

Editorial Foreword

KINSHIP IN HISTORY CSSH has a long and continuing commitment to kinship as a topic of study—see, for example, such notable essays as Lawrence Stone’s “Marriage among the English nobility in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries”, 3:182–206 (1961), Jack Goody’s “Adoption in cross-cultural perspective,” 11:55–78 (1969), and James D. Faubion’s “Kinship is dead. Long live kinship,” 38:67–91 (1996). In this issue two essays show again to what good effect kinship can be put in the hands of able historians.

Jutta Sperling examines the peculiarly stringent, even suicidal kinship structure of the patriciate in early modern Venice: unstoppable escalation of dowrys within an enclosed, endogamous society resulted in financial burdens upon lineages that they meet by sending supernumerary daughters to nunneries against their wills and disinheriting younger sons (a configuration strangely like that of the Nambudiri brahmins of Kerala in southern India). The ineluctable result was population decline. The inability of the patriciate to perceive the nature of its own predicament was a blind spot formed by its paradoxical, smug self-representations: Venice as the miraculous polity that combines and harmonizes the opposites, at once egalitarian and hierarchical.

Mark Elliott’s premise is that study of widows—“free electrons, unbound elements in the social chemistry”—can be very revealing of the cultural politics that governs ethnic boundaries. In Qing-period China, Manchu military men were expected to maintain markers of their Manchu being and distinctness from the Han, while Manchu widows were treated quite differently, sometimes in terms of inherited Altaic patterns that appeared Confucian (widow suicide), at other times in terms of deliberate acculturation to Confucian values (widow chastity). Eventually, the mixture ends imperial policy, needing both Manchu ethnic particularism and Confucian universalism, split along gender lines.

IMAGINING NATIONS AND RACES Two essays consider how the racial imagination is deployed in the construction of nations. (Of related interest: Michael C. Lambert, “From citizenship to *Négritude*: ‘Making a difference’ in elite ideologies of colonized Francophone West Africa,” 35:239–262 [1993].)

J. Lorand Matory examines the construction of Yorùbáland, spiritual home of Black Atlantic nations in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and the United States, following Africanate religions, a construction in which the reification and production of Yoruba culture was accomplished as a result of a complex circulation of persons across the Atlantic in both directions. The essay maps those movements and identifies key participants in that formation.

Benigno Trigo holds that a Creole elite asserting its authority to rule an emerging Puerto Rican nation on the eve of the U.S. takeover in 1898 had to defend the integrity of the national self against racial and environmental-determinist arguments of Spanish governors. To do so, it displaced the sensed difference onto two

bodies, that of the black (male) and the white female peasant. It fed the fear of miscegenation with results that, the author argues, were truly fantastic, though expressed in the idiom of science: “the representation of the black body as a contaminating parasite which must be eliminated, and . . . the representation of the white peasant woman’s body as invaded by a cureable disease”—an intestinal worm, very real and visible under the microscope.

STRUGGLES OVER REPRESENTATION Contested representations have always been with us, but the issue seems to grow with the multiplication of the technical means to disseminate them. Two essays on current cases concern, respectively, the articulation of opposition in cyberspace and disputed meanings of land seizures by small farmers in Paraguay.

Mamoun Fandy guides us through a fascinating new aspect of global communication, that of what he calls cyberresistance. Here it is a question of the Saudi Arabian opposition groups—Shila, (Sunni) Islamicist, and liberal—that circumvent state censorship through the internet, operating mostly out of London. The texts produced are liable to have a dual aspect, English versions being couched in the language of universal human rights, Arabic versions of the same text being put in terms of Islamic law. “The struggle between governments and opposition is no longer merely local, and . . . even the local is tremendously mediated.” The ability of states to control cyberresistance appears to be limited.

Beverly Nagel gives us a history of the recent struggle over land occupations by poor farmers in Paraguay, where a large population of rural landless and a highly unequal distribution of land prevail. The Constitution of 1967, which states that a plot of land is a fundamental right of citizens, affords the insurgent campesinos a basis for nationalist rather than a class-based justification of their encroachments. Landowners and public officials had to undermine this appeal to patriotism and legal right, claiming that the settlers had occupied land that was not legally subject to such expropriation, were in fact land speculators who would sell their lots as soon as they could, and were the dupes of radical political parties or groups. The “ideological contest over the meaning of rural violence” in its relation to democracy and human rights continues. (See also Fernando Coronil and Julkie Skurski, “Dismembering and remembering the nation: the semantics of political violence in Venezuela,” 33:288–337 [1991].)

PEACE BUSINESS **Craig Charney** closely examines the contribution of business groups in South Africa to the peace process at two levels, the National Peace Accord and the local peace committees. The effectiveness of business intervention in the democratic transition, the author believes, has to do with certain rather special conditions: growing alienation of business from the current regime, and conviction that it could treat with the opposition; a “re-think” of its interests; willingness to abandon homeland elites and rural chiefs of the existing structure; and active efforts by the peace structures to gain the participation of business. Causes of the comparative failure of this phenomenon to emerge in the Philippines and Colombia are identified, and comments on the limitations of structuralist and rational choice perspectives to explain this order of facts are offered.