

## **“The Germans are Hydrophobes”: Germany and the Germans in the Shaping of French Identity in the Age of the French Revolution’.<sup>1</sup>**

Historians of national identity in Europe have frequently distinguished between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ patterns of belonging. In the ‘western’ form, the nation is defined politically, that is as a matter of explicit or implicit political choice by its individual citizens whose continued existence together as a nation, as Ernest Renan famously declared in 1882, was a tacit ‘daily plebiscite’.<sup>2</sup> This makes one’s nationality, at least theoretically, a matter of political choice, defined by one’s determination to share the political and civil rights of citizenship with other citizens in the same state. It might take years or even a generation before some individuals or groups, such as foreigners and immigrant communities, are allowed to enjoy the full rights of citizenship, but their ethnicity, racial origins or religion are not an obstacle to that process. Indeed, in some cases, their new nationality is meant to transcend, if not efface altogether, such identities.

The ‘eastern’ form of national identity is one which glories in the shared ethnic roots and distinct culture of a people, who, it is claimed, enjoy a common descent from a particular ancestry, real or mythical. One remained ‘organically’ part of one’s nation, whatever one did and wherever one went. Ties of ‘blood’ and ‘culture’ are often evoked to justify or to explain this immutable sense of belonging. In this definition, foreigners

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in many, many places, most recently in T. Baycroft and M. Hewitson, ‘Introduction: what was a nation in nineteenth-century Europe?’ idem. (eds), *What is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914* (Oxford, 2006), p. 1.

who cannot claim to share the same ethnicity or ‘race’ can never be full citizens. Based on these two different conceptions of national identity, ‘nationalism’ can therefore take, respectively, two different forms: ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’.<sup>3</sup>

‘Nationalism’ itself can be defined variously.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, nationalism is here defined as a belief that the individual is part of a people called a ‘nation’ which is bound together in ways which transcend social and, sometimes, religious and ethnic differences. In nationalism, the nation is held to be an essential source of individual identity. The nation owes no loyalty to any institution beyond itself: it is the source of sovereignty and legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> Nationalism can therefore be the expression of a programme of national unity or liberation, or conversely, of territorial conquest and domination, based on a nebulous sense of entitlement or superiority. What ‘nationalists’ of all kinds have in common is that they assume that the nation exists objectively, but that some sort of activity is required to ensure that the nation is recognized and that its rights are fulfilled. This might mean dramatic actions such as an insurrection to expel foreign rulers, or conquering other peoples to ‘restore’ or ‘reunite’ territories claimed as integral to the nation. It might equally entail the development of a

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<sup>3</sup> H. A. Kohn, *Nationalism: its meaning and history* Revd ed (Princeton, NJ, 1965), pp. 19-37; J. Plamenatz, ‘Two Types of Nationalism’, E. Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism: the nature and evolution of an idea* (London, 1976), pp. 22-36; A. D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth, 1991), pp. 8-13.

<sup>4</sup> Historians of nationalism are divided between ‘modernists’ and ‘perennialists’. The former, like Elie Kedourie, John Breuilly, Eric Hobsbawm, argue that nationalism was a modern creation stemming from such conditions as the French Revolution, the emergence of the modern state and the impact of economic and social change: E. Kedourie, *Nationalism* revd ed. (London, 1960); J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, 1982); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge, 1992). The latter suggest that ideas which be equated with nationalism are discernible much earlier – in some cases some of the contractual or proto-contractual theories of government which emerged in some places in the Middle Ages or the early modern period. See, for example, J. A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982). Among the most recent critics of the modernist view is Tim Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 15-25. The most recent rebuttal of the ‘perennial’ position can be found in Baycroft and Hewitson, ‘Introduction: what was a nation in nineteenth-century Europe?’, pp. 1-13.

<sup>5</sup> L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 3.

programme of education or other cultural initiatives to awaken a dormant, provincial population to their true identity as part of a wider, national community. It follows that nationalism is based on a sense of national identity (even if, at the outset, it is shared only by a rarified bunch of intellectuals) and seeks to galvanize, instill, or even create that sense of identity amongst that wider population which is said to be the nation. Ironically, while nationalists generally claim that the nation has ‘always’ existed (even if awareness of that existence remained subterranean), in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most European nationalists were confronted by the awkward fact that most of the very people who belonged to the ‘nation’ were in fact entrenched in older loyalties – regional, dynastic, religious. It was for this reason that Massimo d’Azeglio famously declared just after Italian unification that ‘we have made Italy. Now we must make the Italians’.<sup>6</sup> It was one thing to create the political framework of a unified state, but quite another to mould the people with their older, divergent loyalties into citizens bound to the abstract idea of the Italian nation.

The French revolutionaries of the 1790s were faced with precisely the same task when they swept away – on paper at least - the corporate, municipal and provincial privileges which, prior to 1789, had defined one part of France from the other and one social group from the next. All French people were henceforth meant to be, firstly and foremost, citizens of the national community, defined by the enjoyment of the rights of man proclaimed repeatedly by the revolutionaries over the course of the decade.

Religion, culture or ‘race’ were not preconditions for French citizenship in any of the

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in D. Beales and E. F. Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London, 2002), p. 157.

constitutions of the 1790s, but, for a foreigner seeking naturalization, living on the nation's territory and taking the civic oath were.

