

Editorial Foreword

SCALES OF COMPARISON Knowledge is generated through comparison, setting things in relation to assess similarity and difference. Indeed, language itself works through comparison, as Saussure showed in lectures given in Geneva over a century ago, and very likely this is true of all human thought. While *CSSH*'s founding mandate is comparison, and every issue juxtaposes essays in a comparative frame (not least through the kind of editorial fiat represented in this Foreword), single articles that actually hazard a comparison between two or more entities are rare. Articles that both do this and simultaneously reflect on methods of comparison are even less common.

We are delighted, then, to begin this issue with just such an essay, **Simona Cerutti** and **Isabelle Grangaud**'s "Sources and Contextualizations: Comparing Eighteenth-Century North African and Western European Institutions." How to compare, they ask, without either eliminating or eliding the contextual specificity of a given case, or requiring a relation of contiguity whether via diffusion or framing as *histoire croisées*? Both approaches reduce specificity to increase commensurability, with important benefits—such as the power to denaturalize an object of study and see it anew—but also entail obvious liabilities. Cerutti and Grangaud offer a bold proposal for how to compare without relinquishing specificity. Their key move is to compare not historical phenomena or objects as such, but rather sources as they act as constituting agents of historical events. To show this, Cerutti and Grangaud compare sources on two analogous but non-contiguous or *croisées* institutions regulating transfers of property, the European *droit d'aubaine* and the Ottoman *Bayt al-mâl*.

Historical sociologists **Alexander Anievas** and **Kerem Nişancioğlu** "scale up" to open new considerations of an old problem: Why did the West develop into a technological and colonial power after centuries of being a relative backwater to cosmopolitan centers in Asia? Arguments for Western exceptionalism or sheer contingency, roughly "internalist" and "externalist" explanations, are equally unpersuasive and ultimately indefensible. Against these, Anievas and Nişancioğlu draw on Leon Trotsky's reanimated theory of "uneven and combined development" to posit a multilinear and interactive model of the so-called rise of the West. Their argument that the endemic warfare of Western feudal states, in contrast to large tributary empires of Asia, summoned continued innovation of the means to violence. Thus, paradoxically, it was the very weakness of Western states that helped to create technological innovations that ultimately allowed for colonial and capital expansion. And this had snowballing effects, as colonial assets were then leveraged toward further domination. The authors show how Trotsky's model works

in their analysis of the simultaneous “rise” of Great Britain and “decline” of the Mughal Empire. Not all recuperations of classic theory pan out in more than rhetorical ways, but Anievas and Nişancioğlu’s gambit pays off in spades, offering a powerful new method and intervention into what seemed an over-worn question.

ARCHIVES/MATERIALS Archives are material things endowed with shape, texture, and varying durability and fixedness. Some documents are firmly, even monumentally located in veritable fortresses of history, and there catalogued and maintained in temperature-controlled chambers. Others are elusive, suddenly appearing through careful sleuthing or, at times, hand-to-hand connections or sheer luck, and then disappearing again for recirculation. At the same time, materials of varying composition, from hulks of rusting metal to shards of glass, can become, or be made into, archival sources of historical memory and civic pedagogy. The following articles juxtapose the fortuitous appearance of a personal diary, now become “archival,” and the transformation of monumental machines in an abandoned industrial zone into “heritage.”

In the story of the diary, **Carole McGranahan’s** essay, “Imperial but Not Colonial,” poses a compelling comparative question about the ways in which empires depend on non-colonized yet nevertheless imperial subjects. How to write postcolonial histories of never-colonized peoples? McGranahan asks how Tibetans or Nepalese were subjects of British India as liminal figures, neither citizens nor foreigners, and accorded neither sanction nor rights. She delves into the story of a Tibetan political activist, Rappa Pangdatsang, who was taken as a threat to British interests in India, a misrecognition that nonetheless set official archiving wheels in motion to produce layers of official archival “truth.” McGranahan uses Rappa’s diary, shared with her by his family, to read against the official record and give contours to Rappa’s person and aspirations as an imperial but not colonial subject, as well as to British strategies for managing such interstitial subjects.

