colonialism . . . they are working in alliance with each other in reinforcing the caste system. In this context what you see is that if you really want to see what should be the project of decolonizing caste . . . we have to look at this whole idea of interconnection between race, caste and gender, and its invisible epistemological interconnections, particularly with white supremacy, with Brahminical Hindu supremacy." Jangam, "Decolonizing Caste."

87 In 2001, for example, a contingent of Dalit scholars and activists who attended the UN-led Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance argued that caste should be understood, at least in part, as a form of racial discrimination because it hinges on questions of blood, descent, and labor, postcolonization. This claim was challenged by the Indian state, which sought to argue that caste was a social problem of religion and an "internal matter" to India and therefore not a problem of global racial discrimination. See Rawat and Satyanarayana, *Dalit Studies*, 7; and Pinto, "UN Conference against Racism."

88 Suraj Yengde argues, "Caste has been thought of as an institution intimately tied to the Indian past and present. However, caste as a social system invested in purity, pollution, endogamy, hierarchy, and inflexibility locked in the rigidity of birth, is found in major societies across the world." Yengde, "Global Castes," 340.

89 *Jati* refers to one of the thousands of endogamous clans, tribes, communities, and subcommunities in India. Each jati typically has an association with a traditional job function. The British categorized the many thousands of jatis into either one of the four varnas (brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, Shudra) or the avarna (outcastes) of the brahminical varna classification system. See Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India*; and Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, for extensive discussions of the relation between colonialism and caste. See also Carby, "Limits of Caste"; and Jangam, "Decolonizing Caste."

90 Trautmann, *Aryan Debate*.

91 Shankar, "On Brown Blood."

92 *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923), at 261 U.S. 215.

93 Jangam, "Decolonizing Caste."

94 In fact, in some cases, colonial modernity may have actually punctured the institutional forms of savarna supremacy and therefore benefited the caste oppressed. For one extremely important example, see P. Sanal Mohan's *Modernity of Slavery*, which argues that the "slave castes" of Kerala converted in large numbers to Christianity during their encounter with European missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These experiences reshaped what Dalit consciousness looked like in Kerala and how equality and mobility were imagined afterward. In his review of Mohan's text, Uday Chandra writes, "The single most important lesson of Sanal Mohan's finely-crafted book is to rethink the nature of colonial

modernity and its implications for historically subordinated groups in ex-colonial territories. . . . [C]olonialism may . . . have, paradoxically, been central to the efforts of Dalits and other subaltern groups to overcome the historical conditions of their subordination." Chandra, review of *Modernity of Slavery*, 211.

95 Ambedkar had argued that Dalits should be allowed to choose their own separate representatives to the legislature independently and *also* vote in the general constituency. He argued that this "double vote" would eventually lead to the full dignity of and respect for Dalits as political actors over time. However, when the double vote was to be enshrined as part of the Communal Award (1932), Gandhi, who was steadfastly opposed to anything but a single voting block for all whom he considered Hindu, announced a fast unto death. While Ambedkar tried to hold his ground against this form of coercion, eventually he signed the Poona Pact, which gave up the double vote and the separate electorate while leaving the reserved seats for Dalits within the general electorate. See S. Anand, "A Note on the Poona Pact."

96 Subramanian, *Caste of Merit*.

97 Over the past five years, caste-based discrimination in the United States has finally come under scrutiny and become a cause for policy change. For example, in November 2021 the University of California (UC), Davis, added caste to its antidiscrimination policy, making it the first UC institution to acknowledge the existence of caste discrimination in the United States and on its campus. In 2019 Brandeis University became the first US institution of higher education to ban caste-based discrimination. Chopra and Subramanian, "Caste Discrimination Exists in the U.S., Too—But a Movement to Outlaw It Is Growing."

98 Ayyathurai, "It Is Time for a New Subfield." Another response has been the field of Dalit studies, which has centered the movements, narratives, and histories of struggle against caste-based oppression by Dalit communities. See, for example, Rawat and Satyanarayana, *Dalit Studies*. Others include P. Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery*; Guru, "How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?"; A. Rao, *Gender and Caste*; Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*; Omvedt, *Understanding Caste*; Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India*; and Rege, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender*.

99 Yengde, *Caste Matters*, 33.

100 Minai and Shroff, "Yaariyan, Baithak, Gupshup."

101 See the preface for detailed discussion of my approach to "nervous ethnography."

102 As the title suggests, part 1 is *by far* the most theoretically (in the academic sense) burdened part of the book.

103 Ong and Roy, *Worlding Cities*.

104 R. Benjamin, *Race after Technology*; and Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression*.

1. GLOBAL HELP ECONOMIES AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

1 Suraj Yengde argues, "The networks that become the lingua franca of a capitalist society are nothing but caste-based ties, wherein a person from a specific caste ensures that his fellow caste people are given opportunities." Yengde, *Caste Matters*,