

*The Nation, Nationalism, and After:
The Case of France*

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I. FROM REVOLUTION TO LIBERATION

My purpose in these lectures is not to discuss once again the enormous subject of the modern nation, its aspiration to have a state of its own in order to be independent, or its creation by a preexisting state. Nor do I want to describe the many varieties of nationalism. But at a time when nations multiply and when nationalism seems to be the most widespread and troublesome of the ideologies that survive after the fall of communism —thus guaranteeing that there will be no “end of history” —it may not be without interest to examine one particular case, unique as it may seem; for the tribulations of France may carry lessons for contemporary cases as well. Also, at a time when the sovereign nation state is still the chief actor in world politics, but sovereignty is eroding and other actors both provoke and benefit from that erosion, the case of France today is again instructive. (One of the many paradoxes of that case is that in a country where historical writings are a growth industry, and where nationalism has counted for so much, there is no overall history of French nationalism.)¹

Let me begin with a few simple definitions. A nation is a group of people who, for what may be a multitude of reasons (a common ethnic origin, a common language, a common and distinctive past, etc.), feel linked by a bond that transcends kinship and geographical proximity, and see themselves as belonging to a single community. It is a bond across space, as well as through time; it brings together people and groups that are not in physical contact and links the present generations to those of the past.

As for nationalism, it is an ideology that, like other ideologies, is, first, a reaction to a problem: what is the secular community to

¹The best short and partial history remains Raoul Girardet's essay in *Le nationalisme français 1871–1914* (Paris: A. Colin, 1966).

which individuals and groups should owe their highest allegiance and from which they should receive their social identity? Second, it is an answer and an explanation: the nation is the community in which we do more than merely live and work; we are actually constituted as social beings by our membership in it. Third, it offers a program: our duty is, at a minimum, to ensure and protect the cohesion, uniqueness, and independence of our nation and to promote its interests; at a maximum, it is to assure its superiority over all others or to carry out its mission. National consciousness is a sense of solidarity and originality. Patriotism is a sentiment of love and loyalty for one's nation; nationalism is both a sentiment and an ideology. It uses patriotism as the foundation of its program, giving it specific directions. Again like other ideologies, it appears with the weakening or the demise of the religious and monarchic conception of the polity —when the emphasis shifts from the Church and the king to the people, or to individual rights, when the press and the books, the brochures and the academic competitions, “public opinion” and the intellectuals, challenge the established order in all its spiritual, social, and political dimensions.

My purpose in these lectures is to examine how, in the French case, nationalism conceived the nation and its mission, at home and abroad; how, in particular, it reacted to and dealt with the contradictions that appeared both in these conceptions and between its program and the real world; what, if anything, is left of it today, and what problems a nation so deeply marked both by the strength and by the torments of nationalistic ideology faces in the present international system.

For nationalism to succeed and to become a significant or even the dominant ideology, the answer it provides has to make sense. Whatever the strength of other loyalties, religious and secular, a sense of belonging to a single and distinctive nation has to exist — this is why a nation begins by being an “imagined” community,²

² See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

and why it is always necessary to distinguish between the “imagined” nation, which may be little more than an aspiration, and the “completed” nation, achieved through the enforcement of a nationalist policy. The reason disparate groups begin to feel connected by national kinship varies; it can be a sense of being oppressed by a foreign conqueror; it can be shaped, as in England: by a sharp and contentious relationship with outsiders: wars against France, a Protestant country confronting Catholic foes. In the case of France, it was spurred by an increasingly widespread opposition to the absolute but inefficient monarchy at the end of the eighteenth century. The word “nation” ceased to have its purely descriptive and vague earlier meanings,⁴ and took on its revolutionary one, when both the defenders of privileges who feared a reformist “enlightened despotism” and promoted the *thèse nobiliaire* (which insisted on the privileged orders’ ancient right to be consulted and to consent) and the enemies of privilege and feudalism who saw the monarchy as the apex and linchpin of the feudal order used the concept of the nation as a ram against the Old Regime’s political system. History was already both used as a weapon and turned into a stake. Supporters of the *thèse nobiliaire* and radical critics of the Old Regime both sought to strengthen their arguments with readings of the past: the former remembered, or invented, the assemblies of Frankish nobles; the latter saw the Franks as the conquerors and oppressors of the Gauls and wanted to recover the latter’s “rights.”

Nationalism, reduced to the skeletal ideal-type I have presented above, is almost devoid of substance. When the nation conceives itself —which means, in effect, when its leaders and elites conceive it —primarily in opposition to distant foreigners, as in

³ See Linda Colley’s admirable book, *Britons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁴ On those meanings, see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Pierre Nora, “Nation,” in Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), pp. 801–12.

Britain, nationalism can coexist with and complement the ideology or ideologies that have shaped the domestic institutions. (In the American case, it was this ideology —liberalism —that provoked a nationalist rebellion against Britain, accused of violating the colonies' rights.) But when the nation conceives itself in a struggle over political legitimacy against either an established regime (France) or foreign rule (Germany, Italy), then it needs to add flesh and blood to the skeleton; it must give itself a far richer substance, to try to recruit and inspire believers and militants by making explicit its views of what the nation is based on and how it should be governed. This was what happened in France at the end of the eighteenth century.

The nationalism of the revolutionaries of 1789 was turned inward. It attacked the Old Regime on three grounds: for its principle of legitimacy —the divine rule of kings, the sovereignty of the monarch; for its failure to establish a fair society and an efficient administrative and economic organization —considerations of justice and efficiency were always blended by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment; and for its failure to spread what might be called the culture of Enlightenment widely enough in a still largely illiterate society. In other words, even though nobles joined in the assault, and bourgeois had little enthusiasm for the poor, the nationalism of the revolutionaries was inherently democratic and had a project that covered *both* the state and society; but everything turned around the nature of the *state*, its philosophical basis and its political structure. The “nation” felt it was left out by the pre-existing state, and its first mission was the conquest of the state. Once conquered, the new state could destroy the institutions of the Old Regime and build a “national” France. From the start, French nationalism glued together what Tzvetan Todorov calls the cultural nation,⁵ made of common memories and customs, and the civic nation, based on common citizenship. It presented itself

⁵ In *Nous et les autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

as the claim of the cultural nation to the conquest and exercise of citizenship, in order to be able to turn an imagined community into a real one — with new customs, new institutions, and a set of richer memories all the French could be proud of.

When the revolutionaries sought to provide their inward-turned nationalism with the substance they needed, they found two very different models. One was the liberal formula of inalienable individual rights, limited and representative government for the protection of those rights, and divided powers as a guarantee of freedom. It certainly had the potential of destroying the social order of feudalism and of building a new state founded on the consent of citizens. But a second model seemed to provide the same results on a different basis: that of the *Social Contract*. If the key word of the liberal formula is “balance” —between rights retained by individuals and the powers delegated to the state, among the branches of the government —the key word of Rousseau’s quasi-mystical formula is “unity”: the unity of the general will, the fusion between the individuals who form this will and the state that expresses and enforces it. Here there are no individual rights protected from the state (since *we* are the state) : it is up to the state —our general will —to define the content and limits of our rights; and because the sovereign will is *une et indivisible* there can only be a hierarchy of, but not a balance among, the organs of the state; representation is ideally to be avoided since representatives might substitute their (partial) will for the general one. Where liberalism tries to define a common will out of the clashes of and bargains among individual and group interests, Rousseau based his general will on the sense of a common interest he believed inherent —consciously or not —in all members of a civic community. He postulated a hierarchy in each of them, between the (superior) will to the common good and their (inferior) individual or group interests, and he demanded the repression of the latter in the public sphere. Insofar as the ideal community had to live in a predatory world of states, its best for-

eign policy would be to have none, so as to avoid both the greedy designs of others and the domestic corruption that would result from entanglements abroad.⁶ At home and abroad, this was the model of the closed community.

When the Revolution began, its champions tried, for a while, to blend the liberal and the Rousseauistic conceptions. Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès's *Ou'est-ce que le Tiers Etat*, and even more the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, are the best examples of this attempt. The central concept was the Nation; it was a revolutionary notion precisely because its use was aimed at instituting both liberty and equality. The nation was defined by Sieyès as "a body of associates living under a common law and represented by the same legislature"⁷ —a definition acceptable to a liberal *and* to a disciple of Rousseau willing to make adaptations for a country the size of France, where the people could not meet in a single place. Soon, however, contradictions appeared, and choices had to be made.

Let us begin with what the revolutionaries considered their main task: the reconstruction of the domestic political and social order. It must be noted that it was perfectly possible, at first, for the Constituents to combine the idea of a sovereign nation made of all French citizens with a fine distinction between nation and people that allowed them to restrict the suffrage, not merely to males, but to "active" male citizens, those who had a certain amount of wealth (only the Jacobins remained faithful to the democratic content of the *Social Contract*, to Rousseau's notion of popular sovereignty). Thus they could borrow a leaf from the liberal book where it served their interests, and they also tried to devise a representative system with divided powers. But there was a tension between the idea of the king as the servant of the law (i.e., subordinated to the legislature) and the idea of the king as

⁶ See Stanley Hoffmann and David Fidler, *Rousseau and International Relations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁷ *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1982), p. 69.

the nation's delegate with independent powers alongside the powers delegated by it to the legislature. The king's refusal to act as the former sealed his fate. There was a tension between the liberal formula of sacred individual rights and Rousseau's ideal community. It was the latter that prevailed. Sieyès himself presented the image of a sovereign nation whose powers could not be subordinated to any Constitution: "the national will needs only its reality to be always legal, it is the origin of all legality." It was the nation, not the individual, that had inalienable rights: "it can neither alienate nor ban the right to will . . . it cannot lose the right to change its will when its interest dictates it."⁸

Why the Revolution, as it evolved, made of the nation a mirror image of the old monarchy, with the absolute and indivisible sovereignty of the king transferred to the nation, is perhaps the most fascinating question in the history of modern France. Was it simply the imprint of centuries of monarchic rule justified by *légistes* and preachers? The imprint of another illiberal and authoritarian institution, the Church? Was it — as for Sieyès in 1789 — the fear that a set of liberal institutions, with all their checks and balances, might actually impede the huge task of overhauling all existing barriers to unity, allow the supporters of feudalism to entrench themselves in part of the legislature or to barricade themselves in their unbreachable rights? Was it because of the unwillingness of the court, of many of the nobles, of much of the Church, to accept the rules of the game that liberalism presupposes? In every one of these hypotheses, the stake is the same: the capacity of the revolutionary state to carry out its program of reshaping French social and political institutions. The nation, or rather its spokesmen, condemned the monarchy for having failed to carry out its own program of national unification and homogenization, because of the fundamental handicap constituted by the remnants of feudalism: all Richelieu and Louis XIV could do was build a centralized administrative structure above a maze

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

of social, local, and linguistic particularisms, in a society where many “public” functions (*offices*) were in private hands because of the financial needs of the Crown. The revolutionaries thus wanted an appropriate politico-philosophical basis, a new principle of legitimacy that would allow them to complete unimpeded what the monarchy had barely begun. National sovereignty was the chief weapon. The Rousseauistic insistence on *volonté une*, the relegation of pluralism to the private sphere, the distrust for groups and factions, the refusal to see as legitimate anything except the nation and the “social” part of the individual (i.e., the part that is included in the general will) — all could serve as weapons against resistances and particularisms.

