

Editorial Foreword

Gendered Economies. Everyone now knows that the status of women is an important topic. The social consciousness of our era and the intellectual experience of recent scholarship have taught us that. Many will be surprised, however, by the wide range of significant issues addressed by these two articles. Both begin with the close observation of specific communities, build to comments on the larger (and very different) cultures to which these communities belong, and broaden to consider the Western and colonial conceptions on which scholarly understanding of these cultures rests. Both articles use comparison to sharpen their focus. Deborah Winslow compares women potters in India and Sri Lanka; Victoria Bernal compares women's place now and twelve years ago in a Muslim village of the Northern Sudan (on the economic role of women in other pre-industrial economies, see in CSSH Heald, 33:1; Thompson, 27:1; Roberts 26:2; Guyer, 22:3; Mintz, 13:3). Both explore the complex intersection of the material and the cultural and in doing so engage very current theoretical questions. Winslow finds that cultural differences between India and Sri Lanka remain telling (note Daniel, 35:3), even after she has compared the specific tasks women perform in making pots and taken into account women's changing status when their contribution to the family economy increases. Finding that general well-being and material conditions matter, too, Winslow addresses issues of theory and conceptions of caste (note Kumar, 4:3; Moore, 19:1) as a colonial construction but also a cultural agent. The interaction of cultural and material needs is central to Bernal's study as well, part of the very complexity of social change. Dramatic alterations in custom and subtle shifts in women's place occur, she shows (compare Hatem, 29:4), in a world in which Islamic fundamentalism is an agent of modernity and the isolation of women constitutes a division of labor that preserves social solidarity but may also foster further change. Bernal thus engages Orientalism, assumptions about fundamentalism and tradition, and issues of political and religious identity. The conceptual pots of social scientists have to be recast over and over again.

Old Social Ties and New States. Explanations of political change tend to be sharper, more numerous, and more interesting than explanations of political continuity. The two essays here, however, look at a particularly notable kind of continuity, the persistence of old elites (compare Lindholm, 28:2; Fisher, 25:4; Diamond, 25:3; de Carvalho, 24:3; Sahlins, 5:3) in political systems otherwise transformed. For Goran Hyden and Donald Williams that reopens the much-discussed issue of the weakness of the African state (see Southall, 30:1; Burke and Lubeck, 29:4; Owusu, 31:2; Azarya and Chazan, 29:1; Greenstone, 8:2; Shills, 2:3 and 2:4; Fallers, 2:1). They find the explanations

and models associated with political economy to be inadequate for explaining the politics of Nigeria (where wealth brought corruption but not political stability) but also Tanzania (which achieved political stability in a declining economy), and they propose community models instead. The rulers of these two very different new states sought in community the support and legitimacy that the state had been deprived of by colonial rule. And the kinds of community that proved most effective were not those welded by ideology or forged by coercion but rather those woven from the social ties of local elites. Jesus Cruz also questions an explanation associated with political economy, in this instance the view that political liberalism in early nineteenth-century Spain resulted from a rising middle class (see Shubert, 33:1, and Pi-Sunyer, 16:1). His detailed analysis finds instead that the social origins of the new elite were little different from those of its predecessors and that the liberals gained access to power through networks of personal loyalties. However crucial to the survival of new regimes, old social ties could nevertheless act as agents of political change in Spain or Tanzania or Nigeria.

Speaking in Symbols. Analyzing symbols is always paradoxical. By their very nature they invoke more associations than can be defined, transgress conceptual boundaries, signify at multiple levels, and are differently interpreted by different audiences. To study symbols, then, is to pick some intersecting paths through a forest in which none is clearly marked. Chang-tai Hung starts from a specific historical moment and a particular political conflict—attacks on the Guomindang by Chinese cartoonists. These satirical assaults had, he recognizes, important Western parallels; and the comparisons keep multiplying (including many discussed in CSSH, see Streicher, 8:1, Alba, 9:2; Coupe, 9:2 and 11:1; Marsot, 13:1; Appel, 13:4). Although they directly used Western models, Chinese artists also wanted to invoke a national Chinese style; wished to reach a mass public but also claim an aesthetic connected to high culture; and sought to do it with the bite of satire and the uncontrollable ambiguity of witty images. Jack Goody and Cesare Poppi start from a simple observation—there are more flowers in Italian cemeteries than in English or American ones—and proceed to a delightful exploration of cultures and spaces, theology and kinship, ghosts and economics. Attitudes toward death often reflect important social changes (see Ozouf, 17:3; Vovelle, 22:4; Kselman, 30:2), but as Goody and Poppi's conclusion demonstrates, the ultimate importance of symbolic practices lies less in what they can explain or the hidden causes they may seem to reveal than in the connections they weave.

CSSH Discussion. In his thoughtful essay on the problems for Marxist theory raised by current political movements, George Steinmetz contributes to a continuing discussion and suggests new directions for a system of ideas even its critics would find hard to do without.