

Editorial Foreword

ENGINEERING ECOLOGY The ever-present term *Anthropocene* played on the earlier “Holocene,” and first appeared in the 1980s’ work of Eugene Stoermer at the University of Michigan. Stoermer wrote about human effects on aquatic systems of the Great Lakes. After 2000, Paul Crutzen expanded the concept to denote an entire global ecosystem ultimately shaped by humans, the Anthropocene. From this viewpoint, even wilderness is now domesticated, drained of the wild. We now live in this new world, whose manifold neological descriptors not only offer a vocabulary to describe it, but also take part in making it, and our experience of “it.” To be sure, Anthropocene may have been a bit hasty and shortsighted; several decades after the millennial turn, it is not hard to imagine a terra that shakes itself free to launch a post-human world. For now, though, the Anthropocene, both as phenomenon and as lexical monument, continues to announce and bound our shared world. For that reason, this issue of *CSSH* opens with two articles that guide us into new ethical-ecological geoscapes. They address, respectively, sea defense and climate change in Guyana, and the eco-ethics of palm oil plantations in West Africa and Southeast Asia.

Sarah E. Vaughn’s essay, “Erosion by Design: Rethinking Innovation, Sea Defense, and Credibility in Guyana,” explores the intersecting socio-material and ethical demands that engineers confront in adapting sea defenses to climate change in Guyana. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and archival research, Vaughn focuses on the tensions in climate adaptation that create the possibilities for theorizing innovation as a key theme of counter-modernities in the Anthropocene. She shows how engineers generate “innovation narratives” to describe how obstacles to climate adaptation are created by combinations of neocolonial empire, shapeshifting ecologies, inconsistent maintenance programs, the reckoning of fiscal debt and, perhaps most importantly, the politics of credibility.

In “Cultivating ‘Care’: Colonial Botany and the Moral Lives of Oil Palm at the Twentieth Century’s Turn,” **Alice Rudge** traces the techniques used by scientists and government officials involved with palm oil at the turn of the twentieth century. She shows how mundane practices of care and carefulness were key as they worked to collect, identify, market, and improve the oil palm. But they also applied this so-called care to people: care of the oil palm was thought to presuppose care of the “native,” providing a correction for what were

seen as “careless” local manners of cultivation. Colonial techniques of care sought to encompass both plants and peoples within contemporary liberal rhetorics of efficiency and moral improvement.

CARE The question of care has accelerated rapidly in anthropological interest over the last decade, featuring prominently in, inter alia, Sherry Ortner’s 2016 essay, “Dark Anthropology and Its Others: Theory since the Eighties,” the successor to her landmark *CSSH* article of 1984, “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties.” Ortner points to a shift away from a narrowly “dark” approach to anthropology that focuses only on ruin, oppression, exploitation, marginalization, and death, and toward studies of empathy, compassion, hospitality, and care. To our view, the parallel attention to the Anthropocene, ethics, and ecological risk, and the simultaneous move toward concepts like “care” and compassion, is fruitful.

In “Sovereignty as Care: Acquaintances, Mutuality, and Scale in the Wa State of Myanmar,” **Hans Steinmüller** notes that sovereignty always relies on a double movement of violence and care. It requires the power to exercise violence as well as the capacity to care, to protect, and to nourish. In the spirit of Ortner’s intervention, Steinmüller notes that anthropologists and historians writing about sovereignty have long paid close attention to violence but have often given short shrift to the importance of care. Steinmüller poses sovereignty as *both* violence and care. He describes the relationships of care between commanders, soldiers, and villagers in the Wa State of Myanmar, a de-facto state governed by an insurgent army. Care provides the balance and foil for the exercise of violence, and both are necessary for the exercise of sovereignty. It is the combination of violence and care in personal relations that can be scaled up to create “the people” as the subject and object of sovereignty. Care is equally central to economic governance and local, household forms of provisioning.

In her article, “The Simple Bare Necessities: Scales and Paradoxes of Thrift on a London Public Housing Estate,” **Catherine Alexander**’s historicized ethnography of a London social housing estate and its residents shows how middle-class household thrift fueled derogatory discourses in Britain aimed at low-income urban residents, but proved a potent metaphor for national economic policy and planetary care alike after the 1970s. “Thrift” was applied morally and economically to justify neoliberal austerity policies and national responses to excessive resource extraction and waste production. These policies shift responsibility onto consumer citizens, regardless of their class or capacity. The problem is that this model of thrift is blind to the provisioning practices of low-income urban households, which emerge at the nexus of wage labor, sharing, welfare, debt, the conservation of material resources through remaking and repair and, crucially, the fundamental need for dignity expressed through kin-care.

