Editorial Foreword

Forming National Consciousness. If social science had shaped the modern world, nationalism would not be the troubling force it is today. Instead, its persistence and recrudescence has sustained and revived a scholarly literature that, even while hastening to catch up with events, has reached remarkable agreement. National consciousness, although experienced as a natural historical growth, is constructed by ideologies and institutions (compare Greenfeld in *CSSH*, 32:3). Its claim to constitute community can build upon differences of language, class, religion, and region by reinforcing some of them but obscuring others in a continuing process that absorbs contradictory identities and shifts cultural boundaries. This process, associated with others such as state making, social change, economic growth, and the exercise of political power which have proved to be equally universal, requires comparative analysis; but the comparison reveals the importance of local circumstance whereby similar fabrics are woven from the distinctive materials at hand. Uffe Østergård is thus on solid ground in emphasizing the uniqueness of Danish national identity and political culture. As it must for most of Europe, his account begins with the French Revolution and the national mobilization that followed. In Denmark, as in most countries, schools were assigned a central role; everywhere grammar, literature, and history were taught as a call to patriotism in classrooms adorned with national symbols and with maps meant to delineate the face of kinship (on schools, see LaVopa, 28:2; Day, 25:1; Maynes, 21:4). The purpose and achievement of Danish schools, Østergård argues, went beyond all that in several ways; for the Danes created a special kind of school, with its own style and content, one that claimed to embody folk culture and that spoke to a society of peasants. The familiar picture of national schooling reaching out from the center, overpowering the rustics with its sanitized version of a national and essentially middle class culture, is here reversed. Instead, an invented culture of the folk (note Linke on folklore and government in eighteenth-century Germany, 32:1) became the stereotype of national character used to explain everything from social style to the welfare state (discussed by Baldwin, 31:1, and Levine, 20:1). Donald Donham's study of revolution in Ethiopia is also about culture and peasant encounters with nationalism. He uses a concentric series of comparisons—of revolution, Marxism as an ideology of development, nationalism in Africa, the role of reforming elites (themes treated by, among others, Becker, 29:3; Garvin, 28:3; Singelmann, 17:4; Sklar, 29:4; Ashcraft, 26:4; Owusu, 31:2; Azarya

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500017400 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and Chazan, 29:1)—to delineate the particular process whereby Maale traditions of culture and kingship became the basis of radical resistance to the state. Avoiding explanations that rely on prefabricated taxonomies of modernization or journalistic discoveries of enduring tribalism, he shows how general processes were locally configured by the experience of missionaries, Italian invasion, Amhara dominance, and student radicals.

The Limits of Literacy. The large and impressive body of scholarship on the cultural importance of literacy and formal education, making one dependent upon the other and the two together markers that distinguish between kinds of civilization, is directly challenged in Niyi Akinnaso's systematic but wide-ranging essay (see Goody and Watt, 5:3; but also Niezen, 33:2; and Ewald, 30:2). His close analysis of Yoruba practices (see Dixon, 33:1) finds in their ritual training the characteristic qualities of formal education, sustaining without writing a special language, decontextualized learning, graduated levels of knowledge, and public examinations. Furthermore, using a striking array of comparisons that range from Homeric poetry, the Counter Reformation, a variety of oral traditions, and current debates about why schools fail, he argues that schooling can be better understood by looking at it in both literate and non-literate societies (note Eickelman, 20:4). The social basis of knowledge and the psychology of learning have deeper roots than the ability to read and write. That raises the question, of course, of why people acquire literacy. As Stephen Kowalewski and Jacqueline Saindon note in their study of the spread of literacy in Oaxaca, there are a number of leading explanations. All of them have to do with modernization, and there is no question that levels of literacy have tended to increase with urbanization, market economies and economic growth, and the development of the state. More refined explanations, however, have proved difficult despite (or maybe because of) the fact that the study of literacy's spread lends itself to close statistical analysis. Kowalewski and Saindon are able to test the role of improved transportation, the creation of schools, the use of indigenous languages other than Spanish, and urbanization. All prove to be relevant but not decisive and hardly causal. Although Kowalewski and Saindon find a market economy and job opportunities to be a clearer stimulus to literacy, they come to emphasize still more the importance of revolution and democratic politics, of culture and popular aspirations (on Mexican politics: Foley, 32:3; Becker, 29:3; Tardanico, 24:3; and Waterbury, 17:4). Markets, schools, and roads facilitated literacy where some kind of hope made the effort seem worthwhile.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500017400 Published online by Cambridge University Press