

Editorial Foreword

“EVENTS” AND EVENTFUL PLACES The question of what, exactly, transforms “happenings” in the grand flow of time into “events” is longstanding, dating at least to French sociologist François Simiand’s coining of “evental history” (*histoire événementielle*), famously opposed by Ferdinand Braudel with his preference for *longue durée* analyses. As Marshall Sahlins had it in *Islands of History* (1985), “event” names a relation between a “happening” and a structure of interpretation: Captain Cook’s unexpected return making him into the Hawaiian god Lono in 1779, for example. Sahlins saw “event” as strongly dependent on a perceiver: “One person’s radical event is another’s date for lunch.” William H. Sewell cast “event” in a more sharply defined mold, less like Sahlins’ “structure of the conjuncture” and more like a “conjuncture of structures” that leads to long-lasting, relatively durable social transformation. Meanwhile, the sociologist Andrew Abbott worried over events and time, the ways that our ability to reckon with the flow of time requires “events” to divide and measure it, in intervals that acquire significance in relation to such “events.” But Abbott also showed how the kinds of things we call “events” help to determine the particular flows of time we are invested in. Time itself is always, that is, *événementielle*, though it is not entirely clear how wide an aperture of time needs to be to qualify as an event, nor what causes an event to inflate or deflate in relative importance at a given juncture in time.

The two articles joined here consider, in turn, Brexit as an “event” in flux, exerting a shifting degree of influence on political memory, and then the methodological problem of making microhistories and “small spaces” count as eventful within the tides of global history. **Félix Krawatzek** and **Friedemann Pestel** lead us off with their essay, “The Political Force of Memory: The Making and Unmaking of Brexit as an Event.” Posing the key question of what qualifies as a political event, they argue that it hinges on the temporal structure deployed by a given narrative; how political life is set in time in relation to the past and to various possible futures. The 2016 event of the Brexit referendum was initially set into historical memory as a key temporal rupture, but by now has begun to fade or recede in its eventfulness. Through this close study, they open new windows on this keyword by showing its radical contingency, the ways an “event” comes into being and then may disappear.

In “Between Global History and Microhistory: Rethinking Histories of ‘Small Spaces’ and Cities,” **Gaurav C. Garg** asks related questions about space and eventfulness in historiographic methods. How can historians of “small spaces” focus on local events and at the same time converse with scholars of so-called global history without succumbing to “defanged empiricism,” or being dismissed as merely a scholar of the local? In a way, the question parallels the debates of Simiand and Braudel about the proper time-space of historical inquiry: is “history” made or best interpreted in short-term combative scenes, or in *longue durée* structures? Garg finds hope for the study of small spaces and local theory through “soft critical realism” and, drawing on Charles Tilly, paying attention to

“deep order.” Drawing on his research in Calcutta, Garg shows how the local experiences of socio-economic malaise in the postcolonial period can be drawn into conversation with global history by lingering over mid-range deep structures like, in this case, the disjuncture between land ownership and finance, that help to link Calcutta’s history to the histories of other cities.

THE OUTSIDES OF RELIGION Religion or, better, traditions and social events named as “religious,” have typically been juxtaposed with non-religion in the form of the secular, secularity, or secularism. The two articles gathered here each give lie to that simplistic, bipolar model. They show that “religion” has multiple outsides against which, and within which, that category is constituted—not only the secular, but also “magic” and “superstition” (and there are no doubt additional outsides in other cases).

Aymeric Xu’s contribution, “Typologies of Secularism in China: Religion, Superstition, and Secularization,” establishes a triadic relationship between historical categories of the secular, the religious, and the superstitious as they played against each other. Rejecting the thesis of the Western “invention” of religion and its counterpart, the secular, Xu considers specifically Chinese ideas of religion and secularity, from the Confucian secular to atheist secularity under the Qing Dynasty, to the repression of “superstition” and the simultaneous spiritual engineering that created the idea of a socially productive sphere of “religion” in the early twentieth century and during the Republican period; alongside “interventionist secularism” under the communist regime. Though it is true that the word “religion” arrived with the British, it was only truly *adopted* five decades later, after 1890, via preexisting Chinese categories drawn from Confucianism.

