Editorial Foreword

Imperialism and Political Identity. Imperialism's importance in modern history necessarily affects the way we think. The term itself has acquired a heavy, emotional, and usually negative charge. More fundamentally, recognition of imperialism's diverse forms and effects required a flexible, expansive vocabulary, which has come to shape a broader discourse of almost universal applicability. Such achievements have their dangers; for in the realm of ideas, familiarity breeds acceptance. If most intrusions of alien power and most instances of exploitation across the globe for more than a century can be described as belonging to a single genus, there are few inherent limits as to what imperialism may reasonably seem to explain. In this issue two articles tackle the difficult task of considering effects that did not result from imperial rule. Each considers subject societies in which foreign force was not followed by the strengthened political identity and the energetic state making that recent experience and current theory make us expect. Although arguments *ex silentio* are often disparaged by talkative social scientists, they have the advantage of being fundamentally comparative; and these studies build to provocative general hypotheses about social structure and politics. Gary Miles compares the imperialism of ancient Rome with that of modern Europe (as did Strayer in 9:1 and Brunt in *CSSH*, 7:3). Although the ancient state and ancient empires have for centuries evoked comparative analysis and continue to do so (for example, Adam, 26:1; Manicas, 24:4; Runciman, 24:3), Miles's systematic explanation for the absence of nationalist revolts against Rome paradoxically becomes a reassessment of the structural weaknesses as well as the tactical strength of the Roman empire itself (for a comparison of the role of local elites in other empires, see Carvalho, 24:3; de Vere Allen, 12:2; Benda, 7:3). With similar sweep, Peter Ekeh addresses the historical development of African states, a topic of continuing interest and debate (Owusu, 31:2; Azarya and Chazan, 29:1; Ekeh himself, 17:1; Kottak, 14:3). His approach challenges a great deal of the anthropological and historical literature (compare Kenny, 30:4; Ewald, 30:2; Saltman, 29:3; Southall, 30:1; Strickland, 18:3), starting from the dangerous concept of tribalism, with its multiple meanings and inherent controversies. While forthrightly adding to those, Ekeh clears the way for another look at kinship and the state (treated in very different contexts by Silverblatt, 30:1, and Lindholm, 28:2). He then argues for the slave trade's destructive effect on state formation prior to colonial conquest and subsequently for the disruptive impact on political mobilization from colonial concepts of tribalism. For both authors, the state not there and the political identity not established lead to rethinking the empires that were.

The Cohesion of Political Groups. Even when powerful new currents flow into previously stagnant waters, local groups must build their own boats to

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take advantage of the chance for movement. These articles analyze how that happens. Minion Morrison probes a poignant case to show how blacks, emboldened by nation-wide political and social trends, briefly captured power in a southern American town only to be divided by their own social and tactical differences and then defeated by the established, white power structure. Attentive to theory, his case study of the enfeebling intersection of class differences and racial politics in the United States (compare Peal, 31:2; Morrison's earlier article, 29:2; Clawson, 27:4; and Kuyk, 25:4), exposes on its Lilliputian scale many of the problems associated with political mobilization in less developed societies across the world (see, for example, Diacon, 32:3; Diamond, 25:3; Gray, 5:4). Daniel Levine subtly explores the interior life of Catholic base communities in Colombia and Venezuela in order to understand what sometimes enables them not just to mobilize the poor but to create groups with a capacity for endurance and renewal. In doing so, he addresses questions central to the modern politics of Latin America and to the social analysis of religion (compare Foley, 32:3; Becker, 29:3; Kincaid, 29:3; Finkler, 25:2, an earlier article of Levine's, 20:4; Singelmann, 17:4). The similarities in studies so different are striking. Shared experiences, interpreted in terms of race or religion, can give voice to people usually repressed or ignored. Proximity to power can increase their vulnerability, however, and religious values may be more helpful than political spoils in holding them together. Established parties experienced at manipulating local supporters can be a hindrance, a weak state an asset.

The Politics of Cultural Continuity. In skillful hands, local studies can make artistic use of telling detail to evoke a whole culture, and Helen Siu's essay will be read with that kind of pleasure. In a single community closely observed over a long period, a scholar can see the intersection of things usually kept apart when considered at the level of theory or in large-scale research. This investigation of one town and region reveals tradition and change tightly interwoven through lineage, community, religion, economics, and politics— a process always especially absorbing in China (as in Harrell, 32:3; Mei-Hui Yang, 31:1; Shepard, 30:3; Mann, 26:4; Fewsmith, 25:4; Hamilton, 21:3; Skinner, 13:3; Levenson, 4:4). That process uses the pliability of ritual like a treasured family album which is differently understood in each generation (compare in 30:4 the articles by Sangren and by Korovkin and Lanoue). With this complex evidence, Siu is also able to reassess a number of important anthropological and sociological theories. Like Morrison in this issue, Stephanie Lawson peers into a specific, recent, political event. She shows how the claim to chiefly power in Fiji embodies a fabricated myth (and part of Fiji's special fascination for anthropologists lies in the fact that its myths are often anthropological, see Thomas, 32:1, and Rutz, 29:3) from which ethnic politics can be constructed. Taken together, the articles in this issue argue for structural significance in the dialectic between politics and culture.