But here a second contradiction appears, or rather a clash with reality. The nationalism of the revolutionaries was aimed at unifying France, at removing all the obstacles to unity. But the obstacles to unity were inside France, and the history of the Revolution involved a supreme paradox that many nationalisms have experienced: exclusion in order to unite. This can be seen on two fronts. The main one was that of the “enemies of the Revolution.” Sieyès described the privileged order as being *outside* the nation: “if one removed the privileged order, the nation wouldn’t be something less, but something more,”⁹ for the Third Estate *is* the nation, albeit “hampered and oppressed.” When delegates of the Third Estate, following Sieyès rather than Mirabeau, called themselves the National Assembly (rather than the Assembly of the People’s delegates), they prefigured what was going to follow: exclusions and self-exclusions that led to a lasting split in French society and thought, between those who accepted the new dogma of the nation and those who did not and gradually rallied around the counterrevolutionary doctrines of Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. The long rift between an anti-Catholic Republican Revolution and Catholics faithful to Rome and to the king had thus begun.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

It wasn't only the problem of the enemies. Sieyès had given a voluntaristic definition of the nation; but it left open the question of who were the "associates": all those who lived under French rule and were not enemies of the new dogma of the nation? Two problems in particular arose. One was that of the Jews. They were already the targets of a traditional Catholic anti-semitism, for instance in the statements of the Abbé Grégoire (who supported political and civic rights for Jews), and of a left-wing antisemitism that attacked them as capitalist corrupters (Marat).¹⁰ Here inclusion prevailed, although with the assumption, expressed by Grégoire, that this would lead to complete cultural assimilation of the Jews, to gradual discarding of their language and their ancestral superstitions: once again, a dream from the "old order" —that of the Catholic Church —was being taken over by the nation (it was not by accident that the granting of these rights was especially controversial in the case of the Jews of Alsace, who were less "assimilated" than those of the Southwest). The other problem was that of the Blacks in France's colonies — or rather that of the abolition of slavery and that of the rights of people with mixed blood. The Constitution of 1791 did not extend to the colonies. The debates revealed a mass of arguments for the status quo: a relativism based on climate and a "radical cultural determinism,"¹¹ which took a particularly rabid form in Honoré de Mirabeau's case. Ultimately, the mulattoes were granted political rights, but the main reason was that they would thereby help the French settlers preserve order against the slaves. Slavery was abolished in February 1794, but mainly in order to prevent a revolt that, according to the *rapporteur*, was being fostered by counterrevolutionaries and foreign agents. Thus, in these two cases, an inclusive definition prevailed, but in conditions and with arguments that showed that the extension of citizenship rights to

¹⁰ See Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Les citoyennetés en révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1992), pp. 239–71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

all who lived under French rule was far from automatic. Since in the revolutionaries' conception citizenship and nationality were indissociable, the question Who is a citizen? immediately became Who is entitled to be called French? Would the varying legal answers given by the Revolution's Constitutions and laws be accepted by all as conclusive and valid?

The program of the Revolution was the forging of national unity at home. What would its policy be abroad? Was Rousseau's isolationism at all practicable? Here the revolutionaries faced two dilemmas. The first was war or peace. The very enormity of the domestic task, a priori, made peace eminently desirable. Indeed, the Constituents proclaimed that the Revolution wanted to be at peace with the world. It was the impossibility of achieving domestic unity without battle and exclusion that actually fueled the debate between "warmongers" and Robespierre. The former called for war because they deemed their domestic enemies encouraged and inspired by "Old Regimes" and enemies of France abroad: they wanted, so to speak, to invade those sanctuaries and to go to the source. Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Girondin leader who proclaimed that the Revolution needed "great acts of treason,"¹² probably saw in war a means of forcing the king to reveal his true colors; war was also, clearly, a diversion from domestic conflicts, a way of unifying the French behind patriotic duty, as a complement to and substitute for domestic ideological unification around the new principles of government and society. What the idea of the nation could not achieve at home by itself, it could try to achieve by battle abroad. Robespierre replied that only the court and its ministers had an interest in war and that the home front was all that mattered; war would only reduce the vigilance of the people at home. France's "salvation" resided in "public spirit": "if this sacred flame . . . exists in the soul of the French, war is unnecessary; if it doesn't exist, war is a scourge."¹³ Even when

¹² See Frank Attar, *La Révolution française déclare la guerre à l'Europe* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1992), p. 131.

¹³ *Textes choisis*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ed. Sociales, 1956), p. 154.

he came to power and had to wage the war the Girondins had started, Robespierre never lost his sense of priority. But the die had been cast; it was a debate that other nationalists and other revolutionaries were often going to repeat.

A second question now arose: war for what? Nationalism, once again, showed its lack of substance when left to itself. Would France at war export revolution and set out to destroy old regimes, to bring about the rule of liberty and equality, all over Europe? This meant, literally, fostering nations —in the modern sense — abroad, and treating foreigners as brothers, if they shared the same ideals as the French nation. Many of the great actors of the Revolution supported both a missionary conception of nationalism and the granting of French nationality to foreign champions of its principles. But another tempting course was a far more traditional one: the nation as (once more) the persistent and, one hoped, successful continuation of the Old Regime, pursuing a policy of “natural borders” (i.e., self-interested expansion). Danton, characteristically, moved from messianism to annexation.¹⁴ Robespierre’s hostility to the former remained based on principle —liberty can’t be brought by force, nations can’t be made happy against their will.¹⁵ But both his defensive nationalism and the more traditional expansionist one resulted in substituting for a transnational cleavage between the good people and the enemies of freedom everywhere (i.e., for a kind of militant internationalism whose secular arm would happen to be “big brother” France) a sharp barrier between France and the French, on the one hand, and all foreigners, on the other, whether abroad (occupied or, as in the case of Belgium, annexed, rather than liberated) or at home, where, under the Terror, foreigners were increasingly suspected, attacked, excluded, and charged with trying to divide the French. “Cosmopolitanism,” once celebrated, was now proscribed, both because it seemed to call for a risky crusade abroad and because foreign in-

¹⁴ Cf. his *Discours* (Paris: Ed. de l’Aire, 1983), pp. 105, 126.

¹⁵ *Textes choisis*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ed. Sociales, 1957), p. 102.

vasion and fears of collusion between foreign and domestic enemies turned the revolutionaries and many of their provincial supporters into ardent xenophobes.¹⁶ The Declaration of Rights of 1789, by emphasizing the Rights of Man, had seemed to give to foreigners a promise of equal rights. The Rousseauistic construction of the nation equated citizenship and nationality, and thus reserved the former to the French; the xenophobia raised by war threatened the foreigners' other rights.

Ultimately, what caused the failure of the revolutionary program was more than the dilemmas discussed above. They point out the difficulties of the project and certainly contributed to the final fiasco, which resulted from the inability to establish a set of institutions that could function efficiently and enjoy a sufficiently broad support. For a project whose success depended on the state, the failure to provide it with institutions both legitimate and effective was a fundamental flaw.

After the Revolution, nationalism stopped being an overt political program and became a subject for political theorists and historians. To be sure, Napoleon kept many of the trappings of revolutionary ideology, but the work of unification he pursued was centered on his own power, and the main function of Napoleon's nation was waging Napoleon's wars — which were not inspired by the messianism of freedom and promoted national self-determination only when he deemed it to be in France's enlightened self-interest. After Waterloo and the return of the Bourbons, the afterglow of *la gloire*, the memories of *la grande Nation* (a notion that seemed to combine or confuse messianism and power politics in modern garb), and the legend of Napoleon as the exporter of Jacobin ideals showed that nationalism had survived both defeat and Restoration. Even a fervent Catholic monarchist like Chateaubriand longed for the days of French expansion and roundly con-

¹⁶ See the excellent study by Virginie Guiraudon, "Cosmopolitanism and National Priority," *History of European Ideas* 13, no. 5 (1991), 591–604.

demned cosmopolitanism. But the two regimes that ruled France between 1815 and 1848 were not in the hands of nationalists. The first man to use the word “nationalism,” pejoratively, had been an ardent counterrevolutionary, the Abbé Barruel, and French counterrevolutionaries remained firmly attached to a vision of the polity in which family virtues, social hierarchy, and a strong monarch preserved traditions, order, and stability, in which revolutionary notions of universal rights and national sovereignty were banned as nefarious products of the Enlightenment, and in which the pope exerted spiritual power over all Catholic countries. As for the Orleaniste liberals who took over in 1830, their dislike of Rousseauistic and Jacobin notions of absolute sovereignty, their belief in either limited and delegated popular sovereignty or the “sovereignty of reason,” their view of parliamentarism as a transnational force of progress, their suspicion of state power, and their preference for the “spirit of commerce” over the atavistic desire for conquest placed them far from the Revolution’s nationalism in any of its domestic and external forms.¹⁷ Their two greatest thinkers, Benjamin Constant and François Guizot, were cool admirers of England.

The nationalist tradition was carried on by Republicans, who did not add much to the thought of the revolutionaries. Charles Renouvier, in his *Mangel républicain* —a dialogue between a schoolteacher and a pupil —has the student say: “the Republic makes me French twice”: pride in France and national unity have lifted him beyond his village origins (“I lived only in my village, and now I live in France”).¹⁸ Once again, nationalism is associated with, and inherent in, a certain form of government and society: it is the Republic that is the beacon for the French inside and for oppressed nations abroad. The most interesting innovations come from historians; for they turned to the history of

¹⁷ Cf. Benjamin Constant, *De l'esprit de conquête*, ed. René-Jean Dupuy (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1992).