In “Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Technology and Magic in the Ghost Dance, Boxer Uprising, and Maji Maji Rebellion,” **Sean F. McEnroe** engages us in a wild comparative ride crossing from the U.S. Western Plains, to China, to East Africa. As if by magic, McEnroe reveals striking similarities in anti-colonial movements of the same period of 1890–1910, even across this vast spatial range. These similarities reside in the critical uses of new technologies and in the ways specific protest movements linked new technologies to ritual techne—arts of revelation—to express something radically new, all within the same temporal frame. These techno-magical mysteries expressed and confirmed a similar logic, namely *action-at-a-distance*, above all in the form of the gun, alongside new phenomena like the telegraph (sound at a distance); phonography (music and voice at a temporal and physical distance), and many others. Importantly, McEnroe shows how European colonizers shared the belief in “magic” with those they colonized, and their ultimate uncertainty about the roots of agency in such actions-at-a-distance only added to its perceived efficacy.

LOCALIZING MACRO-CONCEPTS: “CASTE” AND THE “RULE-OF-LAW”

With the article, “Cartwheel or Ladder? Reconsidering Sinhala Caste,” **Deborah Winslow** invites us to consider the ways *caste* resists a single, uniform history. In the Kandyan Kingdom of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, for example, a two-tiered hierarchy of agriculturalists on top and craftspersons below was cross-cut by a hub-and-spokes configuration that radiated out from the king at the hub to different occupational groups. The variegated form was, moreover, flexible, able to incorporate

new groups while never losing its shape. In this deep dive into Sinhala notions of caste, with its distinct “cartwheel” form of structured inequality, Winslow succeeds at provincializing the Brahmanical figuration of caste as a set hierarchic ladder, at once showing how Sinhala and Brahmanical formulations of caste were ever in flux and contingent.

In “The Rule-of-Law as a Problem Space: *Wāṣṭa* and the Paradox of Justice in Jordan,” **Yazan Doughan’s** ethnography of institutionalized patronage systems (*wāṣṭa*) in post-Cold War Jordan, he similarly reconsiders a notion too often taken at face value: “the rule-of-law.” Doughan takes rule-of-law as a historically specific “problem space,” within which Jordanian patronage networks sometimes, but not always, become objectionable. Rule-of-law, he shows, serves as a practical space for balancing and brokering an array of concerns, including at least bureaucratic neutrality, public oversight, transparency, proceduralism, legal accountability, global standing, and “development.” In relation to this problem space, *wāṣṭa*, too, takes on multiple roles, not only as patronage but also as an interpretive framework for social injustice. Doughan provocatively suggests that these kinds of multi-system social pragmatics are perhaps not only typical of Jordan, but also characteristic of twenty-first-century postcolonial governmentality in many other sites.

WORLDMAKING IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY In “Parliament and Revolution: Poland, Finland, and the End of Empire in the Early Twentieth Century,” **Wiktor Marzec and Risto Turunen** compare political trajectories of Poland and Finland in relation to competing notions of “revolution” on the western borderlands of the Russian Empire. They explore the complex reasons socialists in Finland were suspicious of parliamentarism and gravitated toward armed revolution, while Polish socialists largely embraced parliamentarism as expressive of the genuine will of the people. Despite these very different paths, Finland and Poland ended in formally similar democratic outcomes.

Roy Bar Sadeh’s essay, “Worldmaking in the Hijaz: Muslims between South Asian and Soviet Visions of Managing Difference, 1919–1926,” considers how Soviet officials and Indian Muslim thinkers imagined a post-imperial world through the Hijaz, the holy land of Islam. While Indian Muslims pushed for a vision of the Hijaz as an international Muslim republic, Soviet officials imagined it as an ethno-nationalist Saudi nation-state. Neither group was much concerned with Hijazi self-determination. Sadeh sheds new light on how the ultimate form modern Hijaz assumed was dependent on not only Saudi politics or European influence, but also the competing visions of Soviets and Indian Muslims.

Finally, **Andrei Sorescu’s** article, “The ‘Is’ at Home, the ‘Ought’ Abroad: Self-Comparison as Self-Criticism and the Transylvanian Model in Early Twentieth-Century Romania,” interprets the role of self-comparison and self-criticism in Romania. Examining travelogues of teachers, priests, and many others, Sorescu shows that Romanians in Transylvania and in the Kingdom of Romania were keenly attuned to their respective internal “other,” and always perceived their own polity, both in its present reality and its future potential, in relation to the path not taken.