

CSSH NOTES

Samuel Clark. *State and Status: The Rise of the State and Aristocratic Power in Western Europe*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

In *State and Status*, Samuel Clark surveys the rise of the state and its relationship to aristocratic power in two zones in western Europe, the British Isles and France and its eastern periphery. The core of Clark's argument examines the ways in which ruling aristocracies were restructured by state formation, particularly the emergence of political centers. As monarchs became more important arbiters of the manifold flows of resources, the exercise of power, status awards, and cultural grammars, older and more dispersed forms of feudal lordship were unevenly transformed. Lordship eventually declined, but meanwhile the actions of centralizing monarchs could shore it up or retool it as aristocracies were rearticulated into emergent states. This was a two-way street, for the decline and restructuring of lordship also sped state formation (pp. 153–4). There were other factors at issue, and the book discusses some of them—for example, commercialization as tied up with statemaking—but the emergence of political centers has been neglected, Clark thinks, and deserves more emphasis.

The first part of the book goes on to explore a number of factors that influenced center-periphery relations. In this section, Clark elaborates E. W. Fox's distinction between water- and land-based polities. *State and Status* nicely reverses the usual “from-the-center-out” sociological perspective by highlighting the political fate of the peripheries fought over by land-based centers like Paris, Madrid or Vienna. This section is a valuable addition to the growing literature on contiguous empires.

Part Two, the bulk of the text, deals with what happened to aristocracies as monarchical centers established widening control over fields of noble power. Monarchs became a fount of new-minted but ostensibly traditional markers, a source of social nobility and privilege, and eventually a central target of people's hostility to revamped systems of noble status. Venal office-holding was one paradigmatic practice, and it was particularly extensive in France (pp. 164–7). Money became more closely linked to acquiring and performing aristocratic status, which was fused with central state power. Although English monarchs had less need to sell offices, Clark claims (partly because the center had alternative commercial revenue sources and partly because the English Revolution curbed monarchs' attempts to tinker with status for revenue's sake), English rulers acted more like the French with respect to their peripheries, notably Ireland and Wales (pp. 194–5). Readers will appreciate Clark's excellent, extensive discussion of status and power.

0010-4175/99/8101-9909 \$7.50 + .10 © 1999 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History

My hesitation about the argument stems from Clark's having folded all of this into yet another layer of abstraction: neo-functionalist evolutionism. For example, one of the book's overall conclusions is that there was greater differentiation among the four forms of aristocratic power in continental zones than on the British Isles (pp. 366–8). This is a nicely counter-intuitive statement, inverting the old chestnut of modernization thinking that most of the Continent was relatively backward in the eighteenth century. Yet it is still an open question whether “differentiation” as applied to one field is comparable to “differentiation” in another, so that merging them in a common metric and a grand generalization might make sense. Perhaps Clark will address this question in the planned second volume.

—————Julia Adams

Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

In this book, Sumathi Ramaswamy explores how the Tamil language became the focus of intense commitments in twentieth-century South India. Following recent calls among South Asian scholars to find alternatives to narratives derived from western experience, she rejects language nationalism as an appropriate conceptual tool for her study, both because the term implies a universal European standard by which language feeling is to be measured and because it is incapable of encompassing the full range of ideas and sentiments that became attached to Tamil. Instead she employs a concept grounded in the discourse of the politicians and writers she has studied: that of *tamilpparru* or devotion to Tamil.

Each of the main chapters in the book takes up several diverse manifestations of language devotion in Tamil society. Chapter two, the most conventionally organized around an historical narrative, explores the multiple projects that became associated with Tamil: the neo-Shaivite efforts to attribute to Tamil a divine quality; the Indianists' placement of Tamil in an Indian nation as composed of peoples who possess a unity in the very variety of languages that they speak; and Dravidianism, which rallied around Tamil in direct opposition to “North Indian imperialism” and Hindi. The author effectively relates the different characterizations of Tamil's qualities to specific power considerations in specific contexts. Chapter three discusses how Tamil was variously represented in female form—as goddess, as mother, and as maiden—and thus became linked to discourses of femininity that were acquiring a new power in the colonial context. Chapter four treats different movements and conflicts in South Indian politics that have focused on Tamil. Chapter five examines the lives of some of the main Tamil advocates as well as the representations of these lives by their followers.

Ramaswamy draws out a number of parallels between devotion to Tamil and the development of language feeling in other societies experiencing modernity, such as the equation of linguistic and racial identifications, the legitimizing of a language's status through insistence on its ancient character, and the use of metaphors rooted in categories of gender and home. But the stress in this book is on the particular forms of expression of devotion to language in Tamil India. The study's greatest strengths are its nuanced and rich treatments of the meanings of Tamil discourse, most remarkably in its discussion of the feminization of language. In the latter chapters, Ramaswamy ranges widely over time for examples of her themes, departing from any kind of chronological organization, and there are moments when the reader would like further historical contextualization of particular statements by Tamil devotees. But this structure helps avoid the implication of any even progression toward some single, final form of language devotion. Instead the stress here is on the heterogeneity, contradictory and conflicting forms in which Tamil has been imagined, and the ways all these forms have contributed to the construction of the modern Tamil subject. In the process, Ramaswamy sets forth a model of historical writing that rejects the imposition of a larger unitary narrative of any sort and that highlights both difference and diversity. For this reason, this study should be compelling to scholars working on colonialism and post-colonialism in South Asia and elsewhere in the world.