The modern French Republic, therefore, with its emphasis on this revolutionary heritage, is usually held to be representative of 'civic' nationalism, while Germany is usually considered as a classic example of 'ethnic' nationalism, where once the *Volk* did not simply mean 'people', but carried strong connotations of blood and culture.<sup>7</sup> Yet recent work has suggested that the distinction between the 'civic' and the 'ethnic' is a false dichotomy and that all forms of European national identity and nationalism carry elements of both. Anne-Marie Thiesse emphasizes the common eighteenth-century origins of national identities in Europe. In a metaphor which will strike a chord with anyone who has been exposed to the dubious pleasures of 'do-it-yourself' furniture, she refers to the European variations on the same essential themes as 'the IKEA system', which, 'from the same basic categories, allows for differences in assembly'.<sup>8</sup> Anthony D. Smith distinguishes between ethnic and civic identities for the sake of analysis, but stresses that ethnic and civic elements are 'the profound dualism at the heart of every nationalism'.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, the editors and authors of a rich and dense volume of essays on the subject agree that 'the dichotomy between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism corresponds, at most, to an ideal type. In most cases, it fails to describe the diversity and contradictoriness ... of nationalism in modern Europe'.<sup>10</sup> Not all historians accept, however, that French republican nationalism was cut from the same cloth as other European nationalisms. David A. Bell, for example, argues strongly that what

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<sup>7</sup> R. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> A.-M. Thiesse, *La Création des Identités Nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Baycroft and Hewitson 'Introduction', *What is a Nation?*, p. 7.

distinguished the French type was not only the single-minded purpose with which since the Revolution representatives of the French state (mostly notably republican school teachers) pursued the goal of turning provincials into 'Frenchmen', but also the genuine universalism in French nationalism, which sought not only to build the nation, but also to expand it so that it embraced as much of humanity as possible.<sup>11</sup>

These differences of opinion raise important questions about the evolution of French national identity and nationalism. In the first place, as French power surged across Europe over the course of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, French soldiers and officials came across non-French peoples whom they struggled to understand or accommodate. If the rights of man were universal, it seemed that they were, in fact, buried beneath deep seams of cultural difference. Put another way, the universalist aspirations of the French Revolution were heavily blunted once they made contact with the 'other'. In the Holy Roman Empire, the variety of local customs and practices – and the obvious attachment to them which persisted amongst many Germans - bemused and frustrated the French as they sought to export revolutionary ideals and institutions. Cultural difference was a still more urgent issue in those areas like Belgium, Piedmont and the Rhineland, which were directly annexed by the Republic. When these regions officially became part of France, the challenge of turning their peoples into French citizens seriously tested the revolutionaries' universalist ideas, since they constantly struck against a wall of much older loyalties, social relations and customs. As Stuart Woolf has shown, the 'universalism' of French revolutionary notions of nationhood was predicated on the assumption of the superiority of French civilization, judged in terms of

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<sup>11</sup> D. A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), pp. 206-7.

manners (*moeurs*), politeness (*civilité*) and laws (*police* – which also means organisation, administration).<sup>12</sup> Mike Broers has further proposed that the French exercised a ‘cultural imperialism’ or indeed an ‘orientalism’ within Europe, predicated on this sense of having the blueprint for a state arranged along lines citizenship exercised within a rational, ordered and centralized state.<sup>13</sup>

The cultural process by which these French ideas of citizenship, nationhood and civilization developed did not start with the Revolution, but began, as David Bell has shown, at the beginning of the eighteenth century when, in opposition literature the ‘nation’ rather than the king started to be regarded as the source of legitimacy, particularly amongst the Jansenists.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in what Peter Sahlins terms the ‘citizenship revolution’, from the 1760s the monarchy itself sought to make clearer distinctions between nationals and foreigners, while writers began to explore concepts of the active citizen participating in the public sphere.<sup>15</sup> Liah Greenfeld argues that the development of French nationalism in the eighteenth century was spurred by a sense of *ressentiment* towards France’s great rival, Britain. This term did not only mean ‘resentment’, but also a more complex knot of envy for, reaction to and imitation of British mores and institutions, driven by a patriotic sense that France could and ought to do better.<sup>16</sup> David Bell, too, charts the evolution of French nationalism with reference to

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<sup>12</sup> S. J. Woolf, ‘French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire’ *Past and Present* No. 124 (1989), pp. 104-5.

<sup>13</sup> See, among his other recent publications, M. Broers, *The Napoleonic empire in Italy, 1796-1814 : cultural imperialism in a European context?* (Basingstoke, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> P. Sahlins, *Unnaturally French: Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After* (Ithaca, N.Y, 2004), pp. 215-224.

<sup>16</sup> Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, pp. 15-17.

French perceptions of the British, particularly during the Seven Years War and its aftermath.<sup>17</sup>

While recognizing the central importance of the Franco-British rivalry to the development of nationalisms and national identity on both sides of the Channel,<sup>18</sup> this present chapter suggests that French perceptions of Germany and the Germans also played an important role in shaping the French self-image. Additionally, in one important sense French relations with the Germans had a greater impact in molding French notions of citizenship and civilization because the French were never presented with a genuine opportunity of annexing any part of British Isles. Yet they did, of course, annex the Rhineland and, under Napoleon, a broad swathe of territory as far as the Hanseatic cities. Consequently, Germany in general offered an example of the ‘other’ against which French civilization was judged, while the Rhineland in particular became one of the testing grounds for the universal application of revolutionary citizenship.

### *Germany and the Germans as the ‘other’*

Germany, or rather the states of the Holy Roman Empire, provided a rich though very fragmented mirror in which progressive Frenchmen and women could find a reflection of France’s own virtues, vices and, ultimately, superiority. This process, of course, went back a very long way – at least to Froissart – and in, a more intense and consistent way

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<sup>17</sup> Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, pp. 78-106.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, M. Rapport, “‘Deux nations malheureusement rivales’: les Français en Grande-Bretagne, les Britanniques en France, et la construction des identités nationales pendant la Révolution française’ *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* No. 342 (octobre/décembre 2005), pp. 21-46.

from the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> One should also add that an important source of French images of Germans came not from across the Rhine, but from within the boundaries of the French kingdom – in Alsace, which first fell to the French in 1648. In the later 1790s, one of the Directory’s commissioners in Mainz warned the government that although Alsace had been united to France for a century, ‘the same prejudices and the same ills’ still afflicted the province, thanks to the over-indulgence shown by the conquerors.<sup>20</sup> From his perspective, the stubbornly persistent ‘Germanness’ of Alsace was still too evident and provided a salutary warning to the French about accommodating local customs in the Rhineland.<sup>21</sup>

