

Editorial Foreword

RELIGIONS AND NATIONS Three essays examine the vexed relations of religions and nations in the modern era, when the people becomes an electorate and the nation becomes foundational for the state. Religions, once so powerful in forming communities and underwriting the authority of states, have different, more troubled histories within nation-states. (See also, “The State and religion,” the subject of a pair of articles by Joseph R. Strayer and Rushton Coulborn in the very first issue of *CSSH*, 1:1 [1958], 38–57.)

David Gilmartin shows how analysis can benefit by examining closely the ballot process. The nation-state of Pakistan began to come into existence through the ballot box in British India. Muslim League electioneering attempted to form a bridge between the (perhaps never entirely reconcilable) ideas of a universal community of belief and the nation-state, creating in doing so an uneasy alliance of the Anglicized, secular leadership of the Muslim League party with pro-Pakistan leaders of religion. (Compare Nikki R. Keddie, “Religion and irreligion in early Iranian nationalism,” 4:3 (1962), 265–295.)

James Pasto finds a deep convergence between the treatment of Judaism and its history as “a system of contradictory combinations” (to use the phrase of Bryan Turner) by the liberal Protestant German theologians propounding the Higher Criticism of the Bible and political discussions of “the Jewish question” in the emergent German nation-state following Jewish emancipation in the nineteenth century. Following up on Edward Said’s claim that there is a similarity between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, the author proposes a number of alternative research strategies to probe the parallel, calling into question the hegemonies and the interests that, he believes, cloak the relations between these “secret sharers.”

Jacob Borut and **Oded Heilbronner** contribute to the ongoing discussion about German *Bürgertum* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by examining the rural bourgeoisies of two minorities, Catholic and Jewish, within the (mainly Protestant) German state. Here the nation is in the background, as a given, while class and the rural–urban dichotomy are to the fore, revealing striking departures from the scholarly consensus—a rural Catholic bourgeoisie that tended toward assimilation with the national norm and was somewhat independent of the church, and a Jewish rural bourgeoisie that followed the Catholic Center Party, was denounced by Protestants, but emulated Protestant bourgeois norms in their private lives. It appears that the rural bourgeoisie is not a simple extension of the city into the country and that the microanalysis of various bourgeoisies is going to reveal a number of different subspecies. (On minorities and their relations to the majority, see the articles in 20:3 (1978):

Bernard Wong, “A Comparative study of the assimilation of the Chinese in New York City and Lima, Peru,” 335–358; Mark A. Tessler, “The Identity of religious minorities in non-secular states: Jews in Tunisia and Morocco and Arabs in Israel,” 359–373; and Henry Rosenfeld, “The Class situation of the Arab national minority in Israel,” 374–407.)

EFFECTIVE FICTIONS Two essays explore the politics of symbols, involving fictions of different kinds: evident falsehoods in one case and anticipatory realities in another.

Lisa Wedeen considers the case of a regime (Syria) that demands people act as if they believe in a cult of their leader by participating in political rituals of public obeisance. The phoniness of these rituals is, however, both transparent and left deliberately unconcealed by the state. The logic of such symbolics is not to induce belief but to compel public displays of complicity in the fictions of state. This is a different kind of “theater state,” to use Geertz’s evocative phrase, for which the symbolics are but another side of the substance of politics. Powerful but unstable, the case suggests a type of political theater in which representation and function part company in the public self-enactments of the state.

James Smith addresses the extraordinary symbolic potency of the instruments of literacy and bureaucracy among anti-colonial Mau Mau insurgents, having low rates of literacy and operating from the forest. Rubber stamps, typewriters, written rules and passes, offices and ranks are the materials with which a counter-state was created, first as fiction, then as fact. (Also on literacy: Janet Ewald, “Speaking, writing, and authority: explorations in and from the kingdom of Taqali,” 30:2 (1988), 199–224, and R. W. Niezen, “Hot literacy in cold societies: a comparative study of the sacred value of writing,” 33:2 (1991), 225–254.

SITING CAPITALS **Alexander H. Joffe** proposes the concept of disembedded capitals—capital cities “founded *de novo* and designed to supplant existing patterns of authority and administration.” The germ of the idea comes from the archaeological discussion of Monte Alban in Mexico, where the idea was raised, then quashed, in debate. This essay shows that the “disembedded capital” is nevertheless a highly useful category across the Atlantic, in ancient Egypt (Akhnaton’s Akhetaten at El-Amarna), Mesopotamia (Sargon’s Agade among several examples), and Islamic Iraq (Baghdad and Samarra). Such capitals, founded in new sites with new elites, normalize or die in the long run. Though unstable, they are a recurring item in the repertoire of political choices.