

## **CfP Special Issue: Indentured Bodies / Embodiments of Indenture (Journal of Indentureship and its Legacies)**

Systems of indentureship have included a variety of social actors such as indentured labourers, recruiters and planters. The specific conditions of the recruitment process, the transportation of labourers to their assigned work sites, the labour itself and its social and environmental conditions affected not only the lives and socio-cultural traditions of the people involved, but also impacted their bodies and the ways embodiment was understood, experienced and negotiated in crucial ways.

The body is a complicated category, especially in contexts where human beings are reduced to their labouring bodies in settler-colonial extractive systems such as the plantation complex – the space in which many indentured workers found themselves. Questions of fungibility, replaceability and exploitation necessarily cling to the body, as do notions of permeability, porousness and relationality. As Tao Leigh Goffe has argued, the mutilation of flesh can be understood ‘as foundational to contending with the enslaved and indentured presences in the Americas [...]. It is not merely labor that is being posited as a claim to the land, but broader questions of freedom, property, and personhood in the context of the theft of the body and volition’ (Goffe, “‘Guano in Their Destiny’: Race, Geology, and a Philosophy of Indenture’ 2019, 28).

Before, during and after the duration of their contracts, the so-called ‘agreements’, indentured labourers would have experienced their bodies in disagreement – as subject to volatile and voluntary transformation, modification and mutation. They may have adapted means of maintaining or modifying their own and other people’s bodies, affecting their overall health and medical/nutritional practices, traditions related to skin, hair, dress or ornamentation, and rituals related to death, birth or religious (im)purity. We are thinking, for example, of body modification practices such as *godna* (tattoo/ing) that were adapted during and after the indentureship period, or the conversion of dietary rules and fasting in religious contexts, which provide insights into complex negotiations of agency and subalternization, trauma and memory.

Histories of indentureship encompass not only bodies themselves, but also the historical narratives of bodies and embodiment. Or, in other words, the materialities of the indentured body are echoed, adapted or subverted by representations of the indentured labourer’s body in the visual and textual traces left behind by embodied experiences. (Historical) bodies are constructed, expressed and transmitted in art, literature, film, journalistic media and other kinds of representation. In a series of artworks titled *The Notebook of No Return* (2017), artist Kelly Sinappah Mary, for instance, explores her ancestors’ journey from India to Guadeloupe by portraying specifically female bodies as porous – sharp spikes or thorns protrude from their skin, signifying the mutating and migrating body as a threshold between past and present.

This special issue will explore bodies and embodiment in the context of indentureship by focusing on the bodily experiences of indentured labourers (and other relevant social actors) and their influence on social contexts, interactions and relations of dependency. Its objective is to examine bodies, embodied experiences and their legacies from an interdisciplinary perspective – including history, literary and cultural studies, philosophy, social and cultural anthropology, art history and archaeology – to gain new and innovative insights on this under-researched topic in indentureship studies.

We especially welcome contributions that critically reflect on mind-body dualisms, that re-consider indentured bodies and embodied experiences of indentureship from a processual and performative perspective on bodies, and that contextualize these experiences from a historical perspective, in cultural performances and representations.

Among the questions to be discussed in this special issue are:

- What kinds of bodies have been relevant during indentureship with regard to social hierarchy and power relations? In what ways have 'other', e.g. more-than-human, bodies been of significance in this context?
- How do (historical) representations and transformations of indentured bodies reveal symmetrical and asymmetrical dependencies among the various social actors involved in systems of indentureship?
- How can we address the historical (dis)continuities between the fungibility of Black enslaved bodies and that of indentured bodies?
- To what extent did colonial anthropometric ideas and practices affect the recruitment of indentured labourers?
- How can we understand the relationship of the indentured body, neither property nor allowed to own property, to land, geography and the environment?
- In which ways can we interlink discussions of humanism and animality/animalization within the discursive and philosophical frames opened up by the indentured worker's body?
- In what ways have bodies memorized experiences of indentureship? How have these experiences been visualized and materialized in and on bodies, and in and on other media?
- What possibilities are offered by literary, visual and sensory engagements with the materialities of embodiments – how do aesthetics relate to affects, ethics, politics?
- Are there bodily practices that reveal characteristics of post-memory (Hirsch 2012) – intergenerationally transmitted trauma – in contemporary post-indentureship societies?
- How do gender, sexuality and desire factor into our discussion of bodies of indenture?

Selected contributions will be published open access in the [Journal of Indentureship and its Legacies](#) (Pluto Journals) in the special issue 'Indentured Bodies / Embodiments of Indenture' in December 2024, edited by Sinah Kloß and Jennifer Leetsch. Please send your abstracts (500 words) by **March 31, 2023** to [s.kloss@uni-bonn.de](mailto:s.kloss@uni-bonn.de) and [jleetsch@uni-bonn.de](mailto:jleetsch@uni-bonn.de). Selected full-length articles (5000-7000 words), photo essays and creative texts (up to 2500 words), and book reviews (1200-1500 words) will have to be submitted to the editors for peer review by November 30, 2023.

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