One of the earliest eighteenth-century French observers to commit pen to paper on Germany proper was none other than Montesquieu, who travelled through southern and western Germany in 1729. This was not the Montesquieu of the *Lettres Persanes*, which used the device of sophisticated foreigners staring in satirical wonder at French customs and institutions. Instead, Montesquieu’s *Voyage en Allemagne* reflect the author’s own, private perceptions (since they were not published until the nineteenth century), but they certainly reflect wider French prejudices. Germans are phlegmatic, have no sense of irony and have an excessive penchant for wine and beer while avoiding water – for this reason, Montesquieu flatly states that the Germans ‘are hydrophobes’. A traveller passing through a village asking for water would provoke a gathering of the entire populace who would watch as the stranger drank and laugh uproariously. Having made

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<sup>19</sup> H. Marquis, ‘Aux origines de la Germanophobie: la vision de l’Allemand en France au XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles’, *Revue Historique*, vol. 286 (1991), pp. 283-294.

<sup>20</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris [hereafter, AN] F/1e/42 (Berger to the Directory, Mainz, n.d.).

<sup>21</sup> On the problems of integrating Alsace into France, see D. A. Bell, ‘Nation-Building and Cultural Particularism in Eighteenth-Century France: the Case of Alsace’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 21, no. 4 (1988), pp. 472-90.



this judgment on German dipsomania, however, Montesquieu then fell seriously ill ... from having imbibed the local water.<sup>22</sup> Montesquieu also relates – again, without any flourish – some odd Germanic customs. In Heidelberg, for instance, he visits the famously giant wine vat in the cellars of the castle. One may drink from it, but if one fails to observe certain rituals, including toasting the health of the Elector, or if one strikes the barrel, one would be soundly spanked on the backside.<sup>23</sup>

Montesquieu's political observations are more serious: Prussia (this, of course, decades before the accession of Frederick II) is intolerably frugal, boorish, despotic and militarist. The Duke of Württemberg is capricious and frivolous, while in Bavaria the local magistrates 'live like princes and are little tyrants'.<sup>24</sup> The fragmented nature of the German polity, even with the overarching structure of the Holy Roman Empire, elicited less-than-enthusiastic French commentary: the *Encyclopédie* wrote that 'one conceives that this form of government, establishing within the same empire an infinity of different frontiers, assumes the existence of different laws from one place to the next, money of different types and goods belonging to different masters'.<sup>25</sup> In *Candide*, Voltaire famously ridiculed the tinpot nature of the small German states, the obsession with noble pedigree and the unwieldy language.<sup>26</sup>

Decades before the Revolution, therefore, French commentators were remarking on the odd German political and social jumble. Yet there were also nuances. Progressive French publicists lionised Frederick the Great because of his enlightened reforms, his

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<sup>22</sup> Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Sécondat, *Voyage en Allemagne* in A. de Montesquieu (ed.), *Voyages de Montesquieu* 2 vols. (Bordeaux, 1894-6) vol. 2, pp. 131, 138, 153-6.

<sup>23</sup> Montesquieu, *Voyage en Allemagne*, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> Montesquieu, *Voyage en Allemagne*, pp. 157, 161, 190-1, 197-8, 202.

<sup>25</sup> 'Allemagne' in Diderot and D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (Paris, nd), vol. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Voltaire, *Candide ou l'Optimisme*, ch. 1, in Voltaire (ed. R. Peyrefitte), *Romans* (Paris, 1961), p. 143.

military prowess (visited, not least, against the French themselves during the Seven Years War), his famous preference for the French language over German and, perhaps above all, the consistently anti-Austrian orientation of his foreign policy. Respect for Frederick's legacy persisted into the 1790s. At the end of 1791, as the National Assembly debated the prospect of war against Austria, Frederick, now dead for five years, was described (not inaccurately) as a 'philosopher king' whose state was rich, just and stable.<sup>27</sup>

With the eruption of the Revolutionary Wars, the revolutionaries cast themselves in the role of liberators because of the strong sense that their principles of liberty and equality were universal. It was not long before France itself was identified with 'civilization' and, later its self-proclaimed mission would be applied not only to Europe, but to the wider world as the 'civilising mission', which became a central justification for French overseas imperialism.<sup>28</sup> In the 1790s, any people who did not match up to the exacting standards of the Revolution would fall beneath France and the French in the hierarchy of moral and political development.

This was well-expressed when the revolutionaries cast a glance over what, to their eyes, were the unacceptably arcane structures of the Holy Roman Empire. When making his case to the Directory for the annexation of the Rhineland in January 1796, the stridently republican Jean François Reubell grudgingly admitted that the French would still have to treat with the German princes. The sort of overarching structure provided by the Empire had its uses in that it provided unity and protection to Europe's soft centre,

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<sup>27</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986), p. 110; See also the French ambassador to Berlin, General Custine's letter of 1 April 1792 to Dumouriez in AN, AF/III/76, dossier 313.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf, 'French Civilization and Ethnicity', pp. 104-5.