¹⁸ *Manuel républicain de l'homme et du citoyen* (Paris: Garnier, 1981), p. 116.

France in order both to find the roots of the nation summoned almost *ex nihilo* by the Revolution and to rekindle revolutionary ardor dormant since the end of the Revolution —the memory of the past was now being asked to play the role that the political philosophies of the eighteenth century had played earlier.

Their investigations of France's origins aim at, or end in, supporting the voluntaristic conception of the nation. In Augustin Thierry's view of France as a "race," there is no biological determinism, only the story of the "conquered" Gauls emancipating themselves from the rule of their conquerors and thus regaining their unity.¹⁹ In Jules Michelet's vision, France is a blend of races; such a blend is essential (once again) for unity and progress: it gradually lifted the French above regional and ethnic particularisms and led to the emergence of France's unique feature and contribution, fraternity. The conception of history that underlies his works, but also those of the brothers Thierry, is one of an ideal archetypal France, which is at first almost a void, an empty circumference (or hexagon), that history gradually fills, both geographically and politically, as if French history had been nothing but the necessary fleshing out of an Idea of France, culminating in the Revolution. Thus the abstract ideal of unity achieved, in Rousseau's *Social Contract*, by the general will, becomes a concrete march toward unity, in which the different elements that went into the final product are praised not for their distinctiveness, but for their contribution to the synthesis. A history of multiple and inexplicable conflicts is thereby provided with a magic thread, held by the writer, who condemns or praises actors and peoples depending on whether they contributed to ultimate unity.

There were, of course, contradictions between this view of French history and reality, which Michelet had to face. He did so in two ways. As for the past, he demonstrated the potential for

¹⁹ On Thierry, see Marcel Gauchet, "Les lettres sur l'histoire de France d'Augustin Thierry," in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoires, II: La nation*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 247–316; and Lionel Gossman, *Between History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), ch. 4.

unity around the nation, despite the prevalence of strife, by stressing such moments of national harmony as the Fête de la Fédération of July 14, 1790, and such symbols of national fervor as Joan of Arc. In the present, the contrast between social conflict and the aspiration to unity, or the destiny that is unity, could, he asserted, be overcome by education, a nationalist education for rich and poor alike, all receiving on the same school benches “an ineradicable impression of *la patrie*.”²⁰ It is the great dream of inclusion again —not by juxtaposition of disparate parts, but by fusion into a higher, single whole. In Michelet’s account of the people, there are vices and “servitudes,” but no internal enemies —Christianity is treated as if it had been superseded by another manifestation of God: nationalism.

One problem, of course, remains: how should the nation behave in the world? Michelet’s answer is perfectly schizophrenic. On the one hand, he celebrates “an era of benevolence and fraternity,” based on the coexistence of sharply distinctive nations: the more internal differences are eroded, the sharper differences among nations, now transformed into “persons,” become. Michelet, who celebrates internal unity, believes in a world of diverse nations: a unified world would be “monotonous and barbarous”; the destiny of each nation is to “fortify its individuality.” But, on the other hand, in this “concert” all the instruments are not equal: France alone has a universal mission and significance —“in her we find both the representative of the world’s liberties and the country sympathetic above all, the initiation to universal love.” There are pages of *Le peuple* that are almost delirious: “France superior, as dogma and as legend,” France as the modern “pontiff” of Europe, which owes its superiority to what it has done for others and also to its two unique features: the principle of fraternity (i.e., “the biggest idea”) and the most constant tradition. Here a cosmopolitan ideal —fraternity, *l’égalité fraternelle*, a task begun by Rome and Christianity —becomes a source of chauvinism: an

²⁰ *Le peuple* (Paris: Julliard, 1965), p. 82.

international mission becomes a reason for nationalist celebration. It is the chauvinism of universal service, The peculiar historical model described above serves as its justification: “any other history is mutilated, only ours is complete.” England has wealth, Germany has “systems,” but both “are foreign to the world’s great tradition, roman-Christian and democratic.”²¹

Nowhere does Michelet repudiate the voluntaristic idea of the nation. Indeed, he presents it as “a great friendship,” an association whose members are tied together by mutual sympathy. But despite this, and his repudiation of any racial determinism, elements of determinism creep in. As Todorov has noted, “if each nation becomes more and more distinctive —unlike the elements that lose their originality by forming the nation —French citizens will find it difficult, as well as improper, to escape the “determinism of being French.” This determinism, which is never spelled out, results from two factors, both of which will have a bright future in French thought. One is, obviously, history: are the French all those who want to be French or those who are themselves the products of French history, the descendants of the French? The other one is the soil: France’s backbone is the peasant-proprietor, rooted in the land; “the English, who don’t have the same roots in the soil, emigrate to where there are profits. . . . In France, man and earth are inseparable.”²³ This allows Michelet to exclude the Jews from the nation: their roots, their *patrie*, are at the London stock exchange. The revolutionary project was ahistorical: indeed, it was a revolt against history and gave France a new calendar. Entrusting the revival of nationalism to historians carried risks.

In 1789 the myth of the nation had created a new state, which was too divided and beleaguered to carry out its mission of turning the myth into a reality —except in a few moments of internal cele-

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

²² *Nous et les autres*, pp. 243–44.

²³ *Le peuple*, p. 80.

bration (Fête de la Fédération) or victory over invaders (Valmy). The state finally received a lasting (albeit originally tenuous) Republican set of institutions, after a double defeat: that of France in the war against Prussia and that of the Paris Commune; it was now able at last to “nationalize” the country. How this was done has been admirably studied by Eugen Weber,²⁴ and I will try not to repeat what he has told us.

Let us focus again on the project — on how the Republicans in power conceived their task. Once again, it was turned inward, by choice as well as necessity. It had two main domestic dimensions. The first was the reshaping of the polity. Here one of the tensions that had racked the revolutionaries was overcome: the constitutional laws of 1875 represent a compromise between two traditions. One was the Rousseauistic conception of the nation, which survives in the theory of national sovereignty as the expression of the general will (i.e., the will to the common good, superior to and excluding selfish and group interests), in the persistence of centralization, in profound distrust for an independent executive, and in the refusal to submit the constitutionality of laws (i.e., the delegated will of the sovereign) to any independent judicial body. The other was the liberal conception of representative and limited government, guaranteed rights, and divided powers. This compromise was obviously a political necessity and part of the Gambettiste politics of inclusion. But the contradiction between an official discourse of unity and inclusion and the reality of ideological and political conflict did not disappear: a nationalism of inclusion requires, as in the United States, a consensus on the central political tenets and institutions, and in France this consensus continued to elude the Republicans. They could not convert easily those, on the Right, who remained hostile to the very principles of liberalism and democracy; nor could they count on the

²⁴ *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). See also Carlton J. Hayes, *France a Nation of Patriots* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974).

support of those, on the Left, who were impatient with a social status quo that seemed bolstered both by the delays, checks, and balances of representative and divided government and by the Republican interpretation of the general will. For it left out of the public agenda everything except “Republican and religious questions,” in Léon Gambetta’s formula. Anticlericalism and social conservatism on top prevented a full consensus from below.

The second dimension of the Republican project tried to address the problem of political consensus and also to deal with a contradiction inherent in the Rousseauistic limitation of the general will to “what is common to all.” The Rousseauistic notion of citizenship was equalitarian (and France, since 1848, had universal suffrage) ; but French society was not; the “inferior” sphere of the private, in which individuals and groups could operate and worship freely, was a sphere of both ideological conflict —because it included the Church, especially after its formal separation from the state —and social conflict —because it included classes with opposite interests, clashing organizations, and unequal power. The highly articulate politicians of the Republic thought that ideological conflict in society was something the *state* had to deal with, because the principles of organization of the polity itself were at stake. But they also believed that social problems should be resolved primarily by *voluntary* acts: “association” and “solidarity,” with very little role for government. Thus, both in order to win the ideological battle and in order to predispose the French to lower social tensions, the Republican nation needed to complement its political institutions with a project that could be called either cultural or ideological, aimed at shaping and unifying —once again —the minds and mores of the French. This was the educational project, which owed a great deal to unfulfilled revolutionary designs and to Michelet’s dream. (As Weber and others have shown, another revolutionary imperative —eradicating *patois* and regional languages such as Breton— was a major part of it.)²⁵

²⁵ See the remarks of Pierre Jakez Hélias in *Le cheval d’orgueil* (Paris: Plon, 1975), ch. 4.

In France, the Republicans thought that education was not only a *public* function or interest, but a function of the *state* (the British train their future elites in public schools that are private, the French in schools that are part of the state).

This project entailed a kind of gentle Republican indoctrination, aimed both at uprooting Catholic “obscurantism” (by substituting either Kantian ethics or faith in science for religious dogmas) and at inculcating the principles of Republican citizenship. Here the key was the teaching of history, what might be called the popularization of Michelet by historians such as Ernest Lavisse and Charles Seignobos, and their countless disciples who, like Michelet, interpreted French history as a gradual elevation toward Republican unity and as the gradual realization of a “preexisting nation” or national idea.²⁶ A history that focused on chronology, events, and great individuals, primarily those of France, was thought to be the best discipline, as well as the approach that would be easiest for the children to learn and remember; it allowed the right kind of lessons to emerge from the data.

What this ambitious and grandiose design could not do was reach all its goals. It could spread and deepen the roots of Republican citizenship; but as long as Catholic schools coexisted with lay schools, ideological harmony was not going to be possible. The interpretations of central events —the Old Regime, the Revolution —remained profoundly different. Also, if the civic values taught were egalitarian and democratic —you are the people, all authority comes from you —the social values stressed were traditional: hard work, thrift, moderation in behavior and ambitions, a vision of society based on the way of life of peasants and artisans; these teachings were less and less persuasive to sons and daughters of industrial workers and/or of the “uprooted.”

