

Editorial Foreword

RURAL ECONOMIES Our understanding of the countryside is under continuing risk of being simplified and flattened in a world becoming ever more urban. The first three articles illustrate the importance of resisting this steady pressure and looking closely at rural economies. The richness of this terrain reveals itself to the long historical view and the close-grained ethnography of a family farm.

Dick Whittaker and **Jack Goody** argue against the distorting effects that modernizing histories of industrialization project backward onto the past. Examining the manufacture of pottery and cheese in the deep history of rural France, they show how the teleology of “proto-industrialization” and the simplification of “subsistence agriculture” lose the complexity of the economic history of the countryside.

A “tidal wave of maize” has washed over Africa in the twentieth century, supplanting earlier food grains such as sorghum, millet and rice, in step with economic and nutritional crises, and bringing with it massive social changes. **James McCann** illuminates the historical advance of maize in Africa since its introduction around 1500, and delineates different histories of change through three different theaters of its advance: the forest in Upper Guinea on the west coast, cleared and planted with maize; villages of the maize triangle of the South African high veldt, where maize and mining labor developed in tandem; and highland southern Ethiopia, where a coffee-maize complex was constructed.

Michael Donovan’s study of family farms in Kenya under the forces of state-directed agrarian development reminds us that such development (in this case the introduction of tea cultivation) engenders changes that deeply affect the most intimate social spaces. He explores the reconfiguring of families and farms in a Kipsigis community through a somewhat unusual case and the tensions it reveals. For the Kipsigis, tea has become emblematic of progress, and of altered practices of kinship, gender, and work. (Compare Suzette Heald, “Tobacco, Time, and the Household Economy in Two Kenyan Societies: the Teso and the Kuria,” 1991:130–57.)

IMPROVING THE NATIVES AT HOME AND ABROAD Undoing the ontological separation of “here” and “there” seems to be a promising way forward in colonial studies, as the next essay exemplifies.

The Cultivation System was an in-kind tax in the form of export crops, and was imposed by the Dutch on peasants in colonial Java, much criticized by historians. **Albert Schrauers** fastens upon the fact that Johannes van den Bosch was the creator of both the Cultivation System and a model agrarian colony

in Holland to rehabilitate poor criminals. Viewing the two projects together, Schrauwers reinterprets van den Bosch not as a mercantilist pushing policy ideas whose time had passed, but rather as a theorist of economic liberalism. His is not, however, the liberalism embodied in British social welfare programs of the time; it is “an alternative trajectory towards the creation of a free market in labor.” (Also on Dutch Java: Jennifer Alexander and Paul Alexander, “Protecting Peasants from Capitalism: The Subordination of Javanese Traders by the Colonial State,” 1991:370–94.)

COMPETING HISTORIES Historical narratives of competing interests, especially those that are publicly performed, make a privileged site for the elucidation of those interests, as in the next two articles. (An example from Fiji: Stephanie Lawson, “The Myth of Cultural Homogeneity and its Implications for Chiefly Power and Politics in Fiji,” 1990:795–821.)

Imperial Inca Cuzco and Spanish colonial Cuzco embodied competing but overlapping histories in ritual processions. **Sabine MacCormack** shows the subtle continuities and transformations of the Inca narrative and its theory of governance within the Spanish ones—which were themselves not unitary.

The creation of Turkey is the object of two competing commemorations: Republic Day on October 29—the official founding, in 1929, of the modern state—and the May 29 commemoration of the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, in 1453. **Alev Çinar** shows how the annual commemorations of the Ottoman conquest, not recognized by the secular Turkish state, mobilize partisans of Islamist sentiment. It is “the celebration of an alternative national history” and an alternative conception of Turkey itself. The war of representations is not politics by other means, it is politics itself.

EPITAPH FOR A LITERATURE We are used to speaking of literatures as being born, maturing, declining, dying. What do we signify with these metaphors? The last article is an ambitious attempt to capture what, for the Sanskrit literature of India, it can mean to speak of the death of a literature.

Sheldon Pollock undertakes to explain the end of two millennia of high art literature in Sanskrit. The position of Sanskrit intellectuals and the institutions which sustained them are the heart of the story. At length, new subjectivities, new knowledge, and new politics abandoned Sanskrit for their expression, “until only the dry sediment of religious hymnology remained.”