

## Editorial Foreword

**THE EMPIRE OF EXCEPTION** The British and French empires dominate postcolonial studies as decisively as they once dominated the colonial world. The other empires are held to different standards. The Spanish and Portuguese empires peaked early. Belgian, Dutch, and German empires come across as reduced variations on French and British themes. Russian, Persian, Chinese, and Mughal empires generate scholarship of a different kind altogether: less global, less explicitly connected to the political present, and often less comparative in feel and focus. At *CSSH*, these stereotypical trends stand out clearly in the manuscripts we receive. A clear exception, however, is Ottoman studies. During the last decade, we have seen radical changes in work on Ottoman imperial formations. The old Orientalist fixations have been demolished, and innovative approaches to Ottoman political history are gradually feeding back into the study of all aspects of modernity.

In an essay that takes stock of recent developments in Ottoman studies, **Alan Mikhail** and **Christine M. Philliou** make the case for more broadly comparative analyses of the empire, its regional cultures and political transformations. For *CSSH* readers who still file the Ottomans under “empires, other,” this review explains how Ottomanist historiography is pushing the imperial turn in unanticipated directions.

**STATE EFFECTS IN THE TRIBAL ZONE** The ideological and institutional power of the modern state is now being confidently undone by political theorists who explain, with precision, how statecraft is a game of masks and illusions. Of course, these subversive theorists were beaten to the punch by the world’s tribal populations, many of whom were (and still are) adept at undermining the hegemonic designs of state officials. Although metropolitan theorists are not likely to mine the tribal zone for critical insights, state effects are on exaggerated display there. Conscription. Resource extraction. Eviction. Genocide. All are familiar to tribal populations. Yet who produces these effects? Who trains the tribal militia, buys their rifles, and confiscates their lands? Who imposes taxes and collects fines? It is hard to say. In the tribal zone, bandits and bureaucrats look alike. Can this ambiguity tell us anything new about sovereignty?

**Uğur Ümit Üngör** and **Nadir Özbek** tackle these questions in the Kurdish-dominated terrain of eastern Anatolia during the final decades of Ottoman rule and the early years of the Turkish Republic. Ottoman authorities tried to pacify local tribes and extinguish banditry, but they also relied on Kurdish militias to collect taxes and keep Armenians (and rebellious Kurds)

in check. Imperial and tribal actors co-opted each other, fought each other, and blamed each other for social injustices in the region. The repercussions for Armenians, as Üngör and Özbek show, were disastrous, and the Kurds, in turn, were crushed by the Republic. Key differences in the governing styles of the Ottoman and Turkish regimes emerge clearly across the sixty-year span covered by these papers. The promise of the new Ottoman studies, as advertised by Mikhail and Philliou, is evident as well.

**MODES OF INSURRECTION** To overthrow a state, one must imitate and obliterate its institutions. Often a bloody process, insurrection makes the state real in ways legal opposition cannot; the violence that accompanies insurgency will, if successful, produce new governmental forms that carry the same potential for oppression and abuse. Rebels can confront the state directly, using technical means that match state power; or, beginning in a weaker position, insurgents can take control of remote areas, where the state is thin on the ground. These formulas are ancient, and the tribal zone, as a literal place and a figurative location, is a persistent venue for revolutionary contests. Sovereignty is contested there; winners must assert their power over it; losers retreat into it. All modes of insurrection, it would seem, materialize both the state and its margins.

**Christopher Goscha** considers the head-on encounter of Vietnamese and French armies during the first Indochina War (1945–1954), a conflict in which Vietnamese forces moved from the status of rebel cadres to a state-making military machine in just a few years. By contrast, **Jonathan Kennedy** and **Sunil Purushotham** examine India's Maoist insurgencies, which have been active (and most successful) among the forest and hill people of central India's "tribal belt" since the 1940s. The triumph of the Vietnamese over the French was based on close acquaintance with colonial institutions and mastery over the tools of information control—Goscha focuses on radio and telephone communications—whereas Maoists in India have anchored their struggle in poorly developed regions, among people who want to keep state-like institutions at bay. The political outcomes vary dramatically, but processes of state formation (liberatory and decolonizing in Vietnam, brutal and marginalizing in India) are fostered in each case.

**POLITICS AND PRISONERS** The common criminal and the political prisoner have much in common—both are in jail; both broke the law (or are accused of doing so); both are a threat to the established order. Still, the prostitute and the civil rights activist are not portrayed as convicts of the same sort. Why are they both in prison? How does prison, as a total institution, hinder or enhance their ability to change the laws they have violated? And why does the modern state treat political prisoners so inconsistently, denying them basic privileges, giving them special accommodations, executing them, burying them in

mass graves, pardoning and apologizing to them? Whatever makes a crime political, the treatment of political prisoners is now a standard against which the morality and sophistication of contemporary states can be judged.

**Padraic Kenney** and **Mairi S. MacDonald** look at the contrasting fates of political prisoners and imprisoned politicals. The former use prison to generate publicity, train new followers, foster resolve, and pressure the state for change. Political prisoners, Kenney argues, are of recent vintage; their origins can be seen in the actions of Polish socialists in Czarist prisons, suffragettes in England, and Gandhi's followers in British South Africa. These activists realized that the prison was internal to the state, and was therefore a privileged site of opposition. They also benefited from the sensitivities of state officials, who realized that political prisoners enjoyed the support of free citizens. The imprisoned politicals featured in MacDonald's account of postcolonial Guinea were not similarly empowered; most were not involved in oppositional politics of any sort, but were caught up in the purges that followed attempts (real and imagined) to overthrow the Sékou Touré regime. The mistreatment of imprisoned politicals, in Guinea and around the world, is gauged against metropolitan images of the free citizen and the political prisoner. Touré's refusal to respect these images has prompted many observers to suggest that he was bound by colonial legacies of state violence. MacDonald, however, argues that Touré's regime acted on models of national modernity and African dignity that were particular to postcolonial Guinea. Political prisoners, in this context, were simply enemies of the state, acting in league with outsiders. Their removal from political life, not their controlled access to it as political prisoners, is what defined the power and legitimacy of the Guinean state.

**WISHCRAFT** We live in an age of witchcraft, oracles, and magic. They flourish worldwide, often in tandem with market reforms, democratization, and the spread of Christianity and Islam, faith traditions that oppose magic almost as vehemently as modernists once endorsed secularization. Yet *CSSH* articles on sorcery and magic are based mostly in Africa, in African diasporas, in colonial societies, or in distant historical eras, a distribution that tells a familiar tale. Evidence for the modernity of magic is easy to ignore, and our desire to redeem "witchcraft" by insisting on its coevalness with science and religion is too defensive. The aspirational, wishful quality of casting spells and lifting curses is perhaps a better way to understand our endless attempts to control and connect.

**Larisa Jasarevic** takes us to postsocialist Bosnia, where traditional healing techniques are experiencing renewed popularity. Protection from envy and sorcery can be had, for a price or a gift, from practitioners who specialize in diagnosing fears, *strava*, which are read in the shapes taken by molten lead when it is poured into water. Jasarevic does not analyze these practices as symbolic folk rituals, but as therapies that compete with biomedical and

pharmaceutical interventions. Mixing Latour's "practical metaphysics" with new interpretations of classical works on sympathetic magic, Jasarevic arrives at her own diagnosis of suffering and desire in Bosnia, a *strava* session that will leave you with an odd sense of ambiguity, insight, and wish fulfillment.