Abroad, what saved the Republicans from the dilemmas their revolutionary ancestors had encountered was, paradoxically, the

²⁶ On Lavisse, see Pierre Nora, “Lavisse, instituteur national,” in *Les lieux de mémoire, I: La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 247–90. For a criticism of this whole approach, see Suzanne Citron, *Le mythe national* (Paris: Ed. Ouvrières, 1987).

defeat of 1871 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. The latter gave French nationalism abroad both a goal and a limit. The problem of war or peace did not arise, because France no longer had the means to initiate war. If war should come, its goal could no longer be the missionary expansion of freedom — the voluntaristic definition of the nation was now being used defensively, by historians like Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges and Ernest Renan, against German historians who justified the annexation of Metz and Strasbourg on ethnic and linguistic grounds (but note that their voluntarism includes, in the reasons for the “daily plebiscite” that is a nation’s existence, a “community of memories” [Fustel] and the “common possession of a rich legacy of memories . . . a legacy of glory and regrets” [Renan]).²⁷ The Revanche was both a limited mission, the application of universal principles to a single small area, and an undisputed national interest. (Indeed, it is because France needed soldiers for its cause that Republican legislators made a remarkable exception to the voluntaristic definition of the nation: the law of 1889 on French nationality removed the right of foreigners who were born in France and whose fathers were foreigners born in France to reject French nationality.)

However, the idea of Revanche did not suffice in unifying the French, any more than the Republican ideal. There are many reasons for this. The first is that precisely because an immediate Revanche was impossible, a choice quickly arose, between a policy of rebuilding and concentrating strength for the future confrontation with Germany and a policy of colonial expansion, encouraged by Bismarck; the controversy between Georges Clemenceau and Jules Ferry showed once again that the same concern for France’s position in the world that had animated those revolutionaries who were not “cosmopolitan” exporters of freedom and equality and reestablished a bond of continuity between the strategy of the kings and that of the Republic did not suffice to define a policy.

²⁷ See texts in Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, pp. 62ff.

A second reason is that, once colonial expansion was chosen, it did not arouse great popular enthusiasm. Those who pushed for it were marked by the same internal contradiction that had characterized Michelet's views of France in the world. Was it an altruistic "mission of civilization," in which France would bring the light of justice and humanity to the weak, as a pre-Socialist Jean Jaurès argued?²⁸ Was it a simple exercise in power politics, aimed at saving defeated France from becoming another Belgium, at finding safe markets for France's goods, and at providing *la patrie* with manpower to compensate for its failure to produce enough children on its own? Ferry used both sets of arguments, but the second set dominated. Nevertheless, just as, almost a hundred years earlier, both the missionaries and the nationalists motivated by power calculations shared to a large extent a view of French superiority (either because of greater power or because France was the carrier of the highest idea), both kinds of arguments assumed a superiority of civilized France over "weak" or "inferior" races. Alexis de Tocqueville, who believed in the equality of races and had no illusions about the civilizing mission, nevertheless defended French colonialism as a useful component of national sentiment, which he considered to be a necessary antidote to democratic individualism; in Todorov's words, "universal morality stops on the threshold of international relations."²⁹

Third, France's freedom of maneuver abroad was limited — Britain had the lion's share of colonies, and, as long as Bismarck was chancellor, France remained isolated in Europe. This meant that foreign policy could not be used by the Republicans as a diversion from domestic divisions. Finally, if the main function of the state was to shape a unified nation, if another function of the national state was to protect the nation's interests and security, then nothing was more important for a nationalist Republic than its

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 94-96,

²⁹ *Nous et les Autres*, p. 229.

military mission. History taught the schoolchildren the importance of martial values, the virtues of sacrifice, and the crucial role of battles in the fate of peoples and nations. Robespierre, the dark prince of suspicion, had feared war because he distrusted the military and their *esprit de corps*. The Republic made a valiant effort to democratize and control the army. But General Boulanger, one of the generals who seemed closest to the radicalism of Clemenceau —i.e., a Jacobin —bolted in the mid-1880s; ten years later the Dreyfus case obliged the Republicans, pressured by the intellectuals and the press, to make a highly unwelcome choice between the principles of justice on which Republican nationalism was based and the massive refusal of the army's leaders to reopen the "traitor's" case. External nationalism and a strong defense against Germany seemed to require solidarity with the army —and injustice. Fidelity to the domestic project of the Republic —a nation based on respect for individual rights and justice —required a dramatic breach with the military and meant a domestic rift that made the unifying dream of the Republic seem more unachievable than ever.

Boulangisme and the Dreyfus case were important for another reason as well. For the first time, Republican nationalism was confronted with a counternationalism, which actually tried to monopolize the word "nationalism" itself. Its glue —for it was made of diverse elements —was the notion that the Republican project had failed both to unify France at home and to defend its interests abroad. The drive for unity, transmitted from the Old Regime to the revolutionaries, was now picked up by the new nationalist project, as was the traditional concern for status. Both nationalisms invoked French history.

What, then, was original? First, the motivations of the new nationalists: men like Edouard Drumont, Maurice Barrès, and Charles Maurras were above all obsessed with the idea of French decadence, the fear of a disintegration of French society through

the effects of class conflict, social change destroying traditional values and ways of life and work, and “foreign” influences—Jews were now seen as “unassimilable” ferments of decay. A whole vocabulary of health and sickness, diseases and cures, virility and impotence, replaced the romantic and moralistic vocabulary of the republicans.³⁰ It is, almost, a nationalism of despair replacing the nationalism of hope, a nationalism of defense replacing the conquering one. One can say that it was, unlike the Revolution’s and the Republicans’, turned both inward and outward; its main concern was about France’s survival, but this required both external strength (in a strictly “realistic” way) and drastic internal regeneration.

A second novelty was the repudiation of the voluntaristic definition of the nation. Barrès moved from his Boulangiste cult of energy and Jacobin support for the principle of national self-determination to a gloomy determinism of *la terre et les morts*, a belief in the primacy of the unconscious, a conviction that “there is no such thing as freedom of thought: I can only live according to my dead.”³¹ Maurras shared Michelet’s “religion of the divinity France,” and Michelet’s view of France as the only “completed” nation, but he denounced in the romantic Michelet the “chronicler of a decapitated France,”³² and saw in the nation not a voluntary association but a “natural” or “historical” society whose preservation was the duty of every individual, who would be naked without the nation. This is not an ethnic nationalism —Barrès explained that France, alas, was not a race —but it embodies history, the soil, and the dead with the defining, determining, and excluding power of an ethnic conception. And like ethnic conceptions,

³⁰ Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, parts 3 and 4. See also Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (Paris: A. Colin, 1972); Yves-Marie Hilaire, “L’ancrage des idéologies,” in Jean-François Sirinelli (ed.), *Histoire des droites*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 519–66.

³¹ Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 189.

³² *Oeuvres capitales: Essais politiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), p. 74.

Maurras's divided the world's nations into superior and inferior ones.

Third, what was new about this right-wing nationalism was that it was a blend of two very different components. One was a group of Republican nationalists disappointed by what they saw as the fiasco of the Republican project: at home, the school lessons of Kantian ethics and the references to the general will had not succeeded either in integrating the workers into the nation or in diverting them from the cosmopolitan, antinationalist ideology of socialism (already denounced by Michelet); abroad, the regime had behaved weakly when bullied by Bismarck. Disappointment and the fear of decadence led Paul Déroulède and Barrès out of the Republican camp, into a revolt not only against parliamentarism —a revolt Jacobins would have understood —but against the whole cultural project of the regime, toward a defense not only of authority but of social authorities such as the Church and the army: Barrès, haunted by decline and *déclassement*, took refuge in traditionalism and elitism. Never before had defectors from the Republican version of nationalism built their own counterideology.

The second element was provided by Maurras. Before him, counterrevolution had been ultramontane and had denounced in nationalism, correctly, a manifestation of the hated democratic spirit. By the end of the nineteenth century, and especially after the official *ralliement* recommended by the pope to the French Church, the intellectual capital of the ultras seemed depleted. Maurras's only real intellectual contribution was to graft nationalism onto old counterrevolutionary verities and hatreds, to justify antisemitism, antiprotestantism, and antimasonic feelings in nationalist terms, to add foreigners to the list of enemies, and to present a Catholic monarchy based on a traditional social hierarchy and on a repudiation of liberalism, representative government, and universal suffrage not as a dictate of God or providence but as a "positive" empirical law of political science, defined as the science of the preservation of nations.

In the short run, the new right-wing nationalism, despite its attempt to feed on the turmoil of the Dreyfus case and on the separation of Church and state, made little headway —partly because it focused so heavily on the internal enemies of the French nation that it seemed to promise even more disunity and political strife than the regime provided, partly because its two elements never blended enough to agree on a positive internal project. Barrès counted the Revolution and the Republic among France's traditions and worried about the lack of popular support for Maurras's system; Maurras, of course, deemed such support irrelevant and made the history of true France stop in 1789. Moreover, the external program of the new nationalists —vigilance against Germany and a deliberate preparation of the Revanche —did not differ all that much from the policies of Théophile Delcassé and Raymond Poincaré. The “nationalist revival” that Eugen Weber has described³³ represented, in the years before World War I, a convergence of Republican nationalism (which had rediscovered the cult of the military —Alexandre Millerrand, in December 1912, stated that the army was France) and the new nationalism of the Right.

Charles Péguy's unique and unclassifiable philosophy, which mixed populism, Catholicism, antiparliamentarism, militarism, a call for the Revanche in terms of the universal Rights of Man, and a defense of colonialism in terms both of France's mission and of France's energy and power, shows the strength of nationalist feelings partly rooted in and partly extending far beyond the nationalism of the regime itself.³⁴ Péguy's France is much closer to Michelet's than to Maurras's, although the cosmopolitanism of Jaurès and the flabbiness of parliamentarians are Maurras's and Péguy's common enemies. But the celebration of the Convention,

³³ *The Nationalist Revival in France 1905–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

³⁴ See in particular *Notre patrie* and *L'argent suite*; also Gerald Leroy, *Péguy entre l'ordre et la révolution* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1981).

and even the cult of Joan of Arc, brought close together the austere politician Poincaré and the passionate poet for whom, “in times of war, there is only the State; and it is *Vive la Nation*.”³⁵

It is both significant and sad that the nationalist rapprochement could occur only around war, and that the most effective, indeed often heroic, demonstration of the unifying function of nationalism was provided by French behavior in World War I. Péguy, who had demanded both unity and war, was vindicated—but killed. Since the main charge of the new nationalism had been aimed at the Republic’s alleged lack of national spirit in facing the German threat, its champions had to proclaim a truce and to join their foes for national defense. The circumstances of the war—Austria’s attempt to humiliate Serbia, Germany’s invasion of Belgium—legitimized a Republican nationalism that could express itself both in elementary terms of survival and in the lofty terms of France’s role as a defender of the right of the weak to national independence.

