

Editorial Foreword

EMPIRE IN THE LOOKING GLASS The concepts of colonialism and the postcolonial have been valuable keys for understanding the past; now “empire” is the word that seems to open new doors. As Frederick Cooper says in this issue, “Empire is being discovered in the past, in the present, and in the future.”

Engseng Ho seeks the meaning of the conflict between the United States and Osama bin Laden by locating it within a deep history of encounters between empires and the Arab-Muslim diaspora, originating in Yemen and settling in East Africa, western India and Southeast Asia. The author understands the projection of U.S. power overseas as a novel form of empire, one which *repudiates* colonial rule and promotes democracy, free markets, and enforceability of contracts. Bin Ladin is understood as standing in a long lineage beginning in the sixteenth century, when Portuguese oppression of Muslim communities in India provoked a jihadist response. There is no mistaking the urgency of the issue, or the originality Engseng Ho brings to bear.

Frederick Cooper reviews four books titled “Empire,” published more or less simultaneously—surely a sign of the times. The multiplication of empire books, from perspectives as different as the anarcho-Marxist and the Thatcherite, does not necessarily make for coherence and use-value for prognostication. Rather than using the word empire to name new forms of power, Cooper argues, we need to think about “the varied ways in which power has been exercised, constrained, and contested.”

MUSTARD SEED COSMOS Sometimes tiny inconsistencies in the smooth skin of the conceptual order of things, closely probed, break open vast, unsuspected realms of meaning. The next two essays are virtuoso pieces, moving from the very small to the very large, the insignificant to the highly significant, the mustard seed to the cosmos.

Francisco Vaz da Silva leads us on a magical mystery tour, setting out from a bird of ambiguous identity (dove? cuckoo?) in a Portuguese representation of the Holy Family. The trail leads, after many surprise turnings across a vast terrain, to an ancient European folk theory of conception. The physics of conception, as everyone knows, has to do with the birds and the bees; but there is also a *metaphysics* of conception underlying the sex act, according which babies, or more exactly the ordering principles making individual babies, come from the fixed stars of the Milky Way, borne to Earth by birds. The stork is not a fictional story of sex for children; it is the true story of sex, for adults.

Paul Manning begins from a three-letter word in Welsh, *acw* (“that there,”

approximately, as in “that house there,” meaning *my* house). The sense of belonging inhering in this midget word shifts subtly from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, expressing the displacement of a property-based, entrepreneurial ideal of liberal capitalism to the dominance of a service-based professional and managerial ideal of twentieth-century capitalism. Hegel, Marx, Morgan and other notables are called in to bring out the larger meaning of this linguistic wrinkle. (Also by Paul Manning: “English Money and Welsh Rocks: Divisions of Language and Divisions of Labor in Nineteenth-Century Welsh Slate Quarries,” in *CSSH* 2002:481–510.)

BORDER CROSSINGS The next two pieces come from an SSRC workshop called “Beyond Borders,” organized by Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham, the purpose of which was to track cross-border flows of commodities, people, and ideas deemed illegal by the state but being, in their volume and persistence, the undocumented but essential components of larger systems.

Belinda Bozzoli takes up for examination the internal boundaries of South Africa under apartheid and the illicit flows of ideas that eventually led to their demise. Through a close study of a revolt in a black township in 1986, she shows the work of a “complex, socially constructed interface between the illicit and the legal,” explaining how prohibited and fragile ideas were taken up and made effective by township residents. The complexities involve shifting relationships among democratic, millenarian, and nationalist impulses, impulses that get flattened and reshaped in the aftermath. The rebellion was absorbed into the larger public history of the ascendant nationalists after the apartheid regime came apart. The agency of township people was lost in a newly consolidated story of state oppression and the liberating power of political ideas coming into the township from without.

Eric Tagliacozzo follows the illegal or quasi-legal trade of nineteenth-century Siam and Burma in opium, timber, guns, and slaves, upriver to the highlands, ethnically complex and different from the lowland states, increasingly coveted by the British (as well as their French rivals), whose merchants penetrated these regions and participated vigorously in trade. The vagueness of boundaries in these regions of tribute-paying peoples gave way to a modernist regime of hardened boundaries, heavily manned. In the end, Burma was annexed by the British but Siam remained a non-colonized buffer between the British and the French. The frontiers of both, which remain to this day, were decided by Britain and China with little consultation. The map largely served the convenience of complex, multiethnic, international flows of trade.

CLASSICS REVISITED Classic works and classic concepts are subjects of the last two essays.

Moses Finley’s *The Ancient Economy* is reexamined by **Mohammad Naffisi**. His study ranges widely over the successors and critics of Finley in the last

two decades (Edward Cohen, G. E. M. Ste Croix, Michael Mann), and the antecedents of the debate he stirred up, including the work of Karl Polanyi which was Finley's immediate inspiration, and the older debate about the household (*oikos*) as the locus of economic life, as well as the writings of Marx and Weber. The central issue is class, and whether it can properly be said to exist in Athens, provoking the move toward democracy, or whether true class is absent and we should speak, rather, of status (Finley's view); whether the economy was embedded in society or disembedded and visible as such; whether, in short, the ancient Athenian economy was modern or primitive. The author aims to square the circle of this debate and show how both may be true, opening a consensual path towards the resolution of "the battle of ancient economy."

Aram Yengoyan, in a review essay, examines the ideas of memory and soul, and the disappearance of the soul from anthropological discussion, scientized out of existence by positivism.

KUDOS Congratulations to Glenn Penny, whose article, "The Politics of Anthropology in the Age of Empire: German Colonists, Brazilian Indians, and the Case of Alberto Vojtěch Frič" (*CSSH* 2003: 249–80), has won the Nineteenth-Century Studies Association Article Prize.