‘however vicious [the Empire] is in its political principles, in the bizarreness and incoherence of its elements’. But, Reubell continues:

If the war which we have waged had yielded more generous successes, we could have disdainfully refused to have treated with the Princes and have thought only of Nations, those great families of the human species. But since circumstances have not allowed us to purify our system to that stage, let us still do something for the *Princes*, until such time as the slow workings of reason, more terrible than Victories, hurls them from their trembling thrones and calls the subjects, whom they keep curbed beneath a shameful yoke, to participate in the rights which we have conquered and so leaving around us only people driven by the same principles and who are, consequently, friends.<sup>29</sup>

The rhetorical implications of Reubell’s analysis are striking: the princes and Germany’s imperial structures may have been an international necessity, but the language left Reubell’s fellow Directors in little doubt that France was still to regard these Germanic survivals as offensive to the whole idea of an international order based on national rather than dynastic sovereignty. On the other hand, *once* the Germans had understood their rights and claimed them, there was no doubt that friendship between the two peoples would logically follow. That time, however, seemed long distant. Meanwhile, the implication is, there could be no true friendship between peoples who could not greet each other as equals – and in this context, ‘equality’ meant adopting republican forms of

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<sup>29</sup> AN AF/III/59, dossier 230, doc. 10 (‘Plan de Pacification générale et en particulier de la Pacification de l’Allemagne’, Pluviôse an IV).

government and citizenship. French perceptions of the differing levels of enlightenment imposed limits on the cosmopolitanism implicit in the principles of the Revolution – and ‘cosmopolitanism’ meant the spread of *liberté à la française*, not a pluralist vision of different expressions of nationhood. The French could work towards the ‘regeneration’ of the peoples of the soon-to-be-annexed Rhineland, who were meant to be turned into fully-fledged citizens of the Republic, but the high tide of civilization would clearly stop on the left bank of the Rhine.

This was some contrast from the very early days of the war in 1792, when French revolutionaries looked for, and found, evidence that while the old regime authorities might have been benighted, the population was not. Religion – or rather the levels of religiosity displayed – played an important role in French assessments of the levels of German enlightenment. In May 1792 the secretary of the French legation to Prussia, Louis Marc Rivalz, wrote to the then foreign minister Dumouriez, at the end of his outward journey across Germany to Berlin. He was damning about Catholic attitudes, but not those of the Protestants. ‘I can assure you that the Spanish, whose morals and opinions I have studied with some care, have resisted the influence of the Roman clergy more than the Germans have.’ He argued, none the less, that among the Protestants he met, there was more enthusiasm for the French Revolution. Among them, Rivalz reported that when he handed out a tricolour ribbon, it was immediately cut up into small pieces so that everyone could have a piece of the French red-white-blue.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the scowling of the Reubells of the Revolution, even as the initial optimism of being greeted as liberators rapidly evaporated, the nuances in French perceptions of the Germans proved to be surprisingly persistent. French superiority in

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<sup>30</sup> AN AF/III/76 (Rivalz to Dumouriez, 12 May 1792).

civilization was never doubted – at least, not by revolutionary and Napoleonic officials – but observations about the Germans were not entirely negative and in some cases they were quite the opposite. Even on the eve of their crushing defeat of the Prussians at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806, the French regarded the military ethos of the Prussian state with a mixture of derision and admiration. A sense emerges from the French diplomatic correspondence from Berlin that the Prussian army was not as good as the French, but was better than the Russians and the Austrians. Moreover, it was argued, the good thing about the Prussians was that they loathed the Austrians and the Prussian army would march to war against them with a spring in their step. To satisfy their sense of honour, however, the Prussians would fight the French because they, of course, were the most worthy of adversaries.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, while French diplomats remarked on the state of the Prussian army and spoke with a certain awe of Frederick the Great's military legacy,<sup>32</sup> they revealed no sense that France, too, was a militarized state – by the later 1790s perhaps *the* most militarized state in Europe. If one may speculate, this apparent blindness may have stemmed from a deep sense that French national values and identity were always rooted in the civil and political rights of citizenship – even, in theory if not fact, under Napoleon.

As a conglomerate of different lands, the Grand Duchy of Berg, created by Napoleon on the right bank of the Rhine in 1806 out of the Duchies of Cleves and Berg, ceded respectively by Prussia and Bavaria,<sup>33</sup> offers a picture of the nuances in microcosm. On the formerly Prussian territories, a report of March 1806 informed Napoleon, some

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<sup>31</sup> AN, AF/IV/1690, dossier 1 ('Notte sur la Prusse', 1797 or possibly 1804); dossier 3 (General Duroc to Napoleon, 21 Fructidor Year 13).

<sup>32</sup> AN, AF/IV/1690, dossier 1 ('Notte sur la Prusse').

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Grab offers a useful introduction to the Napoleonic regime in the Grand Duchy in *Napoleon and the Transformation of Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 97-9.

institutions were good enough to be kept, some could be transplanted from one part of the Grand Duchy to another, while others had to be swept away altogether. Among the useful institutions which were even worth emulating elsewhere were the fire insurance company, which was cheap enough to be accessible to almost anyone, and the regime in the prisons, which ensured the humane treatment of the inmates, while also imposing on them useful tasks which instilled the work ethic amongst criminals.<sup>34</sup> Yet there was less to be said for the formerly Bavarian areas of the new state. In the same month, Marshal Murat, who was the first Grand Duke, thundered to Napoleon of the administration that ‘it is a chaos which is giving me a great deal of trouble to disentangle. There has never been an organisation less regular than that which exists here. .... There was a royal regency council, a ducal regency council, a privy council, a commission ... no one has fixed responsibilities ... I cannot find anyone who is completely familiar with any single branch of the civil service’.<sup>35</sup>

The differences across the Grand Duchy were still apparent in 1809, which was a very difficult year for the French in Germany. A report on the public mood in March declared that morale was generally good in the formerly Prussian areas, where the government had been enlightened. The County of ‘Lamarck’<sup>36</sup> was a small province which had ‘profited from all the good laws of Frederick II’. Yet even here, there were problems, for a Gordian knot of administrative and fiscal offices had been deliberately maintained to prevent the Prussian state from raising taxation. Needless to say, the local population now had cause to regret to arrival of ‘a government which is too close and too

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<sup>34</sup> AN AF/IV/1225, dossier 1806, doc. 2 (‘Tableau de l’administration civile et judiciaire des Duchés de Cleves et de Berg dans le Régime prussien’, March 1806), pp. 24, 37-9.

<sup>35</sup> AN AF/IV/1225, dossier 1806, doc. 6 (Murat to Napoleon, 31 March 1806).

