Editors' Comment

How do legal and state practices play out in their home territory, in various arenas and sites, how do these practices travel, and how do they trail individuals as people travel, by choice or not? The articles in this issue provide insights into this range of related questions about law and society. The pieces consider law on the ground as state power isolates and shifts individuals, they look at law in how people access legal advice or develop trust in legal institutions, and they study law in elite legal practices in courts. The contributions cover a lot of territory—geographic, social, and conceptual. Together, the articles in this issue present an eclectic yet representative and engaging journey through some top law and society scholarship.

Fittingly, the question of legal travel and international reach is explicit in Valerie Hans's 2016 Presidential Address as it reflects on juries and the Collaborative Research Network of jury scholars. Four commentators provide critical context for this piece. Mary Rose points out in her response to Hans that, although the jury is iconic in the American legal system, trials have been decreasing as a way of resolving disputes. Indeed, increasingly people within the United States sign agreements to keep critical disputes out of the courts. And, processing people accused of crimes would collapse if everyone insisted on their right to trial rather than simply pleading guilty. The belief in the institution of the jury belies the reality of disputes and of the courtroom. Yet, the icon persists powerfully, contributing to an image of an American legal system that promises drama through conflict and wise resolution via democratic participation. The complexity and power of the jury in both our legal imagination and practice are reason enough to study how the jury travels.

The idea of juries serves different purposes within individual political and legal systems, as those who respond to Hans explain. Justifications for the institution of the jury pull on the importance to democracy of lay participation in the justice system.

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Maria Bergoglio, Masayuki Murayama, and Lee Walker each reflect on what juries do for political systems, particularly those in transition. These commentators think about why elites would institute juries and what lay participation might mean to citizens. Micro processes of jury decision-making call into question macro justifications, leading to fruitful cross-national comparison of political regimes and of the meanings of lay participation in the trial process.

Iconic forms of legal institutions, such as the jury or statutes penalizing atrocities, contrast with the perhaps more prosaic, although no less central, experience of the legal system as a congeries of forms, settlements, agreements that no one reads, and unworkable or cumbersome processes that people simply avoid. The ongoing tension between viewing law as a form of meaningful accountability and engaged participation and the experience of law as simply dampening claims for justice continues to animate sociolegal scholarship.

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