The victors produced a peace that was an unstable and somewhat unsavory mishmash of old-fashioned liberal nationalism (with the spread of the principle of national self-determination and the creation of a League of Nations aimed at furthering the cooperation and at resolving the conflicts of nation-states) and power bargains among greedy states. An exhausted France became, for a while, the preponderant power on the continent and the guardian of the new status quo. But even the sharp nationalism of Clemenceau could not obtain from France’s allies the borders and guarantees that his strong drive for security and his “national egoism”—anything but missionary—had demanded. The nationalist Right could use this failure as a weapon against both the regime and France’s unreliable allies. But the stage on which French history was being played had changed so drastically as to make past dogmas and policies irrelevant.

³⁵ Girardet, *Le nationalisme français*, p. 258.

At home, the Republicans, represented above all by the Radical party, had, it appeared, exhausted their program. The legitimacy of the democratic and representative system was challenged only by dwindling traditionalists and by admirers of Italian fascism, altogether not much of a threat. If the central problem was no longer the basis of political legitimacy, however, the Republic's efficiency soon became the main issue —and in the eyes of many, inefficiency and protracted social strife could not fail to reopen the question of Republican legitimacy. The cultural project of ideological harmonization through schooling was undermined by the “desertion” of the “footsoldiers,” or missionary branch, of Republican nationalism: the schoolteachers, who were increasingly concerned with issues of class and class conflict, rather than national unity, and whose inclination toward a pacifist internationalism, already apparent before 1914, had received a decisive boost from the horrors of the war.³⁶ Abroad, a wide gap between France's status and France's actual resources incited its leaders to a retreat from what might be called great power chauvinism, especially after the fiasco of Poincaré's occupation of the Ruhr.

What changed the scene and introduced into French affairs what I once called the tyranny of the outside was not only a victory that had bled France white and left it exposed in turn to German revanchism. It was also the effect, both on France's position abroad and on France's polity, of two new ideologies that had emerged in Europe.

The Bolshevik Revolution, while it quickly moved from a missionary universalism reminiscent of that of 1792 France to “socialism in one country,” deprived France of an ally against Germany and above all established a party of radical sympathizers with Moscow within France. It evolved just as quickly from being a party of Socialists radicalized by war and eager to repudiate the Socialist wartime policy of class collaboration and national unity

³⁶ See Jacques Ozouf and Mona Ozouf, *La République des instituteurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

that had led to no significant advances for the workers to a highly centralized and undemocratic party led by tough Moscow-trained militants who defined the interests of the French working class in terms of the Soviet Union's needs and ambitions. In August 1914 the defensive nature of the war, the assassination of the "cosmopolitan" Jaurès, the relative success of Republican ideology in persuading workers that the regime that had protected their right to vote was their regime (even if, and while, syndicalism taught them to distrust the state and its politics), Jaurès's interpretation of socialism as the simple extension of the Republicans' internal national program from political, religious, and educational issues to economic and social ones — all these factors had pushed the leaderless Socialists into joining *l'union sacrée*. With the appearance of the Communist party, a very different kind of actor had reached the stage: one that could occasionally promote a familiar-sounding Jacobin nationalism of unity at home and of national defense abroad, but only insofar as this was required by the interests and security of the USSR. It was a flickering and conditional nationalism, which could alternatively whip up and freeze the national sentiment or patriotism of its electorate.

As for fascism, it provided right-wing critics of the regime — especially those who remained obsessed by decadence and who saw in social conflict, particularly in the emergence of "Moscow's party," a deathly threat to the established social order — with foreign models that had been missing before; and it thus led people whose doctrine was the absolute primacy of the national interest to define it in such a way as to minimize any possible conflict with the new "regimes of order" or to seek an alliance with Italian fascism as a way of containing the potential German threat.

In the 1930s, after Hitler's advent to power and the formation of the Popular Front in France, the nation, which had often suffered from the contradictions and inadequacies of its nationalisms, now suffered grievously from their collapse. For there really was something extraordinary about a situation in which the old Jacobin

message of internal unity around ‘les petits’ and external resistance to the forces of oppression —now fascism and Nazism — was carried only by the Communists, a handful of Socialists, and Radicals (and some more conservative Republicans in the Poincaré tradition, but only insofar as foreign policy was concerned). As the Communists moved from “defeatist” internationalism to Republican nationalism, and not by coincidence, many of the other Republicans retreated. At home, the resistance of the “big ones” made long overdue social reforms both deeply divisive and impossible to sustain (partly because of the Popular Front government’s economic mistakes) ; abroad, the corrosive effects of pacifism (a hybrid product of revulsion against another war and of awareness of France’s declining birthrate and economic stagnation) —reinforced by distrust of the Communists —led half of the Socialist party, most of the Radicals, and many of the trade union leaders into appeasement.

As for the ex-nationalist Right, its “nationalism” was preserved in words, but in completely perverted form. Before 1914, the Republic had been presented as the enemy largely —although by no means only —because of its alleged failure to protect the nation in the world. Now the internal vices of a Republic equated with a Left in which Communist “antinationalists” and Kerensky-like Socialists dominated, a Republic corrupted by Jews and invaded by foreigners, were seen as so threatening for France’s survival that they had to be addressed and removed *before* any resistance to foreign threats could be mounted —indeed the greatest threat, because it came from inside as well as from abroad, was communism. And so the champions of Maurras’s “integral nationalism” turned their wrath on those who wanted to fight Germany before the French house had been put in order, while some of fascism’s admirers stepped into the shoes of “defeatist internationalism,” abandoned by the Communists.

In this lamentable debacle, in which right-wing nationalism seemed to gird itself for civil war —as in Spain —and the heirs

of Republican nationalism dropped their principles, lost their faith, and sometimes embraced a pacifism that could not have flourished at a worse moment, the only common bond of nationalism that connected the Right (Maurras or the Fascist Jacques Doriot) with the Republican Center (Edouard Daladier) was a defensive colonialism, a chauvinistic celebration of the French Empire as a testimony to and remnant of French grandeur —but also as a compensation for the shame of retreat in Europe. Nothing could have been more symbolic of the flight from a Michelet-like nationalism than the cult of the defensive into which the regime locked itself and than the failure of its last governments, after the war began in September 1939, to call either on the ideological arsenal of liberalism and democracy or for a new *union sacrée* in order to galvanize the public.³⁷

What happened after the fall of France is too familiar to deserve a long treatment. After another rare moment of quasi-unanimity around Marshal Pétain, the traumatized French were torn by the kind of crisis of loyalty that had not occurred since the Revolution, Napoleon, and the Restoration. Among the collaborationists, some were no longer patriots at all. Most French split over the very meaning of patriotism: two conceptions of political legitimacy, of the national interest —indeed two conceptions of what and where the nation was—were at war and placed the servants of the state (soldiers and civil servants) in a particularly painful dilemma, which many, alas, resolved by continuing to serve the “legal” authorities, despite what they were doing, rather than the rebel of June 18, 1940, and his fellow rebels of the Resistance. The Vichy regime represented the temporary victory of a bizarre “national revolution” that combined the reactionary and exclusionary nationalism of Maurras with a foreign policy that oscillated from a sullen acceptance of defeat (accompanied by a foolish hope of being able to limit further German encroachments

³⁷ See my introduction to Marc Bloch’s *L’étrange défaite* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

and a determination to resist fiercely what were seen as the encroachments of ex-allies) to enthusiastic collaboration; in the eyes of Republican nationalists, the latter was treason, the former a tragic absurdity. Indeed, even if the National Revolution's program had been less elitist and *passéiste*, how could it have been carried out in a country two-thirds occupied and with more than a million prisoners of war? Vichy propaganda could try, grotesquely, to enlist Péguy, who had been no admirer of the "tough little minds" around Maurras. But all Vichy could do was exclude and repress: a Maurrassian definition of Frenchness produced denaturalizations, the persecution of Freemasons and democrats, and the scandalous policy that deprived French Jews of their rights and many foreign and also French Jews of their lives. A certain kind of nationalist perversion was thus discredited for a long time.

What was rehabilitated was a new version of Republican nationalism, which emerged gradually under the influence of Charles de Gaulle and in the Resistance. Its foreign program was simple: the recovery of French status (which entailed a *crispation* on the preservation of the empire) after the defeat of the enemy. Its domestic program was a kind of neo-revolutionary policy: the establishment of a more democratic regime of national sovereignty (but each component of the coalition had its own idea of democracy) and a program of national regeneration and unification that required both (as usual) the exclusion of the wicked —those who had supported Vichy—and a policy of unification, not through educational indoctrination, whose limits had become obvious (common values and myths are no substitute for social reforms), but through economic and social change —that is, through a more interventionist and extended state. Communists, Socialists, Christian Democrats, and de Gaulle could all rally behind this project. The lesson of the "dark years" seemed to be that France's renewal required a new nationalism —broader in scope as well as in the basis of its support. The collapse of the Right, the nationalist and Jacobin

turn of the Communists, and the experience of defeat, occupation, and quasi-civil war all appeared to make the effort worthwhile and likely to succeed. But it did not: neither the French nor the world turned out to be right for it. The great, brief moment of national unity, at the Liberation, the first exalted one since World War I, soon became a bitter memory.

At home, the new nationalism did succeed in expanding the scope of the state and in launching thereby a *dirigiste* policy of modernization and industrialization. It aimed at deriving lessons from Keynesian experiences abroad just as the French after 1871 had sought lessons in the victorious Germans' practices. The new policy substituted planning for laissez-faire at home, a measure of openness for protectionism at the border. It accelerated the "rural exodus," the decline of France's traditional peasantry, and thus changed (but did not destroy) the celebrated special relationship of the French to the soil. It created a system of social security—which undoubtedly raised solidarity and welfare. But the new institutions of the Fourth Republic could be set up only against the wrath of de Gaulle, who found them too weak and similar to those of the Third Republic, and with grudging support from the Communists, who were soon thrown into opposition by another manifestation of the tyranny of the outside: the cold war. De Gaulle's Rally, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français, launched a nationalist barrage against the "Republic of parties," comparable to Barrès's Boulangiste assault: in both cases, the regime was deemed too weak to defend the nation's interests abroad. Once again the regime was confronted with an ardent nationalist critique on its Right; but its own nationalism had been much battered and dampened since the breakup of the coalition that had gone from Maurice Thorez to de Gaulle; moreover, de Gaulle's conception of the nation was not deterministic—it was Michelet's—and the ferments of decay he denounced were not Jews and foreigners, but pusillanimous politicians insufficiently concerned with France's honor and independence and the "separatists": the Communists

faithful to Moscow. The presence of the latter as a countersociety in the midst of French society prevented the social program of national unity through integration of the working class from succeeding fully —and anyhow the parties of the governing “Third Force” had no coherent idea about how to achieve full integration.