<sup>36</sup> In German known as ‘Mark’.

clairvoyant'. The former bishopric Münster,<sup>37</sup> meanwhile, was a 'patrie des Candides', where the population was divided between a twelfth-century nobility and a mass of peasants who are 'enserfed and brutalised'. Like the German gentry ridiculed by Voltaire, these nobles were obsessed with their status, particularly their honours and titles, *but*, the report continues, 'the regeneration of the country has begun with the decrees which suppress serfdom and feudal inheritance ... it has changed slaves into men. The brutishness of these slaves is such that they do not feel its benefits yet, but measures are being taken to hasten their education. Now *there* is a mass of people who have been rescued.' This comment was, of course, a little optimistic, not least because all peasants had to pay compensation to their lords for the abolition of seigneurialism. Since the costs were prohibitive for many peasants, the system remained unaltered in many parts of the Grand Duchy. The report concludes with a remark on state-building *à la française*:

... but it will surely require time and effort to create a *patrie* from these people gathered up from ten or twelve different jurisdictions and amongst whom, unlike on the other bank of the Rhine, there has occurred no revolution, which is a terrible, but very rapid, method of education for a people.<sup>38</sup>

The overwhelming sense of all this is that the Germans would require an enormous dedication of time and effort before they could be cultivated to the levels of civilisation represented by the French Revolution. France had earned the right to lead the process precisely because it had had a revolution. It was regenerated.

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<sup>37</sup> Those regions not given to the new Kingdom of Westphalia were sliced off and annexed to the Grand Duchy of Berg. My thanks to Peter Wilson for this information.

<sup>38</sup> AN AF/IV/1225, dossier 1809. doc. 10 ('Bulletin du Grand Duché de Berg: 1er semaine de mars 1809').

*Germans into Frenchmen: the Rhineland*

If the Germans were so different from the French, how could they be shaped into citizens, as they had to do when, from 1798, the French began to process of annexing the Rhineland?<sup>39</sup> In the 1790s, the obvious answer for the revolutionaries was an ideological one: the question was answered by the universalist implications of the rights of man. From the French perspective, the full enjoyment of these rights could only occur within a French republican framework, but sincere loyalty to that Republic and active engagement in citizenship were – in revolutionary theory - the essential determinants of nationality. Initially, when annexation seemed very likely to go ahead, the French commissioners in the conquered territories of the Rhineland in the spring of 1798 spoke of their gratification over the apparent enthusiasm with which the Rhenish peoples petitioned for annexation.<sup>40</sup> Some officials even claimed that the Rhineland, like France, had had its own revolution, even if it was nipped in the bud by the Prussian resurgence in 1793-4. In a carefully-scripted festival held in March 1798, an official was to declare that ‘the people of these territories had courageously thrown off the yoke of its tyrants, who coalesced in order to retake that sovereignty which had just been reconquered’. All of this suggested that the Rhinelanders did, indeed, have the political *will* to the part of the French Republic and that they, unlike much of the rest of Germany, had awoken to their

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<sup>39</sup> Among the best works on the French occupation and annexation of the Rhineland are T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland 1792-1802* (Oxford, 1983) and M. Rowe, *From Reich to State: the Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> AN, F/1e/40, dossier 2 (Rudler to the Minister of Justice, 24 Germinal VI; 16 Floréal VI).



rights. None the less, it was made amply clear that the ultimate thanks were owed to France, ‘the great nation [which] through its power ended that cruel struggle’.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, this festival was held in Mainz, which could claim, at least, to have had a hard core of revolutionaries during the first French occupation of 1792-3 and who, while they may have been a minority, at least represented a cross-section of urban society.

Yet French optimism in 1798 proved to be very shortlived, for it soon became obvious that there were more hindrances than assistance to the integration of the Rhineland into the Republic. Speaking in republican terms, it seemed clear to the Directory’s commissioner in the Rhineland, François Rudler, that the Rhenish were not yet ready for the plenitude of French political liberties. In March 1798, Rudler and his friend the justice minister, Lambrechts, had an interesting exchange of letters regarding the introduction of the French constitution of the Year III (1795) into the four Rhenish departments. The commissioner was clearly grappling with his conscience:

Should the Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and the Citizen, founded on a morality which ought to be universal and which ought to bind the great human family together in all times and in all places, and which cannot be tampered with when one is a French citizen, should it suffer modifications, or exceptions?<sup>42</sup>

For Rudler, articles 17 and 20 of the Declaration struck him as especially problematic for the Rhineland. The first of these declared that ‘Sovereignty resides essentially in the

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<sup>41</sup> AN, F/1e/41, document 34 (‘Programme pour la Fête de la Souveraineté du Peuple’).

<sup>42</sup> AN F/1e/41, document 31 (Rudler to Lambrechts, 11 Ventôse VI).

universality of citizens', while the second proclaimed that 'each citizen has the equal right to participate, directly or indirectly, in the formation of the law, in the nomination of the representatives of the people and of public officials'.<sup>43</sup> Rudler, in other words, was not yet ready to recognize his Rhenish *administrés* as part of the sovereign French nation. Yet if the rights of man were immutable and universal, then how could one deny the Rhinelanders their political liberties when, by the very fact of annexation, the Republic was claiming them as citizens? Lambrechts' reply twelve days later is revealing. There should, he said, be no modification to the Declaration:

The truths which are proclaimed there are eternal truths, independent of circumstance and place. The rights and duties of man are the same at Constantinople as they are at Paris. But if those rights are imprescriptible, the course of events can indefinitely suspend their application. They have often sold by corruption, they have often been forgotten by ignorance and fanaticism. Sometimes, finally, the laws of war, which make one people dependent on another, deprive it momentarily of the exercise of its sovereignty. The inhabitants of the left bank of the Rhine are in this last category. But the Republic is great enough to allow these people to know the full extent of their rights, as it is strong enough to maintain the practical measures which circumstances impose and which are necessary for its own conservation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> J. M. Roberts and J. Hardman (eds), *French Revolution Documents*, vol. 2, 1792-5 (Oxford, 1973), p. 341.

