

# Editorial Foreword

*The Construction of Minorities.* These articles were initially prepared for a conference held in Paris and jointly sponsored by *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* (which publishes three other essays from that occasion in its current issue): and by *CSSH*. The conference, which marked the intellectual kinship of the two journals and the many years of collaboration between the Ecole des Hautes Etudes on Sciences Sociales and the Department of History of the University of Michigan, provided the chance to explore the comparative dimensions of a topic easily assumed to be peculiarly American. True, the term minority has particular resonance in the United States, where it is used as a kind of euphemism for racial inequality. But when the social category is considered more widely, it opens provocative questions about how and why a group acquires the specially constructed status of a minority. (In its first decade *CSSH* addressed this issue primarily in articles on enclaves of immigrants and the formation of immigrant associations, although there were a number of studies of specific religious and ethnic minorities. By the 1970s articles on minorities had become too numerous to be listed here. The emphasis, which then was on economic structures and religious differences, shifted in the 1980s to colonialism and the construction of identity.)

The three essays here suggest something of the range of this subject. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber considers the *magnati*, a noble minority in Renaissance Florence whose explicit status was meant to circumscribe their influence and limit their violence. Although her account of this effort to establish domestic order thus begins as a study of elites and state making (in *CSSH* compare Braddick, 38:1; Bestor, 38:3; MacHardy, 34:3; Baron, 2:4), Klapisch-Zuber carries it on through developments that led to an ironic change: The minority status once imposed as punitive discipline later became a status retrospectively claimed by choice. In contrast to this case of a privileged minority, Serge Gruzinski and Nathan Wachtel expose the subtle process, also full of ironies, whereby Spanish rule in the Americas reduced an overwhelming majority to minority status (see Mignolo, 34:2; Silverblatt, 30:1; Clendinnen, 22:3; Gibson, 2:2). Ancien régime ideas of corporate status favored the creation of separate Indian communities, and Indian culture was further marginalized as European interest in it gave way to sterile exoticism. Christian concern and Enlightenment ideas of equality raised additional barriers of incomprehension, while demographic disaster reduced the indigenous population to a numerical minority. Following the steps of their own logic, Gruzinski and Wachtel pose some provocative and more general questions about minorities as a category of social analysis. A quite different set of considerations emerges from Lucette Valensi's close investigation of religious affiliation in the Middle East (contrast Khodarkovsky, 38:2; Thomas, 34:2; Tessler, 20:3). She starts with a microhistorical investigation of why people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed religious associations, in effect laying claim to a different minority status. Her study then opens the way to a more general perspective as her research into individual cases reveals a society in which fissiparous religious enthusiasm, as well as convenience, and vibrant systems of exchange frustrated

the official urge to order society in fixed categories. How many minorities can there be before there are none?

*Ritual Power:* Each of these essays illustrates why ritual is so endlessly fascinating; and, although concerned with three different continents, all are about the politics of myth making, the social effects (and intellectual confusion) of multiple meanings, competing identities, and the ways in which claims to tradition serve accommodation to change (note Kratz, 35:1; Siu, 32:4; Crumrine, 12:4). Each also opposes some common interpretations. Stanley Brandes must grapple with the tendency to seek an ultimate historical source for social customs and, in the case of Mexico's famous Day of the Dead, the insistence that its origins must be pre-Columbian. Assessing the elements one by one, from funerary rites and food to carved images and the use of sugar, he argues that the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead is a creation of the colonial experience, formed as the pressure of pain melded indigenous elements with Spanish and Catholic ones to establish a rite that remains unique (compare Sutton, 37:1; Goody and Poppi, 36:1). Peter Arnade addresses the famous pomp of the peripatetic Burgundian court in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (note Gulbrandsen, 37:3; Peabody, 33:4; Kenny, 30:4), and he considers the intentions of the urban participants as well as the more familiar ones listed by royal chroniclers. Arnade thereby uncovers a process of negotiation in which burgers and courtiers used civic and religious ceremony to contest issues of legitimacy and identity. Maia Green writes about the movements to suppress witchcraft that have swept through southern Tanzania, rituals of purification that anthropologists have tended to interpret in terms of opposition to modernizing changes (see also White, 35:4; Dixon, 33:1; Freitag, 22:4). She shows that they are much more, a way of enforcing social norms against selfish behavior and a clever form of political opposition within a colonial regime. In the New World, Europe, and Africa, public rituals made explicit, local claims to ancestral mysteries. Enriched by the fusion of religion with social concerns, these rituals provided participants a kind of agency within the everyday conflicts of their societies.

*Occupational Identity:* Starting from the extensive literature on professionalization and bureaucracy (see Heper, 27:1; Markoff, 17:4), these articles seek to explain the behaviors of Czech doctors and Jewish clerks. In both instances they find cultural attitudes crucial. That leads Lily Hoffman to reject the theoretical distinction between the corporate and the clinical autonomy of professionals in explaining the rather dispiriting story of physicians in communist Czechoslovakia. Demoralized by society's rejection of values that constituted their cultural capital and restricted by the lack of resources, they were effectively controlled by the state even when they seemed to exercise professional autonomy within their own institutions (compare Verdery, 37:4; Joppke, 37:2; Lempert, 35:3; Mitchell, 34:4; Krause and Vanneman, 27:1). David DeVries probes the ways in which Jewish clerks in British Palestine absorbed and used Zionist ideologies of labor and of nation to describe themselves and thus to make claims of the larger society (see Ben-Eliezer, 37:2; Lockman, 35:3; Segre, 22:1). His exploration of the culture of the clerks becomes a remarkably revealing study of nationalism at work.