ISLAM AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION Barbara Metcalf's "A Sovereign and Virtuous Body: The Competent Muslim Woman's Guide to Health in Thanawi's *Bihishtī Zēwar* (1905)," guides us to the intersection of gender and historical imagination in Islam. She gives special attention to Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, a reformist Islamic scholar concerned with both women's roles in individual and societal "improvement" and elite male "best practices" of health and ethics. His text reveals a historical moment when medical treatments were more craft than industrial, and the professionalization of discrete Muslim and Hindu "systems" of medicine was barely incipient. Health maintenance in Thanawi's hands was a matter of empowering women to both spiritual and practical competence and responsibility. In its description of challenges, strategies, and resources related to health, his text offers a window into women's everyday worlds. But it also raises comparative questions about the history of medicine, the history of emotions, ethnicity in a colonial context, and the potentially empowering implications of Islamic socio-religious reform for women.

Aaron Rock-Singer's article, "The Rise of Islamic Society: Social Change, State Power, and Historical Imagination," explores the history of an idea: "Islamic Society" (al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī). Rock-Singer analyzes the origin and expansion of this idea, as well as its frictions. Drawing on a wide array of Islamic print media published by leading Islamic movements and state institutions in Egypt between 1898 and 1981, he shows how the concept of "Islamic Society" became intellectually viable and politically meaningful in the context of transition from colonial to postcolonial rule in the mid-twentieth century. Building on histories of religious nationalism that trace how religious nationalist visions produce novel understandings of religious identity, his article explores the inverse: through the notion of "Islamic Society," it shows the ways in which national identity is linked to projects of religious practice. In doing so, Rock-Singer casts light on how religious nationalist projects seek to structure social life through calls to continuity with the past even as they adopt the core assumptions of the nation-state project.

Camille Lyans Cole's contribution, "The Ottoman Model: Basra and the Making of Qajar Reform, 1881–1889," reveals an Iran beset by internal and external threats to its cohesion. In considering Qajar responses to this condition of threat in the late nineteenth century, scholars have emphasized the rise of nationalism and a traumatic encounter with Europe. Cole offers a different interpretation. Through a close analysis of the travel narratives of royal engineers, she draws out alternative discourses of reform based on comparisons and connections with the Ottoman Empire. Unpacking little known travel narratives, Cole shows how the comparisons drawn in such texts between Qajars and Ottomans helps us to rethink late Qajar history outside the national question of "Iran" and an overly Eurocentric frame.

ICONS AND INDEPENDENCE Roger Canals and Celeste Muñoz foreground the notion of “iconic path” to narrate the multiple lives of saints. Their article, “The Iconic Paths of La Verge de Montserrat in Catalonia and Beyond: A Comparative Approach from History and Anthropology,” traces the arc of an eleventh-century Catalan version of the Virgin Mary as she came to occupy diverse roles and political parts, signifying variously through her “Blackness,” her Catalan origins, and her activism in national independence movements from Puerto Rico to Equatorial Guinea to Sardinia. Their study applies historical and anthropological methods to assess how La Verge’s distinct iconic paths converge to generate new potential projects of identity both religious and national. Religious icons, they show, are constantly in processual flux, accruing new lives and resonances, even as they never fully leave behind their previous sites and significations.

Finally, in the essay “Reading Rostow in a Rhodesian Prison: Anticolonialism and the Reinvention of Modernization in British Central Africa,” **Geoffrey Traugh** examines how and why anti-colonial activists in Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) seized on modernization theory to make their case for national independence in the early 1960s. For them, modernization theory was a kind of icon in its own right—not only a set of ideas but a totem indexing the aspiration toward independence. Against the condescending views of British officials, the Malawi Congress Party imagined their country as a future “Central African Denmark.” Traugh argues that the Congress’s Danish vision was part of an anti-colonial challenge to the development strategies that dominated early international development thinking. Far from rejecting the modernization idea, Congress thinkers flipped the framework of modernization from the idealization of industry to agriculture, helping to open new possibilities for small, agrarian territories on the empire’s margins. Traugh shows the iconic paths of modernization theory in the unfolding process of making Malawi.