Abroad, even though de Gaulle reproached the leaders who had emerged from the Resistance for showing more concern for domestic issues than for the defense of the nation’s interests in the world, and more inclination to accommodate powerful allies than to resist their transgressions, the political class that he left to its own devices when he resigned in January 1946 tried at first to pursue his nationalist program. It was certainly not a messianic or cosmopolitan one; it was strictly the protection of French security, the defense of France’s positions, the recovery of status. The latter was, thanks to de Gaulle, largely successful —but it was also more symbolic than real. On two fronts, the new realities of the international system rebuffed French aspirations. In Europe, de Gaulle tried to revive the hard policy of German division and dismemberment that had failed in 1919. His successors pursued the effort for a while; as after World War I, France alone was unable to impose its views; its allies proceeded without it. The French tried to adjust their policy by switching from repression and occupation to cooperation and the construction of a common European entity. It was a remarkable attempt at blending a traditional concern for security and control over the German neighbor, the new Federal Republic (this was the calculation of a nationalist Quai d’Orsay), with the utterly antinationalist functional Federalism of Jean Monnet, latter-day disciple of Saint Simon. But the fact that the attempt entailed transfers of national sovereignty enraged the Gaullists. When the policy was extended from coal and steel to armies, a coalition of Gaullists, Communists opposed to the Atlantic alliance, and Third Force politicians hostile to German rearmament defeated the scheme for a European Defense Community. A kind of traditional (and situational) nationalism

had prevailed. However, it was a Pyrrhic victory: the Federal Republic was allowed to rearm anyhow, and the Fourth Republic returned in 1957 to a policy of West European integration that entailed more pooling of sovereign powers over atomic energy policy and for a common market. France seemed to have discovered that it could no longer act alone in Europe —that the interests of the nation might even require restrictions on its independence.

It was on the colonial front that the experience was most bitter. The nationalist revolts in Indochina and in North Africa not only challenged French positions and power, they turned against France the very ideology of national self-determination and the principles of national sovereignty that France had once been so proud to incarnate and to export.³⁸ French universalism did not yield without a last stand: the Socialist leader Guy Mollet asserted that the kind of national community France wanted others to develop was a community of enlightened and responsible individuals: a *Gesellschaft* of free wills, not a *Gemeinschaft* based on ethnic identity. In his eyes, neither Communist nationalism nor that of the Algerian Muslims met the requirements: both were of the obscurantist variety, imposed on confused and ignorant individuals. But whose fault was it if they were confused and ignorant? The colonial army mounted an effort to develop first a theory of revolutionary war to win hearts and minds and later a theory of Algerian “integration” that contradicted more than a century of discrimination between natives and citizens —for in the colonies nationality and citizenship were dissociated —as well as denied the natives any right of self-determination. Nevertheless, France lost the war in Indochina, and the prospect of losing Algeria brought down a regime that a combination of desperate clinging to “French Algeria” and disagreements on how far to go, or not to go, in introducing cosmetic reforms had doomed to paralysis and exposed to a revolt of settlers and soldiers in Algiers.

³⁸ Cf. the remarks of Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), ch. 22.

The new nationalism forged in the Resistance had paled and failed. The nation's capacity to act as well as its standing in the world seemed impaired, domestic unity imperiled by external defeats. But the story was far from over. The drama of French nationalism had been the clash between a Sisyphean effort at unifying the French behind a certain idea of France and realities that always kept them divided. And yet never had these splits been more murderous at home and fateful abroad than when nationalism had been abandoned and perverted. Would there be a way out of this dilemma?³⁹

II. FRANCE BETWEEN DE GAULLE AND EUROPE

The second coming of Charles de Gaulle is the latest, most singular, and perhaps ultimate peak in the mountain range of French nationalism. For he was the first French leader and thinker for whom the independence and greatness of France were the alpha and omega, the entire substance of nationalism. As we have seen, the revolutionaries and the Third Republic's Republicans had domestic imperatives and gave to their nationalism the substance of a democratic ideology; the nationalists of the Right at the end of the last century were locked in a static and defensive view of France at home and abroad. Michelet's mystical celebration of the "Christ of nations" taught his listeners and readers that the mass could only be sung again if the people came to power and

³⁹ I agree neither with Liah Greenfeld's (*Nationalism*) nor with Louis Dumont's interpretations of French nationalism (see his *L'idéologie allemande* [Paris: Gallimard, 1991]). Her view of the French conception as imported from Britain, but turned into a "super-human collective person" instead of an association of free, rational individuals (p. 167), is a misreading of Rousseau. The "collective person" is the product of an association of free, rational individuals, the expression of their rational and moral common will. But Dumont's belief that the individualism of French culture makes the French consider themselves human beings first, and French only accidentally, his simple contrast between individualism and holism, and his conviction that holism can be found only on the Right are just as unsatisfactory. Maybe one should define the Rousseauistic conception as a holism resting on an individualistic basis, as opposed to ethnic holism; individualism has coexisted with nationalism in much of French history.

perfected what the Revolution had begun. De Gaulle was far more ecumenical.¹ First, “there is only one French history” and he endorsed all of it, judging leaders and regimes only with the yardstick of national grandeur. This was definitely not Maurrasian; it could have been Barrèsian, had the shivering Barrès not found warmth only in the soil and amidst the dead. De Gaulle was turned toward the future; he shared both Michelet’s view that France was an incessant blending of peoples and his idea of a distinctive personality formed by and imposed upon this blend,² but Michelet looked at France as a historian, de Gaulle as both an avid reader of history (son of a teacher of history) and a man of action: what mattered most to him was the mark France could still leave, the *grandes entreprises* it could still undertake — if well led. The dead provided an inspiration, not a mold; the soil was an essential feature, but not the soul of France. The call of June 1940 had come from “the depths of History,” but aimed at reclaiming France’s future, and it came from London: it was Pétain who celebrated the cult of the soil.

In behalf of his mission, he was the supreme pragmatist. This is why his domestic program was so flexible, except for one essential imperative — the precondition for action abroad was a strong state, “in charge of France.” But even on this point — how to build such a state — he took what he needed from a variety of conflicting traditions. The strong executive from which all other powers flow he borrowed from the monarchy and Bonapartism; from these and from the Jacobins, the centralized administrative structure (until the day, in 1968, before the “events,” when he found it had become stifling); from the Republican and revolutionary tradition that had built modern France and to which the

¹ As Jean Touchard put it, in *Le gaullisme 1940–69* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 301, “The nationalism of the General was diachronically *unitaire* . . . it was also synchronically *unitaire*.”

² Cf. the *Mémoires d’espoir*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1970), vol. 1, p. 7 — an opening paragraph as revealing as the more famous opening paragraph of the *Mémoires de guerre*.

French were attached, the principle of national sovereignty, and — despite his ferocity against the *régime d'Assemblée* and the rule of parties in the previous two Republics — the trappings of representative and parliamentary government. Indeed, what he added went further in the democratic direction: the direct popular election of the president, which had only been tried (disastrously) in the quite special circumstances of 1848, and the referendum. It was, deliberately or not, an ingenious synthesis of all French regimes. As Jean Charlot has noted, this was a means, not an end.³ But it was perhaps here that de Gaulle succeeded most: gradually, around the institutions of the Fifth Republic, a consensus formed. Was the old dream of unity finally realized? — only in a very limited way. On the one hand, the rest of the domestic program — modernization — succeeded neither in finding the “third way” de Gaulle had successively called association and participation, which was supposed to reconcile the workers and the bourgeois somewhere in between socialism and capitalism (but closer to the latter), nor in avoiding the explosion of student malaise and worker discontent in May 1968. On the other hand, what all of these efforts, constitutional and economic, were geared to — bold activism abroad — while also enjoying very broad support from the public, never managed to overcome the rather hostile skepticism of a sizable part of the elite, which was not nationalist (cf. Raymond Aron) and the somewhat more friendly and admiring skepticism of the people (I think of the nuclear force).

The heart of the mission, then, was in foreign policy. Without great external enterprises, the French would divide and quarrel. But these endeavors were not just means to unity, they were a duty by themselves. Here too, de Gaulle determined the substance of his program by combining a few simple principles with what mattered above all, “realities” or “circumstances.” The imperatives were to preserve French independence, “free hands,” from

³ In “Le gaullisme,” in J.-F. Sirinelli (ed.), *Histoire des droites en France*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), vol. 1, p. 661.

foreign domination or “supranational” control and to maximize French power and influence in a world where two superpowers left little leeway for allies, clients, and neutrals. How de Gaulle tried to loosen their grip I have told elsewhere? Two things stand out. The first is that, far more than in 1944–46, he succeeded in combining the two orientations of French nationalism. The politics of power and interest he had practiced before with prickly virtuosity, during the war. His policy of military emancipation from NATO, his costly and persistent construction of a nuclear force, his determination to get the Common Market to serve France’s agricultural interests while diluting the supranational aspects of the Community, and his buildup of financial reserves are the main examples of this side of his policy. What is striking is that so many of his efforts were aimed at defending or recovering *external* sovereignty. The revolutionaries and the Republicans had planted French nationalism on the ground of national sovereignty as a principle of *domestic* legitimacy; right-wing nationalism before World War I had, like de Gaulle, been anxious about French power and freedom of action abroad. But this time, it was sovereignty itself, the source of freedom of action, that was at stake, because of the entangling institutions de Gaulle had inherited from the Fourth Republic: NATO and the EEC.

