

## Editorial Foreword

**AFTERMATH THEMATICS** Great advances in social thought often occur with the awareness that an era has ended. Sometimes they produce this awareness. The aftermath, as cause or effect, is fertile ground for innovations in theory and method. The new intellectual movement, by locating itself in the aftermath, derives much of its analytical power from the reconsideration, deconstruction, and continual reworking of the objects and ideas it has moved beyond. Theoretical traditions that see themselves as politically progressive are especially likely to move ahead through this critical re-engagement with legacies that are eclipsed but still present, turning the aftermath into a perpetual source of momentum. To move ahead faster, and with greater insight, it is sometimes prudent to combine legacies, creating tactical alliances that build on shared interests.

**Sharad Chari** and **Katherine Verdery** advocate for a heuristic merger of exactly this kind. Noting the heavy traffic between postsocialist and postcolonial studies, they suggest that this flow of ideas should be more rigorously channeled in ethnographic approaches to the post-Cold War world. The analytical tendencies now prevalent among postsocialist scholars (a renewed interest in fieldwork and a critical take on World Bank globalism) are doubly effective when applied to postcolonial studies, which is now dominated by sophisticated archival work and close attention to conditions of knowledge production, endeavors that could enhance postsocialist studies as well. Chari and Verdery suggest that a postcolonial lens on postsocialism might explain how Marxism was used as a science of empire, whereas the postsocialist lens might allow postcolonial studies to better explain how the Cold War shaped scientific knowledge of the “Third World,” a concept whose coherence obscures diverse colonial and postcolonial histories. Alongside these calls for intellectual reciprocity, Chari and Verdery make a strong case for the Cold War legacy as the aftermath that matters most for scholars who, working in the shadow of old and new empires, hope to make sense of the steady convergence of postcolonial and postsocialist worlds.

**INTERPRETING CONVERSION** Embracing a new religion is often portrayed as a momentous decision, one that transforms individuals and entire societies alike. In this model of conversion, which is by no means universal, the stakes are high; the decision to convert typically calls for justification and explanation, and interpreting the terms of conversion is an activity important on both sides of the faith boundary. Did the convert truly understand what

he was doing? Did the convert really mean what she said, or fully understand what was said to her? Answers to these questions are situated within the larger contexts in which conversion occurs: political conquest, immigration and travel, cultural reform, social mobility, imprisonment, captivity. Because conversion involves the crossing of boundaries, it can be interpreted simultaneously as a threat to community and an act of incorporation. Misinterpretation is always possible, with results that vary, in the three essays that follow, from the polemical, to the enigmatic, to the deadly.

**Tijana Krstić** looks at autobiographical accounts of conversion to Islam written by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman subjects. These narratives of explanation were produced by men who understood Christianity well (some were priests in their former lives). Their accounts were polemical, didactic, and written in support of their new faith and its protector, the Ottoman sovereign. Krstić argues that these narratives are part of the Age of Confessionalization, a period and political style historians typically confine to post-Reformation Europe, but which had manifestations further east. Krstić contends that Ottoman and Safavid empires shared with Hapsburg Europe a desire to unify imperial formations along confessional lines. This transregional project tightened the relationship between state expansion and religious belief, and conversion narratives, for Krstić, figure as elements in a language of power spoken and understood not only among Catholics and Protestants, but across the vast imperial spaces of Europe, North Africa, and Southwest Asia.

**Matt Tomlinson** explores problems of interpretation that emerged in the conversion of Fijians to Christianity in the nineteenth century. These problems were rooted in words and their meanings. Concepts important to Christian theology and Fijian politics were brought into alignment, often producing incomprehension and moments in which speech was no longer possible at all. Tomlinson carefully dissects terms such as “truth,” “efficacy,” *mana*, and *dina*, which Fijians and Methodist missionaries put to use differently, and which they arranged differently in relation to power, speaking, and the human voice. In the Fijian world, things (including “gods”) could be real without being true, and true without being effective, whereas missionaries worked under another set of assumptions about authenticity and ultimate truth. Faced with a diverse array of semantic misfits, Tomlinson argues, conversion produced not only narratives of new faith, but also moments of silence that were telling and equally transformative.

**Esra Özyürek** brings conversion into the contemporary domain of national security along Europe’s contested boundaries with the Muslim world. The fragility of this border is revealed in the fear and anxiety caused when people cross it incorrectly. Muslim Turks converting to Christianity, and Christian Germans converting to Islam are vivid cases of categorical incorrectness. Özyürek explores both popular and governmental responses to the growing number of German and Turkish converts, whose decision to “change teams” is widely

construed as an act of betrayal. In Germany, converts are subject to special abuse, verbal and physical, as well as state surveillance. In Turkey, they receive the same treatment, and, increasingly, converts and Christian missionaries are murdered. The limits of tolerance, in Turkey and Germany alike, seem to be contracting in matters of conversion, even as the two societies become more closely integrated on several economic, political, and cultural fronts. Özyürek argues that key (and often essentialist) understandings of Europe, Turkishness, and German identity are at stake in recent “conversion alerts,” and these understandings leads to unsympathetic, often hostile, interpretations of what conversion can mean.