<sup>44</sup> AN F/1e/41, pc. 31 (Rudler to Lambrechts, 11 Ventôse VI; reply of Lambrechts, 23 Ventôse VI).

The practical application of Lambrechts' reply is perhaps not surprising in that, as one might expect, the occupiers were reluctant to open up any legal channels through which concerted opposition might be expressed. Yet it is also clear that Lambrechts and Rudler were unwilling to admit even to each other, in closed correspondence, that the rights of man did not necessarily apply to the Rhineland. Significantly, Rudler was from Alsace and Lambrechts was from Belgium: both men, in other words, were from the geographical and cultural peripheries of the French Republic. Both probably understood more than most that the revolutionary state not only had to undertake the *administrative* integration of the periphery through the imposition of uniform structures, but that it also had to encourage the cultural absorption of the peoples of the periphery. The doctrine of the rights of man, by transcending language, customs and other sources of ethnic identity, had the potential to integrate diverse peoples into one polity – once it was no longer deemed risky to give the peoples of the periphery the freedom to express themselves. Yet in the 1790s, that moment seemed long distant. The correspondence of the representatives of the French power on the ground is replete with remarks about the nostalgia for the old regime, the persistence of religiosity and – tellingly – language as a barrier to the forging of the Rhenish peoples into French citizens.<sup>45</sup> Although it was never explicitly whispered, there was an implicit recognition that, for all the cosmopolitanism implicit in the revolutionary ideal of citizenship, the universality of the rights of man was buried beneath weighty layers of cultural difference and the persistence of older social relations. In practice, the Rhinelanders would not be granted full

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<sup>45</sup> Among others, Casimir Rostan complained in early 1799 of the 'silent intrigues of the priests', who 'warn against our principles, and adroitly throw disfavour onto republican institutions: AN F/1e/42 (Mémoire sur la situation des esprits dans les 4 nouveau départemens de la rive gauche du Rhin, par Casimir Rostan, 13 Pluviôse an VII).

constitutional government until the Consulate of Napoleon Bonaparte, by which time the idea of active citizenship was all but an empty concept. To Napoleon, there was no need to shape the Rhenish into politically engaged citizens, since the role of all French subjects – a term which officially supplanted the word ‘citizen’ in 1806 – was primarily to obey, not participate in politics.

Yet the revolutionaries persisted in the belief that the Rhenish could be forged into citizens. One suspects that the French ultimately hoped to *assimilate* – that is, following Mike Broers and the theorist Nathan Wachtel,<sup>46</sup> to obliterate the indigenous culture and impose the imperial one in its place. In pondering how to do so, some republicans came up with some radical solutions which dwelt on the issues of language and cultural identity. In February 1799 the naturalist and antiquarian Casimir Rostan, who had been sent by the interior minister, François de Neufchâteau, to gather information about the left bank of the Rhine, suggested the colonization of the Rhineland by French people from the interior, so that there would be cultural mixing in which, gradually, the Rhenish people would lose their original identity and melt into the mass of French people.<sup>47</sup> A ‘Citizen’ Berger, who was in Mainz in the late 1790s, declared that there could be no indulgence of local languages among the republic’s officials:

If the French language is to be the nursing mother of its pupils, must propagate its work and make itself understood wherever a man decorated with the tricolour ribbon applies and executes the law. You want to open a temple of reason, but

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<sup>46</sup> Broers, *Napoleonic Empire in Italy*, pp. 23-5; idem, ‘Napoleon, Charlemagne, and Lotharingia: Acculturation and the Boundaries of Napoleonic Europe’ *Historical Journal*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2001), pp. 135-154.

<sup>47</sup> AN, F/1e/42 (‘Mémoire sur la situation des esprits dans les quatre nouveau départemens de la rive gauche du Rhin, par Casimir Rostan, 13 pluviôse an VII’).

only Frenchmen should carry the flame there... The Frenchman is rebutted once he pronounces one word, since it is true that the administrators sustain that antipathy amongst his family, at the shopkeeper's and rebounds visibly against the French. Encourage the propagation of the French language: you can do it, you want to do it, and the interest of the republic demands it.

Echoing Rostan's idea of colonies, Berger suggested that republicans be encouraged to settle in all corners of the Republic. Encouraging French people to settle in Mainz and according administrative and judicial posts to Frenchmen would nourish the spread of the French language in the region. Without that, future generations of Mainzers would simply inherit the prejudices of the old regime.<sup>48</sup> None of these proposals were taken seriously at the time, but it shows that, for all the emphasis on citizenship as the determinant of nationality, in reality some of the revolutionaries believed that cultural uniformity was necessary. Under pressure the revolutionary proponents of 'civic' nationalism could adopt tenets more usually associated with the 'ethnic' kind.

Yet the reality on the ground proved to be very different – the Rhineland was never fully *assimilated* into the French imperium, but was rather *integrated* into it – that is, again following Broers and Wachtel, French institutions were imposed, but then the local population adapted them, which allowed for older mentalities, loyalties and cultural and social ties to remain intact, or at the very most mutated. The Rhineland was strategically too important and local society too vigorous for the French to risk alienating those whose co-operation or quiescence was needed. Lambrechts told Rudler at the start of his mission that he was not to strike indiscriminately at all customs, for fear of

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<sup>48</sup> AN F/1e/42 (Berger to the Directory, Mainz, n.d.).

alienating the population.<sup>49</sup> The republican festivals held in 1797 were bilingual.<sup>50</sup>

While initially Rudler hoped that he could use only fully-paid-up Rhenish republicans to administer the French conquests, later officials, especially under Napoleon, recognized the importance of local knowledge and a grasp of the local dialect more than ideological conformity, as well as the importance of having the respect and trust of the population, even if this meant recruiting officials and jurists who had served the Old Regime.<sup>51</sup>

This meant, in effect, that the French used intermediaries: local people who could to some extent mediate between the demands of the revolutionary or Napoleonic state and the local population. In some cases – as in Cologne and Dormagen – these intermediaries mounted a robust and, for a time, successful defence of local institutions against the leveling impulses of the French. This was a situation which the government in Paris found hard to swallow:

... it is evident that the unity which is so necessary in the administrative order and in any well-established political system, demands the reform of the government of Cologne. ... It would be contradictory to establish our republican regime in all the other parts of that region, while only the city of Cologne keeps a form of Government entirely opposed to our own.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> AN, F/1e/40, dossier 3 ('Instructions addresses par le Ministre de la Justice au Commissaire du Gouvernement dans les Pays Conquis d'entre Meuse, Rhin et Moselle', 4 Frimaire Year VI).