At the same time, he also tried to recapture the tradition of French universalism, the missionary or exemplary role of France, in singularly changed conditions. He may have been helped by the fact (which has rarely been pointed out) that, unlike Michelet, he did not simultaneously believe in “friendship” among true nations and in the superiority of France: on the one hand, for him, nations may have feelings and souls, but states have only interests; on the other hand, while the world, as always, listens to and waits for France, other nations are owed respect even when there are

⁴ See the chapters on de Gaulle in *Decline or Renewal: France since the 1930s* (New York: Viking, 1974) and my chapter on de Gaulle’s diplomacy in the forthcoming volume on the post-war diplomats, edited by Gordon Craig.

clashes of power with France. The mission of France was —once again— to champion the right of other nations to self-determination and independence. Now this meant decolonization: exemplary retreat, rather than missionary expansion. De Gaulle's tortuous policy in Algeria was anchored, as of 1959, in the principle of self-determination, and the rest of the former empire followed. This obliged de Gaulle to confront head-on the exacerbated and violent nationalism of those, on the Right, who confused France's possessions with France's heritage, mistook its past for its destiny, saw in retreat the latest form of decadence, and therefore tried to present their rebellion against him as comparable to his own rebellion against the armistice of June 1940. But it allowed him to pose and parade as the champion of the new and smaller states against the "two hegemonies" of Moscow and Washington: a message he carried around the world, from Latin America to Poland, from Cambodia to Quebec. His plan for a sort of West European Confederation, the Fouchet plan of 1961–62, was an attempt at combining the French rejection of supranationality and the need for a broad cooperation among West European nations, so as to maximize their combined autonomy at the superpowers' expense. The nationalist of German dismemberment of 1945 became the solemn celebrant of Franco-German reconciliation and collaboration.

This did not proceed without contradictions. Guinea incurred French wrath when it chose independence too swiftly; de Gaulle's rough pursuit of French interests, his concern for rank, his refusal to tie France's hands, and his determination to push his European partners in the only direction he deemed valid —a "European Europe"—instead of settling for ambiguous compromises resulted in the fiasco of the Fouchet plan and the gradual paralysis of the Community. His West European policy failed because it could not bridge the gap between a *French* policy for Europe and a common policy acceptable to partners he deemed—correctly—insufficiently concerned with Europe's independence and too eager to seek America's protection. Another factor explains the failure of his other

grand designs: a reunited Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, the *querelle de l'homme* that was the economic development of the Third World, the abolition of the dollar's privileges. Quite simply, France did not have the power and wealth to reach de Gaulle's objectives, without the support and cooperation of others, which he did not get and which his style did little to provide. Or else France did not have the means to accelerate a history that moved, *grosso modo*, in the direction de Gaulle had foreseen —the end of the cold war, the reunification of Europe and Germany, the fall of the Bretton Woods monetary system —but not necessarily toward the specific alternatives he favored.

By his relentless energy, ambition, and disciplined imagination, he shook up the “tyranny of the exterior” and gave the French the impression, or the illusion, of having regained mastery, of having loosened and held at bay the constraints of the international system. But his words and prophecies had more resonance than his moves had success. He left French power far less burdened and in many ways modernized and increased. But the constraints had not been removed, and the gap between independence and effectiveness, between sovereignty and achievements, meant that grandeur was in the style and the designs more than in the results. Ultimately, his greatest achievements were at home: not merely the political regime, but the restoration of French self-esteem, through a combination of great deeds, at home and abroad, and some myths.

It may be a paradox that France, whose long history has produced no uncontested national heroes comparable to other nations' “founding fathers,” finally found one in de Gaulle, at what may have been the end of France's nationalist history; but it is not surprising that this hero should have been both a military man and a powerful writer, who, wisely if not always accurately, put into immortal words the “last chapters” of that history: “since everything always begins again, what I did will, sooner or later, be a source of new ardor after my disappearance.”⁵ But the question is: can it be?

⁵ *Mémoires de guerre*, 3 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1959), vol. 3, p. 289.

We can try to answer it first, obliquely, by examining the forms of French nationalism today. We do not find it at the centers of power, the presidency and the prime minister's office. After the death of de Gaulle's stolid "heir," Georges Pompidou, the French turned first to a liberal technocrat, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who did his best to combine the far less nationalist policy he preferred —promoting European integration and calling for "mondialisme" —with the Gaullist legacy he could not afford to renounce. Then came François Mitterrand, whose own balancing act was between a traditional Socialist vision of international cooperation (including further European integration) and, again, the Gaullist legacy, especially in the realm of military independence. The two Gaullist imperatives: the defense *tous azimuts* of sovereignty and the pursuit of grandeur, were, in fact, quietly shelved after 1974.

And yet, one can speak of a new nationalist revival, in parts of the political class, a very small fraction of the intelligentsia, and a sizable portion of the public. But it takes two quite different forms. One is the nationalism of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, on the Right.⁶ Here we find a thoroughly degraded version of the right-wing nationalism that had emerged in the late 1880s. Once again, there is the obsession with decadence, now equated with the "invasion" of Muslims, the danger of miscegenation (*métissage*). In the words of one right-wing Catholic, "heirs in danger of being the last survivors of the people of cathedrals and crusades, chivalry and mission, we are colonized."⁷ Le Pen has revived the determinism of Barrès and Maurras: the nation is defined as a heritage, identified with the family, and therefore endowed with "biological reality." (A sociologist whose theses

⁶ See in particular the chapter by Pierre Milza in Sirinelli (ed.), *Histoire des droites*, pp. 519–66; and the chapter by Pierre-André Taguieff in Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau (eds.), *Le Front National à découvert* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1989), pp. 195–227.

⁷ Jean Madiran, quoted by Pierre Birnbaum in Gil Delannos and Pierre-André Taguieff (eds.), *Théories du nationalisme* (Paris: Ed. Kimé, 1991), p. 136.

are remarkably close to the Front's has recently tried to defend the use of the word "race.")⁸ If the theme of constitutional reform is less present than among its predecessors, it is because the National Front realizes that the present institutions are popular. But like those predecessors, Le Pen's nationalism is turned both inward and outward — arresting France's decline in the world by drastic anti-egalitarian yet populist (i.e., anti-"gros") measures inside. Moreover, as in the 1930s, the inner program almost removes the external one from view and exhibits a glaring contradiction between the ritual appeal for unity and the inevitable denunciation of all those culprits who "plot" and foster French decadence (the Left, antinational intellectuals and syndicalists, technocrats, Jews, etc.), who are pilloried in terms that mix sexual metaphors and Darwinian images. It is a nationalism of resentment barely disguised by the call for regeneration. What inspires it is, underneath it all, the bitterness left by the loss of Algeria, the first scene of Le Pen's exploits.⁹ It animates both his demand for an end of immigration, accused of destroying French identity, and his "solution" for the Muslims in France: total assimilation or else expulsion. A quest for virility turned toward the past, it exploits deep feelings of physical and patriotic insecurity. It is not surprising that this cramped defense of French identity entails a rejection of European integration: the Maastricht treaty was attacked as a "form of mental AIDS."¹⁰

The debate on Maastricht brought to light a second kind of nostalgic nationalism: an appeal to the revolutionary and Republican tradition of national sovereignty, to the august myth of *la République* but turned outward (as in de Gaulle's nationalism, but he did not specifically appeal to the Republican model since

⁸ Paul Yonnet, *Voyage au centre du malaise français* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 70ff.

⁹ Cf. the comments of Benjamin Stora in *La gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), pp. 281ff. and 317ff.

¹⁰ Quoted by Alex Stone in "Ratifying Maastricht," *French Politics and Society* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1993), 83.

the defense of sovereignty abroad had been the mark of both of France's unifying regimes, the Old Regime *and* the Republic). Moreover, it was used defensively (whereas de Gaulle used his call for sovereignty both defensively and as a demand for bold initiatives and actions). In an integrated Europe, France —in the arguments of the Gaullist Philippe Séguin and the nationalist Socialist Jean-Pierre Chevènement —would lose both its independence and the possibility of promoting its universal principles throughout the world. As Séguin put it, the “social contract” that is the foundation of sovereignty, both internal and external, would be transferred abroad and thereby broken.¹¹ The notion of French exceptionalism —a uniqueness that consists both in the fact that “of the twelve states of the Community, France is the most attached to its identity and national unity”¹² (what about Britain or Holland?) and in the universality of its principles of legitimacy, national sovereignty, and self-determination —thus emerges again in terms that Michelet, who believed that Europe could only be a concert of distinctive nations, would have approved. But what had been a conquering notion has become a deeply “protectionist” one, which explains why the anti-Maastricht coalition brought together champions of the Republican version of nationalism *and* Le Pen: the (respectively) depleted and degraded nationalist traditions, waging battle against all those who acted as if not only nationalism but the nation state itself had become obsolete —even if they carefully avoided saying it too crudely and preferred to defend the treaty in terms of France's national interests (which include, above all, they said, the containment of a reunited Germany).

The size of the anti-Maastricht vote in the referendum of September 1992 has many “contingent” reasons: unhappiness with an economic downturn for which Brussels was made partly respon-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹² Quoted by Stone (from a petition of mainly Gaullist senators to the Constitutional Council), *ibid.*, p. 82.

sible, distrust of a president who has overstayed his welcome, and so forth. But there were two deeper reasons as well, and they take us from the study of French nationalism's ideas and tribulations to a look at the modern nation that two centuries of efforts, from the Revolution to the present, have built —consciously and conscientiously —around the *idea* of the nation. In the self-image of the French as in the rhetoric of nationalism, there are two components: an internal one, which can be called national identity or specificity, and an external one: the nation-state.

The revolutionaries and the Republicans tried to define France's national identity in political terms. What constitutes the nation *is* the social contract that set up a national, democratic polity; it was around those principles, transmitted by the school and the army, that foreigners were not merely "naturalized" but "nationalized" (i.e., assimilated). But, as we have seen, the initial voluntarism was enriched and modified by an increasing emphasis on historical continuity, on *l'héritage*: the weight of the past, a Burkean notion, was providing roots and substance to the abstract and somewhat formalistic notions derived from Rousseau. It is the combination of historical identity and political specificity that provided the formula of the French melting pot. As in the United States, the absorption of immigrants has been a constant (it is Germany that today remains reluctant to conceive of itself as a "country of immigration").¹³ In both the United States and France —in this country, because of the liberal tradition, in France, because this is one point on which liberalism and Rousseauism converge, yet without merging —the distinction between the public and the private spheres means that the foreigner who becomes a national, and thereby a citizen, is supposed, in receiving all the rights of citizenship, also to accept the principles of legitimacy and government as well as the laws of his or her adopted country (explicitly in

¹³ See Gérard Noiriel, "Difficulties in French Historical Research on Immigration," in Daniel L. Horowitz and Gérard Noiriel (eds.), *Immigrants in Two Democracies* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 66–79.

the United States, where these principles are not in dispute, implicitly in France), but can, in private life, remain faithful to his or her customs and religion. The public person must speak English or French; the private one can keep speaking his or her language of origin. In both countries, the naturalization of foreigners was made easy (in France, through the use of *jus soli* as well as through voluntarism —requests for French nationality after a few years of residence).

