

Editorial Foreword

UNDERCLASS UNDER GROUND, IN SOUTH AMERICA One of the most enduring material registers of class is place, not only the physical routes traversed by underclasses and elites from pre-birth to death, but also the spatial descriptors that reliably adhere to classed bodies and work, most notably terms like “below,” “under,” “over,” and “above.” The words bundle geography with anthropology. “Under” conveys not only a spatial relation but also a social one; in the underworld dwell the seedy, base, lowlife, lumpen, and the dead. Yet if the force of the underground is different from that “above,” its amassed social powers are as real.

The two essays juxtaposed here explore actual holes in the ground in Peru and Brazil, as those sites are filled with classed bodies and, recursively, exert force on the societies built around them. These pits and their bones and shards say much about how late-modern liberal economies of Latin America work. They also spin new forms of social life out from their depths. **Daniella María Gandolfo’s** “Lumpen Politics? A Day in ‘El Hueco’” guides us through a day in the dense informal *cholo* economy ruled over by a saint called the Lord of Miracles, where “rock-bottom prices” on everything can be had below ground. Much of the merchandise is not quite legal or illegal, but rather “extra”-legal. As we wind through El Hueco, Gandolfo simultaneously leads us down genealogical alleys and detours of the figure of the *lumpenproletariat*. Taking cues from Bakunin, Bataille, and Fanon, she points out the spaces opened in Lima through the strange underworld conjunctures of lumpen and global economies, linked by subterranean tunnels off the grids of the state and the salaried economic world above.

“The Potter’s Field,” by **Graham Denyer Willis**, digs into pit graves in Brazil, uncertified necropolises where persons unknown, poor, or deemed criminal are dumped unceremoniously and en masse. Not unlike El Hueco, in Lima these many pits are state-authorized yet not-quite-legal sites of radical excess. The largest, Vila Formosa near São Paulo, houses a million and a half residents in its earth. Willis shows the durable omnipresence of these potter’s fields in the Americas in the age of neoliberal globalization, where the right to a private after-life marks out privilege no less than the right to a gated waking life. Willis argues that mass graves are not merely tolerated as extra-legal appendages, but are necessary to the infrastructure of the present order. Yet he also reminds us how fears of “falling in” to the pit upon death fertilize new forms of sociality and solidarity among the forgotten. The prospect of uncertain necrosocial futures can, under some conditions, inspire present-day movements above ground.

TIME-REGISTERS AND TRUST IN AFRICA AND ITS DIASPORA

Registers of time and of trust are partners, banded together. Trust supposes stakes in an imagined future or a shared past, in that sense hailing time. And time requires a modicum of concord and consensus; it coordinates the ability to act together in space, for those who accept its terms. These essays calibrate registers of time and trust at specific key moments.

Leslie James recounts the hyper-space flights and magical perambulations of fictive newspaper personages in late-colonial Nigeria. In “The Flying Newspapermen and the Time-Space of Late Colonial Nigeria,” press columnists bearing the *noms de plumes* Tom Tinkle (1938–1941) and Roving Hobo (ca. 1949) reveal the shifting horizons of expectation for late-colonial Africans already seeing a new regime coming. With fantastic capacities of hyper-mobility and metamorphosis, the characters zoom from policemen’s shoulders to government officials’ desks, from West Africa to Paris, London, Cairo, or even to the inside of a coffin. With one foot in the gritty local politics of their present and another in magical flight—a critical “bounded transcendence,” as James puts it—they helped to generate new imaginable social landscapes and time frames, new frames of action in which readers could emplot themselves.

Daniel Magaziner, in “The Foundation: Design, Time, and Possibility in 1960s Nairobi,” develops a vivid snapshot of a specific university course developed and taught from 1965–1967 by two architecture professors—Mvusi and Morgan. They aimed to challenge young African architects to imagine space in ways beyond ideas of the colonial, customary, or classic. “What is our Time?” they asked the students. How is this present place “historical,” beyond old wooden figurings of African subjectivity? Mvusi and Morgan challenged students to generate modern spatial forms that would express and disclose new forms of trust, new versions of “a people.” The course, and Magaziner’s exploration of it, allow us to look back at an unlikely window of possibility, one that was already closing by 1968.