**COLONIAL CONSOLIDATION, LIMITED** The ability of colonial powers to dominate their subjects and bring them into unified structures of governance fluctuates greatly over time and space. It is no longer fashionable to attribute immense, one-sided, world-making power to colonial authorities. The metropole and the periphery, we are now apt to believe, were co-creations, and continue to be. But even this formulation cannot quite capture the extent to which colonial governance, and resistance to it, were simply (or elaborately) an opportunistic mess in which political and economic forces pulled in multiple directions at once, preventing the sense of order, and predictable opposition to order, that gives colonial governance (and colonial studies) its familiar forms. Ironically, opportunistic messes tended to accumulate where colonial enterprise pursued its most rationalized, technologically progressive schemes.

**Jun Uchida** marches straight into what is often one of the messiest of these colonial zones: the railway system, where vexed strategies of cooptation and resistance to state authority accumulated like abandoned freight containers. Uchida’s case is the Japanese colonial state’s attempts, and repeated failures, to consolidate freight transport along Korea’s extensive railway system. In the early twentieth century, freight transport was a trade in which thousands of Japanese and local Korean firms competed, and top-down policies meant to rationalize this “chaos” triggered unintended consequences. Uchida peels back layer after layer of collaboration, cooptation, deal making, and deal breaking. In all of this activity, the illusion of the all-knowing colonial state, or the unified voice of popular resistance, evaporated. Political issues were redefined as economic ones, and the lines between Japanese and Korean interests continually shifted. Uchida sees in this process the genuine mess that it was, but also the possibilities it opened up for colonizers and colonized to produce “new forms of solidarity outside the realm of state control.”

**POLITICAL OPERATORS** If the political is based on the distinction between enemy and friend, as Carl Schmitt reminds us, perhaps we should wonder why political influence is so often and so effectively wielded by figures who are neither enemies nor friends, or who seem to be both.

Operators, fixers, influence peddlers, middlemen and mediators: whose side are they on? What is their role, their effect, in political terrain dominated by clear enemies (of the people) and obvious friends (of the state)? Despite the deep anxieties they provoke, political operators would appear to be as essential to statecraft as the sovereign decider, whom they outnumber and often outmaneuver. Two of our authors add to *CSSH's* recent string of essays on political fixers, formal and informal. For points of comparison, see articles by Pierce and Rogers (in *CSSH* 48-4) and Alexopoulos and Ledeneva (in *CSSH* 50-1).

**Christine Philliou** examines the case of the Phanariots, political operators who were powerful and well placed within the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Greek in cultural and linguistic terms, Orthodox Christian in faith, the Phanariots were the consummate Ottoman insiders, controlling large sectors of the Sultan's political and economic machine in Europe, Anatolia, and the Middle East. The Ottomans clearly depended on the Phanariots, rewarding them for valuable service, but the Sultan rarely trusted them as a group. He often executed prominent figures among them to "open their eyes." Philliou charts the Phanariot rise to power, their integration in governance, and their eventual disappearance into a modern world of nation states, where Phanariots no longer had a place. The likenesses and differences between Phanariots among Ottomans, and Muslim elites in Russian imperial domains, are revealing of how extensively dynasts relied upon liminal fixers, and Philliou suggests that new comparative research on these groups might tell us much we need to know about imperial politics.

**Craig Jeffrey** deals with fixers who are far less powerful, but no less resourceful. Working in contemporary Uttar Pradesh, India, Jeffrey examines the careers of un- and underemployed, college-educated Jats, members of a traditionally agricultural caste who are now struggling to maintain their status as middling, but privileged, sorts in the UP hierarchy. Jeffrey argues that mass education has created a class of underemployed men whose cultural capital outstrips their economic prospects, and who turn to the various forms of influence peddling and political mobilization that now flourish on the margins of the state and its official institutions. Young Jats have adapted well to this position, drawing on older forms of networking inherited from fathers and improvising in the new political environments created by Indian universities. The Jat operators, Jeffrey argues, are a progressive and conservative force, propping up their own caste interests, keeping Dalits (the former "untouchables") down, and organizing public opposition to the very patterns of corruption and inequality from which they benefit. Like Uchida's fly-by-night Korean freight haulers, and Philliou's Phanariot bigwigs, Jeffrey's Jat fixers are a force the state cannot control; instead, governmental bodies have come to rely on them for a wide range of services state officials can neither acknowledge nor effectively provide.

**CSSH DISCUSSION** The field of academic history is like the mathematical concept of infinity: however large we envision it to be, it can be made larger by addition. Infinity plus one meets its historiographical equivalent in the four books reviewed by **Felipe Fernández-Armesto**, in which expansive visions of history are made larger still by adding more time, larger parts of the globe, and deeper historical consciousness about what writing history has meant to historians. Fernández-Armesto offers a grand tour of this expansive terrain, which takes human history into the time before historical actors were “human” at all. Conceptual bridges between evolutionary theory and historical argumentation make this time travel possible. Indeed, the smallest temporal framework on offer is that of “global history” posed as a grand alternative to Eurocentrism. In the face of historiography that now feels at home in the Europe of the Neanderthals, or the Africa of early hominids, the historical sensibility that found inspiration in globalization and world systems theory now seems barely to scratch the surface of what history, as Fernández-Armesto surveys it, could be.

**KUDOS** We are delighted to report that Paul Gootenberg’s article, “A Forgotten Case of ‘Scientific Excellence on the Periphery’: The Nationalist Cocaine Science of Alfredo Bignon, 1884–1887” (*CSSH* 49-1), has been awarded the Best Article Prize of the New England Council of Latin American Studies.