<sup>50</sup> AN, F/1e/41, document 34 ('Programme pour la Fête de la Souveraineté du Peuple'). For an interesting article on the dissemination of French republican culture through songs and images in the early 1790s, see R. Reichardt, 'Une citoyenneté franco-allemande sous la Révolution? Concepts et images comparées', R. Monnier (ed.), *Citoyens et citoyenneté sous la Révolution française* (Paris, 2006), pp. 53-76.

<sup>51</sup> AN, F/1e/43 ('Tableau des quatre nouveaux Départemens', 21 Vendémiaire Year IX).

<sup>52</sup> AN AF/III/59, dossier 230, doc. 8 ('Rapport au Directoire Exécutif, par le Ministre des Relations Extérieures, 3 Pluviôse IV).

In fact, as Michael Rowe has shown, Rhenish officials, including those of Cologne, were not counter-revolutionaries, but, under pressure from both sides, were trying hard to steer a middle course between the French and their exiled German rulers.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the ‘French period’, the Rhinelanders proved to be not the passive subjects of the Napoleonic state, but rather they took what they wanted from the French – not least the Napoleonic Code – while working to mitigate the impact of other aspects of French rule.<sup>54</sup>

For the French revolutionaries, it was clear that while the Germans were, by and large, a frustratingly complex people whose loyalties remained rooted in the past, there was still some good raw material with which officials could work as they reordered central Europe. If one admitted that, then it also meant that one could potentially go a step further and suggest that Germany had never been as benighted as some French policy makers suggested. Germany therefore could be used – in a positive sense - as a means of chastising French action in Europe. In 1810, Germaine de Staël did just that when she tried to publish one of her greatest works, *De l’Allemagne*, which had a clear polemical objective in attacking Napoleon’s policies. Before 1806, she writes:

Germany was an aristocratic federation; this empire had no common centre of enlightenment and public spirit; it did not form a compact nation, and the binding was missing from the bundle. This division of Germany, though fatal to its political strength was none the less very favourable to efforts of all kinds which

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<sup>53</sup> M. Rowe, ‘Between Empire and Home Town: Napoleonic Rule on the Rhine, 1799-1814’ *Historical Journal* vol. 43, no. 3 (1999), p. 659; idem, ‘Divided Loyalties: Sovereignty, Politics and Public Service in the Rhineland under French occupation, 1792-1801’, *European Review of History* vol. 5, no. 2 (1998), pp. 154-5 and idem., *From Reich to State*, pp. 68-9, 74-5.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Rowe, *From Reich to State*, pp. 259-60.

might have tempted genius and imagination. There was a kind of gentle and peaceable anarchy, in terms of literary and metaphysical opinions, which allowed each man to develop completely his own individual way of seeing things.

Staël is far from gushing over Germany and the character of its peoples. Rather, she highlights the contradictions and the tensions within German culture. For example, the Germans can be fiercely individualist in their philosophy, but docilely obedient to their government, while feudalism persisted in the midst of enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> Staël had personal reasons to express nostalgia the Holy Roman Empire: from Switzerland, she was well aware that a confederation of states provided an alternative to the heavily centralized model which, for French nationalists, was the apogee of rational administration.<sup>56</sup> In addition to her innate ability to get under Napoleon's skin, Staël also ran into trouble with the censors because she tried to present Germany in a more positive light, rather than through the critical lens of Napoleonic conceptions of civilization. Savary, the Minister of Police, chased Germaine into exile, explaining in a letter dated 3 October 1810 that her work on Germany showed that 'the air of this country does not suit you, and we are not yet reduced to the point where we need to find models amongst the peoples whom you admire'.<sup>57</sup> With de Staël, Germany was entering into the rhetoric of opposition to Napoleonic rule: there were alternative forms of civilization to that imposed by the French Revolution.

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<sup>55</sup> G. de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* in *Oeuvres complètes* 2 vols (Paris, 1871), vol. 2, pp. 5, 9.

<sup>56</sup> I am grateful to Clarissa Campbell Orr for these insights. For the activities of some of Staël's circle in Geneva, see her article, 'A republican answers back: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Albertine Necker de Saussure, and forcing little girls to be free', idem (ed.), *Wollstonecraft's Daughters: Womanhood in England and France 1780-1920* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 61-78.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, p. 1.



The final unraveling of Napoleonic Europe left French imperialists with some explaining to do: if the standards of civilization achieved by the French Revolution were so superior, then why then did it collapse so spectacularly between 1813 and 1814? After 1815, diehard French republicans and Bonapartist conspirators might have grumbled that the Revolution still offered the best model for the workings of the rights of man, and, more prosaically, for a rational administration, but it was uncomfortably clear that they had been defeated militarily by a coalition of states stubbornly opposed to the French Revolution. Amongst these awkward facts was that the two great German powers were central to the defeat of Napoleon and, even more awkwardly, in the process the Germans had shown that they could be motivated and stirred by patriotism, a patriotism which wholeheartedly rejected French civilization. Historians like Matthew Levinger have shown that such patriotism was rarely devoted to the wider cultural and political concept of ‘Germany’, but was more often focused on loyalty to one of the individual German states and its dynasty – *Staatspatriotismus* – or even more fundamentally, a particular *region* within a state – *Landespatriotismus*.<sup>58</sup> These loyalties were powerful forces operating *within* the framework of the Old Regime. From the contemporary point of view, therefore, the war in Germany showed that the capability of a state to mobilize its people in a national cause was neither a monopoly of the French and nor always going to rally behind the French Revolutionary version of liberty. The hard realities of defeat showed the French that there were still alternative paths of development. Even if these did not have to be followed, they still had to be treated with some respect. Nineteenth-century French nationalists might still cast France in the role of liberator and educator –