———Douglas E. Haynes

Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Berezin's study in historical sociology takes as its starting point an Italian present marked by a resurgence of fascism and by renewed contests for the symbolic space of the piazza. Confident that a new understanding of the "old" fascism can have contemporary social and political relevance, Berezin examines interwar efforts to construct "fascist identities" by fusing public and private selves. In a book that engages political philosophy and the anthropology of ritual, Berezin focuses our attention on public spectacle, "the favored expressive vehicle of the fascist identity project" (p. 5).

For Berezin, fascism is neither a historical "parenthesis" nor reducible to its violence; it is rather characterized by its stance toward liberalism—specifically, by its rejection of the split between the public and the private, "the core of liberal democracy" (p. 6). Berezin proposes that we can best understand and evaluate the regime's political project from the vantage point of what it rejected (p. 6), and she deploys deliberately the conceptual frameworks of nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberalism. She relies not only on liberalism's vocabulary ("citizenship," "community," "identity"), and particularly on its juridical categories of "private" and "public," but also on its anthropology: "for

purposes of this analysis I assume the existence of the self” (p. 20). For Berezin, as for turn-of-the-century liberals, public identities such as citizenship are, in the end, based on a conception of interest and rationality,” while private identities “originate in their purest form as biology or kinship relations” (p. 22).

In the interwar years, Berezin shows, the Italian regime deployed rituals (rallies, parades, commemoration ceremonies, holidays) in order to obliterate this difference. Fascism’s efforts to create new “communities of feeling” also worked to transpose elements of interwar Italian culture. The regime, argues Berezin, aspired to “rewrite” the rules of Italian culture; more often, it had to be content merely to “play with” them. And the available cultural schema proved both enabling and constraining: while fascism appropriated “family” and “religion,” these set limits to the “new” identities that could be articulated in public spectacle and elsewhere.

At the heart of Berezin’s book is a series of case studies that explore at a variety of levels both the ambitions and effects of public rituals under fascism. Her discussion of the annual “reenactments” of the 1922 March on Rome (Chapters 3 and 4) highlights the importance for fascism of the myth of the founding event, the identification of enemies, the appropriation of the commonplace, the merging of the sacred and the secular, and the body as cultural icon. As the years went by, she demonstrates, the anniversary of the March would encompass the entire range of ritual genres—commemoration, celebration, demonstration, symposia, and inauguration (p. 101). Chapter 5 explores, at the local level, the “colonization of time” effected by fascism and the ways ritual action “re-created or disrupted the texture of ordinary life” (p. 194) in the northern city of Verona. Finally, Chapter 6—perhaps the most methodologically innovative—draws on letters from “fascist heroes,” written on the battlefield and mailed to families and friends, to assess the varied ways in which individuals “internalized” a fascist identity. By reading the letters against obituary biographies, Berezin makes visible the tensions between private understandings of selves and their public representations.

In the end, Berezin finds, whatever new identities fascism managed to construct were fragile and transitory—weakly totalized selves were quickly unmade by the fall of the regime. Family and religious identities would by contrast persist—evidence, suggests the author, of their relative “noncontingency” (p. 243). Of course, Berezin’s liberal ontology has prepared us for this result by peopling Italy with private and public selves. If we were instead to imagine these as fragile cultural constructions, we would be differently positioned to evaluate the effects of fascist spectacle in relation to liberalism’s own efforts at nation building. Certainly by the end of the nineteenth century, and in domains as diverse as public health, social insurance, and criminal law, the juridical fictions of liberalism were already being rewritten, and new spaces opened up for the negotiation of identity and difference.

All of which is to say that the value of this provocative study may be tied not only to the comparisons it undertakes but also to those it stimulates.

———David Horn

Carolyn D. Smith and William Kornblum, eds., *The Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience*. Westport: Praeger.

Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California: Berkeley.

Fieldwork was once a mysterious business: Students were told that it involved “participant observation”: a mode of being apparently located somewhere north of “going native” but south of simply collecting survey data. Advice was informal and practical (keep duplicate notes, bring plenty of ziplock bags). However, the recent loss of confidence in the anthropological project and a concomitant concern with reflexivity has meant that fieldwork has also become increasingly “problematized” and self-conscious.

Both of the collections under review are a response to this quandary. The first (edited by Smith and Kornblum) offers examples for emulation. Some of these are classics, while others are written by contemporary authors. The majority are set in marginalized subcultures within the United States, though a few are located in more exotic climes. The book is divided into sections that show how the writer gained entry into a particular community, built relationships, and tried to maintain objectivity while collecting reliable data during the course of fieldwork. Plenty of practical hints are offered. For instance, William F. Whyte reminds us that trying to become just like one’s informants is often counter-productive, and recommends “friendly interest” as a far better—and more realistic—strategy.

