Editorial Foreword

Ethnicity in Soviet Policy and Social Theory. Every now and then, despite all
the precautions, some issues debated within an academic discipline are also
on the evening news. Recent changes in the Soviet Union have led to public
assertion of ethinic loyalties that scholars always knew were there (see Rogger
in *CSSH*, 4:3; and Kelley in 26:4), and developments around the world have
renewed intellectual interest in the difficult question of how ethnic commu-
nities are constituted (Gourevitch, 21:2; Horowitz, 23:2). With racial theories
discredited and national identity increasingly considered a social construct,
social scientists have sought new ways to explain why communities persist in
behaving as if they know where their boundaries are and what it is that holds
them together. (Compare the different approaches of Wilkie, 19:1; Taussig,
26:1; Roberts, 27:3; Wallis, Bruce, and Taylor, 29:2; Borneman, 30:1.) Sovi-
et scholarship on ethnicity, Teodor Shanin suggests, could prove helpful. He
begins, as discussions of national sentiment so often do, with a question of
language but gives it a provocative reversal. The language in question is not a
national tongue invented or revived but the language of social science itself.
As used by Soviet scholars, he argues, concepts of *natsional'nost* and ethnos
may have no Western equivalent; but they are central to theories that evolved
from Marxist debates and Soviet policy, from the ethnic experience of social
change to the salience of ethnicity as a political problem in the USSR. Shanin
thus situates Soviet theory, its structure as well as its urgency, in experience.
The range of approaches supported by this Soviet framework is then set forth
by Julian Bromley and Viktor Kozlov, who are themselves important contrib-
utors to it. Social psychology, religion, economic relations, education, and
marriage patterns are all considered in these studies of ethnos, while territory,
class, and relations to the state are treated with notable flexibility. Their
emphasis is on ethnic consciousness and social process, and their optimism is
on ethnic consciousness and social process, and their optimism about assim-
ilation will evoke a familiar echo in American ears.

The Symbolic Economy of Provincial Capitals. As economic and cultural
centers, cities have a life of their own that research on a larger scale can easily
overlook (and not just in Europe, compare Lapidus, 15:1; Quadeer, 16:3;
Morse, 16:4). Lynn Lees and Paul Honenberg use a neatly controlled com-
parison of cities in Brabant, Castile, and Lombardy that avoids overemphasis
on a single industry or state. Urban economies, they show, moved at a
different rhythm from the surrounding countryside; and they provide a model
important for the history of the early modern period (note Goldstone, 30:1),
which stresses the multiple resources for recovery urban centers possessed.
These resources, especially the symbolic and political ones, lie at the heart of
Beverly Heckart's fascinating comparison of modern Avignon and Worms.

407

Physically little damaged by the war, Avignon was thought to need drastic, even destructive, rebuilding in order to become a modern economic center. In badly damaged Worms it seemed essential to rebuild old symbols of an earlier, happier era. Instead, over the next twenty years Avignon preserved the old, and Worms accepted the new. Deftly tracing the local reasons for these choices, Heckart reaches a striking conclusion: Seemingly opposite policies followed from identical motives. Each case was reshaped by a vision of its place in the new Europe. Buildings were built or restored, streets widened or preserved according to a common symbolic discourse about past and future. In the nineteenth century smaller cities faced a set of challenges different from those of protoindustrialization or the EEC, and William Cohen studies their responses in the monumental statuary of French towns (contrast Yearley, 15:1). Efforts to reconstruct the past, they were representations not so much of what the provincial city did as of what its citizens should believe—earnest evidence of the power of myth and of the continuous vitality of civic life.

Courts and Inheritance. Because laws of property and inheritance are so fundamental to social relations, and conflicts over them so revealing, scholars would like research to expose the lines of force as clearly as iron filings around a magnet. Alas, clarity in such complex matters is more likely to reflect the culture of the perceiver than the society under study (see Saltman, 29:3). What the records of English manor courts have to say about marriage and inheritance depends, as Lloyd Bonfield demonstrates, on what we take those courts to have been. Step by step, he lists the assumptions necessary to consider those courts analogous to modern ones and then proposes a different analogy and alternative understanding. Imperial readings of Islamic law (see Derrett, 4:1; Christelow, 24:1; Roff, 25:2; and Rosen, 20:1) on family and religious endowments rested on a comparable but immediately consequential misinterpretation. By comparing French and English practice, David Powers exposes the intertwining of orientalist ideology and selfish interest in the nineteenth century that codified a view which, more remarkably still, has lasted into the twentieth.

The Reasonable State. These essays focus on politics through the combined perspectives of intellectual and social history. Daniel Walker Howe finds parallels in social context between Scotland and America that explain not only the easy translation of Scotish enlightenment to the new world but a mutual preoccupation with socially conservative and politically daring reactions to the creation of a new union (compare Appleby, 20:2). State making and the enlightenment also fed the development of statistics (see Heper, 27:1); and Stuart Woolf notes how rapidly inquiries, which had once reflected the varied societies and needs from which they rose, came instead to resemble each other. Then, as in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, gathering national data began to alter the societies it sought to measure.