

Editorial Foreword

Things change slowly at *CSSH*. Our trademark green cover, our basic layout, our statement of purpose, and even the fonts in which our articles are printed have stayed the same for many years. The scholarship that appears between our covers is as innovative as ever, but the timeless look and feel of *CSSH* is something our readers enjoy, whether they consume the journal in its hard copy or digital versions. The shift to an online readership, however, is now virtually complete, and the habits of online research have convinced us to adopt, starting with this issue, an artifact of journal culture that *CSSH* has blissfully ignored for half a century: the abstract.

Why include abstracts now, and why did we do without them for so long? The first question is easy to answer. Most potential readers now come to us by way of online searches, and they would like a quick introduction to an article before deciding to read or download it. Currently, when users of our Cambridge University Press website click “abstract,” they are shown the first paragraph of the article and its acknowledgments. The effect is not always ideal, either as enticement to read more or as an accurate depiction of what the article is about. For this reason, we have decided to place more conventional abstracts on the website and at the end of each article in the journal itself. It is a sensible thing to do.

It has taken us so long to adopt abstracts because the editors of *CSSH* have never been especially impressed by the ability of authors to sum up their essays in a few hundred words. Abstracts are one of the most reviled genres of academic prose; few of us like to read them, and even fewer enjoy writing them. Moreover, at *CSSH* we often do not see an essay in quite the way its author does, and the editorial foreword has evolved, over the years, into a site where the comparative significance of an essay, usually defined by its relationship to other essays in the same issue, is brought out and contextualized by the editor. For this reason, we have always thought the editorial foreword was far superior to the abstract in explaining why an article is appearing in *CSSH*, what it is about, and how it relates to a larger body of work.

But that is exactly the problem. In the past, when most readers of *CSSH* held a hard copy in their hands, there was a reasonable chance that they would read the editorial foreword and use it as a guide. Today, we know from analysis of views and downloads that hardly anyone reads the editorial foreword. Indeed, if you are reading these words now, you are as rare as a typewriter ribbon. Perhaps you are a fellow or former editor. Perhaps you have an article in *this* issue. Whatever brought you to these pages, you are but a trace

element of our readership. For our legions of online users, the abstract is by far the more effective way to sum up both the content and intent of our essays, even if it means that the logic of editorial selection, and the larger comparative context of each essay, will slip further from view.

Given the reality of digital use patterns and our shift to abstracts, it follows that the editorial foreword will have to change as well. The close summaries of articles that once appeared here will give way to a more general comment on the comparative themes that are explored in the issue. For the stalwart few who still read *CSSH* as if it were an ongoing conversation, not merely a random gathering of excellent essays, this more modest approach should be enough. For others, our new and ever-expanding readership, the change will go by unnoticed. Our articles will be as fascinating as ever, and the abstracts will be yet another way to get at them. Besides, if we can insure that our abstracts are as good as they are short, we will have improved a small corner of the academic world of writing ... 250 words at a time.

LIMITS OF INDIGENEITY Scholars who study native peoples must contend with the growing popularity of “indigeneity.” As a concept, it reinforces older notions of the primitive even as it creates new forms of community, activism, and identity politics. Because indigeneity supports claims to cultural property and physical space, it was bound to become a sliding scale. Some people really are indigenous; others are not. Or so it seems. Sidetracked by issues of more and less, real and fake, participants in the politics of indigeneity often overlook the extent to which this concept is shaped by modern forms of governmentality.

In essays that range from the forests of northern Paraguay to the sparsely populated hunting territories of the Yukon, **Lucas Bessire** and **Paul Nadasdy** consider how local populations interact with, and evade, encroaching states. As NGOs lobby for the right of Ayoreo-speaking people to live in isolation, and First Nations struggle to define their territories along lines approved by Canadian authorities, the power of external actors to define, speak for, and totally reconfigure indigenous populations emerges with brutal clarity.

SOVEREIGNTY AT THE MARGINS The collapse of the nation-state fondly predicted by a generation of scholars enamored of globalization, or horrified by it, never came to pass. Instead, the nation-state was overcome (analytically at least) by reframing it as an assemblage of special effects: “state effects.” Whether this move represented a conceptual advance, an exercise in imaginary wish fulfillment, or a bit of both, the ensuing shift toward the study of sovereignty was tremendously productive for social and political theory. Ironically, some of the most fascinating studies of statecraft—regional, imperial, and transnational—are now being done at the margins of world systems, where a politics of development, migration, illicit trade, military violence, and

humanitarian aid is pursued in the absence of state control but in ways that consistently produce state-like institutions and ideologies of legitimation.

Pál Nyíri and **Alessandro Monsutti** take us to some of the modern world's most ungovernable places: the border zones of China, Laos, and Burma, and the tribal hinterlands of Afghanistan. Here, state and state-like actors are everywhere, but they seldom have full control; local populations contend with foreign armies, grassroots insurgencies, NGO operators, drug smugglers, human rights activists, and private investors who build factories and casino resorts. Amid the opportunism, violence, and modernist ideologies of progress, incalculable wealth pours into remote areas where neither indigenes nor outsiders can gain the upper hand.

CONSUMER DEMANDS The recent boom in material culture studies has brought much-needed attention to consumption, an activity that, despite its centrality to all forms of human economy, has been overlooked by scholars who see greater significance in production and exchange. The road to theoretical prominence for consumption, as for so many concepts, runs through the territory of “agency,” an attribute that lends cultural and historical weight to the consumer. The addition of agency to the buying power of the middle classes has shed light on both the ethical dilemmas that attend the purchase of goods and the power that accumulates among those who can provide and consume goods in politically useful ways.

Jonathan E. Robins and **Cyrus Schayegh** show us two worlds of consumption, one in which British consumers could not (or would not) intervene to rectify injustices done to African plantation workers, and another in which Iranian consumers could, through their demand for electricity, shift Cold War policy. The production of “slave cocoa” in Portuguese colonies scandalized Edwardian England; it also showed how little “ethical consumption” at the end of the supply chain could do to effect change. In 1950s Tehran, the allure of middle class lifestyles (and the threat of Communism) fueled the building of massive, U.S.-sponsored hydroelectric dams. Across these contexts, consumer desire was coopted, criticized, and reformed as a politics of consumption.

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE THEORIZED The Arab Spring has entered its second year, and its impact can be seen on the pages of *CSSH*. In our last issue, we featured three essays on religion in Egypt. The fall of the Mubarak regime changed how each paper would be read; each became answerable to revolutionary events that seemed sequential and connected. Indeed, the modularity of the Arab uprisings has fascinated observers and participants from the start; the shared logic, pacing, choreography, and emotional language have exposed, yet again, the obvious links between ritual and revolution. The likeness between events in Tahrir Square and revolutionary upheavals in other

times and places is vivid. As “the people” have gathered at the barricades, so have the political theorists.

Dace Dzenovksa and **Iván Arenas** invite us to rethink revolutionary politics by taking seriously the material enactment of “barricade sociality,” a consciousness that is transformative, temporary, and essential to conceptions of “the people” that proliferate during moments of revolution in modern states. **Bjørn Thomassen** asks us to engage in a similar rethinking, but the ritual process he describes unfolds at a much larger scale, shaping multiple contexts in which human social life is disturbed and, eventually, recomposed. The essays are, in effect, permutations of each other. One is empirical and open to revolution; the other is theoretical and wary; yet each capitalizes on the insights that the Arab Spring, in its urgent liminality, has made available to us. Read the two essays together, and read them soon. Revolutionary insights, like the social and material transformations that produce them, do not last forever.