

## PREFACE

When I began this work, I toyed with the idea of developing a theology of hospitality in order to think about the conditions that make hospitality possible. This was driven by the realization that human persons continue to live under the shadow of a past that has left communities polarized by hostile in-group/out-group differences.

Many of my peers caught on to the term “hospitality.” Some even quipped, “Oh, yes, organizations are really into hospitality these days. They serve cookies and coffee.” I soon had to make explicit that I was more interested in thinking deeply about the *conditions* that make hospitality possible rather than delineating how best to “serve cookies and coffee.” In other words, I wanted to go beyond the mere circulation of niceties that often draws back from practices that foster fundamental changes. This book maps out preconditions for hospitality by lifting up the positive agential possibilities laden in the somewhat surprising company of memory and grief.

Structural wrongs have wounded and continue to wound the world. To find healing and hospitality amidst these wrongs, this book facilitates a conversation between theorists and theologians of caste and race. Writing as an Indian currently located in the USA, the book is guided by the belief that the work of healing and hospitality today, given the globalized nature of the world, needs to foster inter-disciplinary and trans-national conversations.

The book’s inter-disciplinary scope opens up new ways to critically understand and theorize caste and race by drawing from gender and

performative theories. There is an increasing recognition of the role of the body in constituting power relations. I thus take embodiment as a fundamental reality that merits critical analysis. The book's focus on corporeality allows for examining everyday bodily habits that are often enmeshed in logics and practices of domination. Anyone interested in thinking about human embodiment will find this focus resourceful.

The book further employs the lens of "ritual" to understand and intervene in structural wrongs. "Ritual" allows the book to speak to religious practitioners for whom rituals are internal to faith practices and also to those who do not subscribe to religious faiths but who may still benefit from understanding human persons as *homo ritualis*. Humans enter real and imaginary worlds through socially conditioned processes that are ritualistic. Human persons *become* by what they do. This book presents possibilities for what persons may agentially become.

Religious thinking has deeply influenced political structures. Approaches to power have historically occurred through resort to religion. In this sense, persons today are "theological" irrespective of what their "faith" is. Humans are not as "secular" as they like to believe and cannot do politics without realizing how theologically inflected social practices are. This is the case even when politics today are not recognizably based on religion or faith. This book is thus an excavation of the human condition under the shadow of wrongs—what it means to be inheritors of a violent past, how that affects the present, and what positive possibilities a future holds.

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Memory, Grief, and Agency

A Political Theological Account of Wrongs and Rites

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