Stuart Earle Strange moves to a different register of time and history, showing ways the Ndyuka of Suriname and French Guyane read affliction in terms of systems and sequences of accountability. His essay, “‘It’s your family that kills you’: Responsibility, Evidence, and Misfortune in the Making of Ndyuka History,” explores diagnoses of Da Antony’s throat illness as rendered by spirit mediums. These, he shows, reveal competing versions of possible histories and futures, “pooled signs of responsibility,” in Strange’s poignant phrase. As the afflicting present is progressively read in relation to the past politics of kinship, and as those diagnoses and verdicts are accepted (or not), certain histories gain traction and are extended, while others are silenced.

“Hail the Census Night’: Trust and Political Imagination in the 1960 Population Census of Ghana,” by **Gerardo Serra**, revisits a specific census at

a crucial juncture of nation-building. Moving beyond familiar approaches to statistics and state-building, Serra focuses on emotion. Censuses and state-building, he argues, are mediated by trust and the question of how statistics come to inform and inspire political imagination. After an inaccurate and lackluster colonial census of 1948, Nkrumah threw his charisma and cultural weight behind the 1960 effort. Census night included ceremonies of drumming, dancing, and bonfires and salvific images of Nkrumah. It was rhetorically broadcast as a “new social contract” and a “victory over colonialism.” As Serra vividly shows, the campaign worked wonders: statistics-gathering was revisioned in terms of national trust. Census fever!

LABOR AND THE LIMITS OF IMPERIAL GOVERNANCE This work demonstrates the precarious contingencies of the imperial management of labor reform at key temporal junctures: 1837–1838 in the British Empire, and the period beginning in 1859 in Japan and Russia. No single factor offers a sufficient account; rather, the authors show, we need a wider comparative frame that leaves space for significant clusters, convergences, and assemblages of variables to congeal and become discernible to analysis. The method taken in these two articles is to telescope the temporal scale in order to expand the geographic range of comparison.

In “Reforming Everywhere and All at Once: Transitioning to Free Labor across the British Empire, 1837–1838,” **Kate Boehme, Peter Mitchell, and Alan Lester** offer a close analysis of the transition from slave to free labor in the British Empire. The complex challenges of managing the transition were daunting not least because the Empire was less a single authority than a vast network of bureaucratic nodes including twenty-seven colonial governments plus protectorates and less direct forms of colonial rule like the East India Company. Radiating out from London, this nearly global archipelago of nodes of imperial power was mostly held together by floating chains of paper; by streaming circulations of documents. Thus the Empire was always irregular and uneven, not only in the delivery of imperatives but also in their very content. For the management of the transition to free labor entailed negotiations of values—profit, security, freedom, and more—but also the setting of forms of servitude into official moral hierarchies. What was “owed” to slaves in India was not taken as equivalent to that owed to slaves in the British West Indies, since in India the old institution was merely “inherited” while in the Caribbean it was imposed. Expressions of imperial guilt were different when directed toward slaves “liberated” (and then forcibly enlisted) by the British at sea than toward indentured convicts in Australia. And so on. By focusing on an empire-wide circuit of documents in play all at the same time, the authors give vivid insight into the multiple challenges of imperial authority and the radical unevenness of its exercise and reach.

Mark Cohen's essay, “Reforming States, Agricultural Transformation, and Economic Development in Russia and Japan, 1853–1913,” likewise

considers the contingent variability of imperial control over labor. He asks how, when, and where rural economies succeeded at developing and expanding in the change of the macro transition from agrarian to industrial economies, in the race to catch up to Western states' economies and their expanding military capacities. Against approaches that overemphasize single-factor causes like the unilateral power of centralized states to impose economic order, or the simple opening of new market opportunities, Cohen builds on Polanyi to offer a more complex, multi-factor explanation. In Japan and Russia, he argues, "rural economies began to develop when and where the structure of relations governing who controlled productive resources, and in what way, was transformed so that the bulk of producers found themselves dependent on markets in order to secure their means of survival." Yet Cohen also takes pains to show variation not only within but also between the cases of Russia and Japan. In Japan, for example, the new Meiji state dismantled feudal village collectives to install its reforms; in Russia it was the old regime itself that tried to enact labor reforms that were often composite solutions and only applied piecemeal in the west and south; thus over the *longue durée*, arguably, the Japanese Meiji regime was more effective at jumpstarting its economy than was pre-revolution Russia. Cohen's essay, like that of Boehme, Mitchell, and Lester, calls attention to the staggered, staccato timelines and the lumpy landscapes of even imperially imposed labor reforms.