How abandoned factories and hulking cranes become archival, and of what sort of pasts, are queries raised by **Andrea Muehlebach**. In “The Body of Solidarity,” Muehlebach traces the emergence of “industrial heritage” as a value marking the refiguring of factory work as a left-behind past. The north Italian town of Sesto San Giovanni has transformed its abandoned steel plants and factories into “cathedrals of labor” and the “civilization of the factory.” In part this is a bid for world heritage recognition but, as Muehlebach shows, it is much more than that. Sesto inhabitants revere the machinery as living icons—even totems—of a form of human solidarity that remains vital in the town’s present communal identity, and needs to be taught, touched, and transmitted in order to remain so in the future.

BREAKING FRAME Much of social life remains recalcitrant to analysis within a single framework, since human action surely derives from myriad

sources. Often we use spatial metaphors to distinguish multiple modes of interpretation—scaling “up” or “down,” judging surface or “deep” motivations or causes, or “framing” an argument. Erving Goffman famously located “frame” both in the mind—in our rules and methods of interpreting things in the world—and in social action itself. *Breaking frame*, he argued, involves that temporary breakdown of the usual governing rules, which both reveals otherwise only implicit structures of the frame and allows new possibilities to emerge. Playing on Goffman’s double-notion of frame as something in mental processes and in the world, here we juxtapose an essay that breaks methodological and analytical frames, and an ethnographic study of the use of jokes to break social frame.

Lucia Carminati engages the study of early twentieth-century anarchism as a social movement only poorly understood within national boundaries. “Everyday anarchists” worked through a network of concealed nodes sometimes articulated regionally, sometimes nationally, sometimes in a trans-Mediterranean frame. Beginning with a case of anarchists accused of hiding bombs in a wine shop in Alexandria, Carminati draws ever-widening circles of connection outward to show how anarchist networks worked and the specific quality of anarchist belonging. The method thus mimics the work and movement of anarchists themselves.

The Mexico-United States border at Tijuana is a joke. Or at least a site of jokes, as **Rihan Yeh’s** elegant essay demonstrates. Jokes, like borders, are crafted to interrupt a given frame and hold contradictions together: reason and violence, performative citizenship and resistance. Yeh argues that jokes not only express contradiction, they make the argument that just as the state is split, so also is the citizen, who (like the state) performs reason while holding in reserve the possibility of violence or resistance, whether acted on or not. In the fraught context of sites like *the visa interview*, where Mexican subjects are pressed to perform “the fully documented person,” his or her holding-in-reserve of another, internal sovereignty is important. Border-checkpoint jokes are deployed to break frame from the performance of official personhood and allow a glimpse of another, perhaps more authentic or at least different personhood.

POLITICS OF BELONGING IN EAST AFRICA The histories of Tanzania and Uganda have been thoroughly entangled in the postcolonial decades. Uganda tried to annex the north of Tanzania, and Tanzania drove Idi Amin from power in Uganda in 1979. Both endured the relative absence of a civil state under competing versions of socialist authoritarianism. What modes of belonging endured alongside or under such volatile political upheaval? **Emily Callaci** explores the rich, vivid, and precarious street world of authors called “briefcase publishers” in Tanzania. Like the heroes of their novellas, the authors were young men, at once rival hustlers and comrades in

the crafting and circulation of their stories in Dar es Salaam. Callaci argues that these texts serve as a “street archive,” but are also in themselves a form of social action. They announced and helped to bring into being a new mode of young, urban masculinity that could rival both village hierarchies—in which elder men governed the right to speak, marry, or own property—and the hierarchies of governance and administration. These were street-savvy literary renegades who wrote and published as much to expand their reputation as to make money. The novellas described in their narratives, but also helped to constitute, a new form of social life, an urban African modernity or cosmopolitanism.

Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch, and Nic Cheeseman consider an event from the same period in neighboring Uganda, namely the 1980 election in relation to what they call the “observers’ dilemma.” The dilemma arises when outside election observers consider a vote to be very likely flawed, but are unsure whether to publicly disavow it, for fear of further destabilizing an already precarious state. That is because performing the state—even with its potentially contradictory values of “lawful order” and “will of the people”—may serve as a powerful mode of belonging. This may be so even in cases of failed or falsified elections. The very staging of elections, the authors propose, is a wager entered into by various groups with different rationales. Still, the very existence of a “shared faith” in elections, and the corporeal choreography required to assemble may serve an important purpose in integrating disparate factions toward a shared project. Elections, even counterfeit ones, may be seen as a mode of state belonging and an assertion that, at least in terms of cultural performance, a given state belongs to a broader community of democratic nation-states. Observers thus hesitate to undermine the possibly salutary effects derived from performing “state order” by staging an election, however compromised.
