

Editorial Foreword

JURISDICTIONAL FLOW Boundaries are drawn to slow the movement of people and things, or to stop this movement altogether. The wall, the barbed wire fence, the checkpoint, the sentry with a gun—all are familiar images of the border zone. And each is an image of failure. In reality, the boundary produces movement. The more politicized and impenetrable a boundary is meant to be, the more effort we devote to working around it, undermining it, transgressing it, or erasing it. This is the enduring irony of boundaries: they simultaneously forbid and invite us to cross them.

Eric Lewis Beverley and **Joya Chatterji** explore two very different regimes of boundary making (and crossing) in South Asia. Working with colonial era materials, Beverley shows us how the frontier between the British Raj and the Princely State of Hyderabad was transected by social types—bandits, temple prostitutes, cattle thieves, police informants, court officials—who specialized in thwarting and manipulating state sovereignty. Their creativity and mobility capital are paralleled in Chatterji's account of the millions of immigrants and diasporans created by the international boundaries drawn through and around Bengal in 1947. As they travel between Bangladesh, India, and Britain, members of a new Muslim diaspora follow “grooves” that link them to diverse locations, options, and histories. In colonial-era Hyderabad and postcolonial Sylhet, the placement of boundaries is a political project that triggers new and reanimates very old patterns of tactical migration.

BORDERLANDERS The ambiguities of the border zone infect the people who, independently or against their will, take up residence in it. Individuals who cannot be protected or prosecuted by local courts are sometimes creatures of privilege; sometimes, they are the most vulnerable of political subjects. As immigrants who want to belong and will eventually be incorporated, borderlanders reinforce popular conceptions of national identity. Others cultivate the role of outsider, opting for the benefits that come to guests. Some are confined to the role of perpetual stranger. As political and economic conditions change, so does the status of these borderlanders, and so do the tactics used to destabilize their position or settle it once and for all.

Ziad Fahmy and **Marc David Baer** guide us along the spectrum of advantaged and stigmatized borderlanders. In nineteenth-century Alexandria, a substantial class of foreign and local merchants flourished by playing a legal shell game in which, as protégés of Western consular offices, they continually escaped taxation and trial by Egyptian authorities (or, in some flagrant cases, by *any* state authority). According to Fahmy, the Alexandrine

commercial elite lived in a world of extraterritoriality and privileged mobility. In Nazi Germany, by contrast, Jewish Turks lost their hold on Turkish citizenship and were subject, alongside other Jews, to annihilation. Yet some Muslims of Jewish descent were protected by the Turkish state, and some German Jews were granted asylum in Turkey. In explaining these divergent outcomes, Baer invites us to create a new borderland in which the Shoah itself will serve as groundwork for a historical consciousness that Germans and Turks can convincingly share.

IDENTITY INSIDE OUT Some swings of the theory pendulum are so extreme that we never expect a return. Indeed, we lose the ability to think clearly about the analytical approaches we have decisively abandoned. Why was anyone a diffusionist, an ecological or genetic determinist, a functionalist, a spiritualist, a structuralist? Our shorthand answers to these questions are rarely accurate, and they eventually become dissatisfying, prompting creative thinkers to reconsider key assumptions, to play with analytical boundaries. The hegemonic status of social constructionism, for decades the regnant approach to ethnicity, race, nationalism, and all related identity concepts, is now undergoing pervasive critique. If theorists once wanted to argue that identity content (often stigmatized content) was defined by external and contingent historical factors, many now want to suggest that internal and predetermined factors (often valorized by members of the group) are essential to identity formation.

Andrew Apter and **Ruben Gowricharn** offer new takes on the old problem of ethnogenesis. Apter argues that Yoruba identity, which is commonly portrayed as an outgrowth of missionary activity, the slave trade, and trans-Atlantic intellectual ties, is equally a product of enduring patterns of social structure and notions of quantity and ritual that complicate any claim that Yoruba identity has an “inside” and an “outside.” Gowricharn, working with British Indian populations in the Caribbean, takes an even stronger primordialist stance, arguing that ethnogenesis is dependent on the content of group identities, not simply on the recognition of boundaries between groups. Apter and Gowricharn admit that the difference between internalism and externalism is a matter of emphasis; neither stance is entirely dispensable. Still, their renewed attention to cultural specificity is productive, and it encourages us to ask what has been left out of strictly constructionist approaches to ethnicity.

COLONIAL LOCALISMS If the lines between social constructionism and primordialism are currently being redrawn, the outcome is seldom an upside down version of the prior orthodoxy; even rarer is a vigorous reassertion of internalist forms of identity formation. The more viable result, in post/colonial studies, is the realization that colonial policy could not generate, reconfigure, or

suppress all local identities alike, and that some social groupings, ideas, and cultural practices predated colonial regimes and evolved outside their spheres of control. If scholars of colonialism have sometimes been oblivious to these localisms, colonial authorities and their opponents were often obsessed with them.

Neil MacMaster, and **Justin Willis** and **George Gona**, consider the political life of groups and institutions that were understood, by their members and by colonial overlords, to be traditional. MacMaster focusses on a very small but pervasive body, the faction or lineage assembly that was found in almost all Algerian peasant villages, Berber or Arab. Unlike the formal councils recognized by the French government, or the tribes the French had neutralized, these small assemblies operated beyond state regulation, and this made them a rich medium in which to organize and conduct revolutionary political activity during the war for Algerian independence. Willis and Gona scale up from the village assembly to the large tribal confederation. Charting the career of the Mijikenda Union in Kenya, they contend that this “traditional” association exploited the tensions between modernity and tribal custom to engage critically in colonial and postcolonial politics. In both settings, internal and external factors became entangled, but traditions were never simply invented, and anti-colonial resistance was always dependent on local models of representation and authenticity.

REVERSE HISTORIOGRAPHY The essays that make up this issue harmonize unusually well—the music has been sweetly revisionist throughout—and it is fitting that we end on a perfect note of alterity. Revising dominant trends in theory, shifting analytical boundaries, scrutinizing local things that have long been neglected: these are not easy tasks. It helps to have support on the ground (and in the archive). Alternative histories surround us, and people are eager to share them if we seem genuinely interested and open to their effects. All that is required is a commitment to look for history in unusual places, in past and present, in voices and objects our “official” historiographies do not recognize.

Matt Hodges finds alternative historicity in the clear waters of a brackish lagoon near a French peasant village in Languedoc. Here, in the 1970s, villagers became avid collectors of the fragments of ancient Roman pottery embedded in the silt that lined their lagoon. Hodges shows us how a local historian (a newcomer to the village) inspired the pottery craze, and how local people used the search for pottery to assert their own village identity within a modern national context and within much older regional histories. As he traces recent demographic and economic shifts in village life, Hodges explains how an apparently frivolous hobby could become a collective ritual that rearticulated the grounds of membership, of belonging in past and present, for people who had no affection for official, bookish versions of history. By

hunting for pottery, they enacted and talked back to history, reversing it, expressing and internalizing it. Alternative histories of this sort, Hodges suggests, are ordinary fare across Europe. After sampling the fascinating array of revisionist histories and alternative accounts of identity formation that fill this issue of *CSSH*, we might well conclude that “reverse historiography” is the most forward-looking kind.