But this is not a methodological handbook; the editors’ aim is to use personal accounts to give the reader a sense of the actual experience of doing ethnography. Though these accounts are sometimes full of qualms and doubts, the overall effect is encouraging: the message is that while fieldwork is indeed difficult and problematic, it is nonetheless feasible, interesting, and worthwhile. This is an encouraging volume to assign to undergraduates or others feelingrepidation about the scary act of actually going “in the field.”

Personal accounts also take center stage in the second collection of essays, but here the atmosphere is far more frightening. This is because the conditions which these essays address corrode the fundamental assumptions of ethnography: social stability, bounded and coherent communities, and the possibility of engaging in significant human relationships. How can one study another society when that society is being torn apart, how can one do research with people

who have undergone (or administered) unimaginable torture; how can the researcher cope with his or her own fear and loathing in such circumstances? In other words, the problem addressed here is not the most efficient way of interpreting the deeds and thoughts of the Other, but the existential problem of living in a moral universe that is being pulled asunder and rendered meaningless.

Perhaps motivated by a wish to do justice to disintegrative experience, the editors purposely avoid making “essentialist” statements or positing overarching theories about violence, preferring instead to search “for understanding and reflexivity” (p. 9). In practice, this means they have solicited a wide range of essays, with little coherence of mode or practice. For example, one recounts the spread of rumors in Mogadishu, another gives practical advice on safety in a war zone; another is a rawly personal account of being raped; another is an homage to a murdered ethnographer; another is an account of the types of seductive rhetoric characteristic of the victims and perpetrators of the terror in Argentina.

The most intellectually high-powered essay (one which has greatly influenced the editors) is by Allan Feldman, who sees all efforts by theorists to posit “closure” as an act of totalizing violence which contributes to the objectification of victims. Rather, the task of the fieldworker is to be a witness-emissary, to tell the stories of those destroyed, and ultimately to become physically transformed by the experience, offering a redemptive vision into the inchoate. This is a striking vision, one which gives the ethnographer great moral responsibility. Yet Feldman tends also to romanticize violence as the source of the desired protean anti-totalizing impulse.

A prophylactic to Feldman’s excesses is Roberto Falla’s down-to-earth account of his long-term fieldwork in the jungles of Guatemala. Fieldworkers are indeed witnesses, Falla says, but they also need a coherent theoretical apparatus to understand what has been witnessed. Nor is this enough. One also must be able to make judgments and choose sides. “We need a set of criteria that says there are some things that are simply unconscionable” (p. 266). Falla’s simple statements provide a sense of moral grounding to this sometimes muddled, often powerful, and always disturbing book.

————Charles Lindholm

Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. New York, Routledge.

In *Post-nationalist Ireland*, Richard Kearney provides a cross-disciplinary study which critically reassesses some of the central components of traditional Irish cultural nationalism and republicanism. He also proposes a new framework for a more complex vision of Irishness.

As part of his revisionist process, Kearney examines the work of modern Irish writers and poets, from James Joyce to Seamus Heaney, who have devi-

ated from the standard themes of the Celtic Revival. The author illustrates how the literary revivalists used myth to create a story of historical continuity but applauds the modern “utopians” who have invoked myth as a “subversion of fixed identities” and have employed it as a “catalyst of disruption and difference.”

Kearney also tries to generate greater appreciation for prominent intellectuals who, because they were not seen as “genuinely Irish,” have been neglected by cultural nationalists. The author argues, for example, that the genius of philosopher George Berkeley has not been duly recognized in the “national tradition,” partly because of his support for the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the low esteem with which he viewed his Catholic neighbors. Similarly, Kearney highlights the important contributions of scientists such as John Tyndall and Rowan Hamilton. He contends that the “curtain of silence” that has descended on Irish scientific history is largely due to the fact that many of the leading figures in the discipline were Protestants.

Kearney’s political vision is based on the assertion that absolute claims to sovereignty over Northern Ireland are irreconcilable and have inevitably produced thirty years of conflict. The author thus reformulates the inherited concepts of sovereignty, suggesting that a possible way forward is through the establishment of a Council of the Islands of Britain and Ireland, eventually evolving towards a federal British-Irish archipelago in a Europe of regions. Kearney suggests that this political framework could help germinate new cosmopolitan and regional models of self-definition which will be, “inclusive, rather than absolute, shared, rather than insular.”

A few years ago most analysts of Irish affairs would probably have regarded Kearney’s proposals with considerable skepticism. But recent profound changes, including the Northern Ireland peace process and the development of a dynamic economy in the Republic of Ireland, have made some of the author’s projections more conceivable. This is most obviously reflected in the overwhelming support for the recent Good Friday Agreement. This document, with its provisions for a North-South Ministerial Council, amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, and the creation of a British-Irish Council, seems to create the potential for the realization of elements of Kearney’s progressive models of sovereignty. For this alone, *Postnationalist Ireland* offers a challenging and provocative vision for the future of Ireland which deserves to be widely read and analyzed.

———Andrew J. Wilson