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<sup>58</sup> M. Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: the Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848* (Oxford, 2000); Rowe, *From Reich to State*, p. 72.

as they did in 1830 and 1848 – but the collapse of the French imperium in Germany marks the start of a process by which French nationalism *began* to recast its role in Europe. No longer seeking to regenerate and integrate other Europeans in the French image, France would now lead a Europe of *nationalities*. This would prove, of course, to be a myth, but it was one which, in exile on Saint Helena, the Ogre of Europe himself had begun to cultivate.

In the years before the Revolution and in the initial flourish after 1789, the French idea of the nation was certainly shaped in relation to the wider world, particularly with the often painful exercise of making comparisons between the French and the British. The Germans, too, played a role as the ‘other’ in defining French national identity. Yet the main thrust in shaping the concept of the nation was political and internal, in the sense that in 1789 the sovereign nation was defined against the absolute monarchy and the privileged orders. This still made, as David Bell has shown, an active proselytizing necessary among the French people to awaken them to their new rights and sovereignty as part of the ‘nation’.<sup>59</sup> French revolutionary nationalism therefore involved a programme of political and cultural activity, aimed at forging a nation-state out of the various peoples of the French Republic. The nationalism of the French Revolution was defined by these efforts at nation-building. In trying to shape the population into citizens, whether within France or in the annexed territories, the revolutionaries came up against the harsh realities of other cultural and political identities: religious, linguistic, regional and dynastic. In the Rhineland some republicans responded with solutions which made revolutionary nationalism sound very close to the ‘ethnic’ or ‘eastern’ type. Indeed,

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<sup>59</sup> Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, pp. 159-168.

Rostan and Berger's concerns for culture and language were echoes of the earlier, short-lived attempt to impose linguistic uniformity on France itself in 1794. Those efforts collapsed along with the Terror and while French administrators in the Rhineland under both the Republic and the Empire saw education in its various forms as an essential tool in shaping the locals into good citizens, they also recognized that German would remain the language of the majority of the Rhenish people for a very long time. This was why festivals were held in two languages and bilingual officials, such as Rudler, were preferred by the government. In France itself, *patois* were tacitly allowed to survive even under the Third Republic, provided they did not appear to threaten national unity.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, the use of intermediaries in the relationship between the government and the local population helped to ensure – as the revolutionaries themselves were well aware – the survival of older loyalties and identities. Much of the reluctance to enforce a programme of cultural uniformity was certainly a practical response to the logistical difficulties in imposing it. Yet some of the revolutionaries, like Rudler and Lambrechts, appeared to take the universalist, 'civic' language of the French Revolution seriously. Pragmatism and idealism combined to ensure that the Revolution's 'civic' nationalism survived even the challenges of cultural difference. It ensured that even people who were regarded culturally as 'others' could be forged into citizens of the Republic, even if it would take time for them to attain the levels of civilization represented by the French Revolution. The cultural assimilation or integration, which the revolutionaries undoubtedly saw as desirable, would take time, but meanwhile the essential facts of French belonging – the rights (and duties) of citizenship and the benefits of the legal and

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<sup>60</sup> Rowe, *From Reich to State*, pp. 120-1; Bell, *Cult of the Nation*, p. 177.

administrative systems of the Republic – would still define people like the Rhinelanders as citizens.

Yet that same universalism (the term used at the time was *cosmopolitisme*) ensured that French nationalism was also expansive: if political rights - and not culture - were the prime determinants of nationhood, then there were, potentially, no limits to the expansion of revolutionary France. This sense of purpose, based as it was on a sense of superiority, was later called the *mission civilisatrice*, or civilizing mission, which justified French overseas imperialism in the nineteenth century. Yet there was one important rupture between, on the one hand, French nationalism as an imperial ideology in Europe and, on the other, as visited upon the overseas empire of the nineteenth century. As the French imperium in Germany shows, in Europe it was hoped that French laws and administration would eventually be as applicable among the conquered peoples as they were in France, but this universalist premise was not extended to the indigenous populations of the overseas empire. While there were programmes for ‘assimilation’ and, after 1900, ‘association’ (which accepted limits on complete assimilation and a slower pace of *francisation*, or ‘Frenchification’), in practice local peoples were legally ‘subjects’ and, as such, they did not bear anywhere near the same rights as citizens.<sup>61</sup> This suggests that, in the nineteenth century, a racial dimension to French identity did emerge. Yet in metropolitan France, nationalists continued to insist on the civic heritage bequeathed by the Revolution.<sup>62</sup> This republican inheritance remained – and remains still - a weighty

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, J. Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa 1900-1945* (London, 1971), p. 83; M. Crowder, *Senegal: A Study of French Assimilation Policy* revd edn (London, 1967); R. Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke, 1996) p. 110. I thank my friend and colleague Phia Steyn for her advice and references on the colonial dimension.

<sup>62</sup> T. Baycroft, ‘France: Ethnicity and the Revolutionary Tradition’, in Baycroft and Hewitson, *What is a Nation?*, pp. 40-1.

‘site of memory’, which has ensured that in the post-colonial era it is the civic form of nationalism which informs mainstream French identity. While this tradition has sometimes struggled to deal with the multicultural challenges of other identities (most notably in the recent *hijab* affair), it has also proved to be robust in the face of the bleaker forms of nationalism posed by the extreme right, which would define Frenchness in ethnic or racial terms.

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