But the French melting pot has never been quite like the American one. The United States *is* “a nation of immigrants”; France is a nation that attracts and incorporates immigrants: this is a major difference. It accounts not only for waves of xenophobia that French historians are beginning to study¹⁴ —against Italians and Belgians in the 1880s and 1890s, against Poles and refugees from Germany and Central Europe in the 1930s —after all, there were comparable waves in the United States. It accounts also for two distinctive features. First, because French nationality is not merely, so to speak, contractual —signing on to the principles of the Constitution, as in the United States —but has a heavy historical component, the “public” dimension is *both* political and cultural: it entails the assimilation of French culture, which the school system is supposed to produce. Moreover, the political principles were, so to speak, more pointed or militant, as the result of long struggles; thus, the notion of citizenship entailed not merely the separation of Church and state, but *la laïcité*, an aggressive *rejection* of the Catholic Church, precisely because of its old connections with and public role in prerevolutionary France and its determination to have a say in public affairs. Second, whereas the French idea that the Republic integrates only individuals, not “communities,” and does not “recognize” communities as public actors is one that Americans would share, the private sphere is

¹⁴ See especially Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), ch. 5, and his *La tyrannie du national* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991). See also Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

regarded, in France, with far greater suspicion than in America. It is the combination of these two differences that explains why the idea of “multiculturalism” remains repugnant to the French, in their great majority: there is only *one* French culture, and “separate” subcultures are not welcome insofar as they impede assimilation to French culture.

To be sure, there are occasional similarities between American debates about, and resistance to, the demands of Black militants who insist on group identity and group rights and reject the model of individual integration and French debates about the integration of Muslims. But America has a special and weighty problem with the Blacks: they are Americans and descendants of slaves forcibly brought to this country long ago. Claiming group rights is a way of obtaining at last the full range of individual civic and social rights they were denied for so long. The Muslims are immigrants. And while the arguments about their “unassimilability,” their ineradicable “difference,” are no different from earlier anti-Italian or anti-polish arguments, there is a novelty: Islam, as Fernand Braudel duly noted.¹⁵ Islam is not only an “alien” religion (unlike Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism), it is a powerful culture (which, unlike Catholicism, has not been a major part of French culture), indeed “a way of life,” and (like Catholicism in this respect) a code that includes the private *and* the public.

Hence the intensity of the debate about immigration. This time, French national identity is felt to be at stake by many more people than those who ranted about what the “invasion” from the East in the 1930s was doing to the French race (I am thinking of Jean Giraudoux). There are two sources of worry. One is that many of the Muslims, particularly those who are deeply religious (*a fortiori* the Fundamentalists) will be “unassimilable”: either French identity will be deeply transformed if they become French or they will be “a danger to the nation” if they are not assimilated.¹⁶ The other worry is that the mechanisms that succeeded in

¹⁵ *L'identité de la France*, vol. 1 (Paris: Arthaud-Flammarion, 1986), p. 195.

¹⁶ Noiriel, “Difficulties in French Historical Research,” p. 74.

assimilating men and women whose “cultural distance” from the French was often wide are no longer as effective. The directives of the Ministry of Education about the civic and social values children must be taught may well be unchanged since Jules Ferry.¹⁷ It is the capacity of schools to transmit them that is questioned, partly because the content of French education has become less “cultural” and parochial and more technical (mathematics and science count for more, history and the French classics for less), partly because many primary schools are now predominantly frequented by the sons and daughters of immigrants in districts — urban and suburban — where they are most numerous and from whose schools the French have fled. There are other aspects of the “weakening of the French melting pot”; as an important report has pointed out,¹⁸ spatial segregation, the loss of influence of the Catholic Church on the Muslims, the flabbiness of French voluntary associations such as unions and parties (remarks that acknowledge the role the Church and the Communists, two organizations seen as “antinational” by many French, had played in the process of assimilation), the decline of the army as an integrative body, because of shorter military service and, here also, because of the preponderance of technical expertise over civic training — all these factors make the Republican model of individual assimilation far more dubious. Thus many foreigners want to become French but without assimilating, and the process that turned foreigners into French is faltering. The nature of the “demand” has changed: it is tougher; so has the supply (i.e., the melting pot): it has softened.

The paradox is that the most common reaction, among intellectuals and politicians, from the conservative Catholic historian

¹⁷ Quoted in Danielle Boyzon-Fradet, “The French Education System: Springboard or Obstacle to Integration,” in Horowitz and Noiriel (eds.), *Immigrants*, p. 149.

¹⁸ Rapport de la Commission de la Nationalité, *Etre français aujourd’hui et demain* (Paris: Documentation française, 1988) vol. 2, pp. 82ff. See also François Bourricaud, “1945–1992: La crise des référents,” in Sirinelli (ed.), *Histoire des droites*, pp. 567–99.

Pierre Chaunu, to the Socialist leader Michel Rocard, via the Jewish sociologist Dominique Schnapper, is an act of faith in the very process that, all agree, no longer performs as it once did. “Integration will be easiest if the consciousness of French identity is strongest,”¹⁹ and such a reinforcement of national consciousness cannot be left to “the free play of the spontaneous forces of social life” (the old distrust of private forces left to themselves is obvious here).” A deliberate policy is needed, and it sounds most familiar: on the one hand, the goal of full integration is preserved —hence the rejection of the suggestion, made by Giscard among others, to make the *jus sanguinis* the exclusive mode of acquisition of French nationality —as well as the “voluntaristic” approach to the acquisition of French citizenship (but when there was a contradiction between the two, the former used to prevail, as in the laws that granted French nationality automatically to certain categories of foreigners living in France). On the other hand, a reinvigoration of the school and the army, as vehicles of civic training, is being demanded; little is said about how this is to be done. Around the need for full assimilation, the Republican and the far Right traditions curiously converge. It is true that the former wants to facilitate integration, the latter, which fears it, wants to make it more arduous; one stresses the political component of the melting pot, the other the cultural one. But there is a common enemy: the pluralism of multiculturalism. Jews who have become fully and proudly assimilated are, occasionally, the strange bedfellows of Catholic *intégristes*.²¹

The episode of the *foulards islamiques* in 1988 —the national debate about the insistence of three young Muslim girls on wearing a veil over their heads at school— showed both the French

¹⁹ Rapport, *Etre français*, vol. 2, p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²¹ The book of Paul Yonnet (*Voyage au centre*) requires particular attention. Rather than defending racism, he attacks antiracism; he charges foreign historians with having destroyed “le roman national français,” along with French critics such as Bernard-Henri Lévy, who has a “sick fear of French identity” (pp. 277, 281).

penchant for turning small incidents into grand symbolic issues and the depth of the anxiety about Muslim distinctiveness. The defenders of the traditional mechanism of assimilation thought that such a demand was intolerable, because it challenged *la laïcité* in the very heart of the process of homogenization: the school system. American quarrels over multiculturalism, especially in schools and universities, have been followed with a certain amount of *Schadenfreude*.²² What will happen to American national identity if Hispanics, Blacks, Native Americans, and others request a right to their separate cultures in the public realm (remember: this includes education for the French)? All these comments and warnings seem to suggest that, whereas each wave of American immigrants contributes to and shapes American identity, French ones are asked to adopt a firmly preestablished French identity. Indeed, Gérard Noiriel boldly asserts that whereas the American melting pot began with the Revolution, the French one ended with it.²³

And yet . . . There are genuine grounds for believing that France's capacity to assimilate immigrants has not been seriously impaired. Most of them speak French — part of the labor of integration is therefore unnecessary. Many of them, especially Algerians, appear to want integration, while preserving cultural and family links with their country of origin — neither an unreasonable demand nor an original one and not a fatal obstacle to assimilation; events in Algeria contribute to this. The power of French culture, even in a “weaker” school system, remains enormous, and many elements of that culture get transmitted in the working place and through the media and entertainment industries. Finally, for all the ideological resistance to the taboo of multiculturalism, all the Rousseauistic suspicion of pluralism as a threat to *la volonté une*, a *de facto* pluralism has spread. It was always there in the private sphere, which is where people mostly live. But what is

²² See *Le Débat* 69 (March–April 1992).

²³ In Horowitz and Noiriel (eds.), *Immigrants*, p. 73.

significant is the loosening of the Jacobin corset in the public sphere and the lowering of the barrier between public and private. Regional government is gaining strength. The legislator's will can be declared unconstitutional by unelected judges. The French state encourages the building of mosques. The "private" (i.e., Catholic) school system has, for many years now, been subsidized by the state and treated as part of the public service of education. When Mitterrand tried to tighten state control over it, millions of French marched, not in defense of the Church, but for the right of families to choose their children's schools. In *l'affaire des foulards*, many Catholics and Jews —the former because the whole Republican model was built to *expel* the Church from the public domain, the latter because of their own new restlessness about a model of *inclusion* that required assimilation but did not, in the horrible crunch of 1940–44, protect them from discrimination and death —supported the girls' request.

There is, thus, an increasing distance between the old Jacobin model, or straitjacket, and the modern French society and polity, but this distance does not doom the French melting pot. A certain amount of friendly tolerance for diversity might turn out to be as good a force for integration as the old Republican indoctrination. What is needed to keep the melting pot busy and effective is, in the first place, the prevalence of values of decency, sympathy, and universality in French society; this is why the refusal of right-wing parties to make deals with Le Pen, even though much of his electorate comes from theirs, is essential: the values common to liberalism and to the French version of democracy are more important than the narrow model produced by the latter. In the second place, the success of the melting pot may be helped by the strength of French cultural identity, which remains as well established and (despite an apparent lack of public confidence in its force of attraction —i.e., a lack of self-confidence) as solid as ever. It may be that the doubts about its strength are nothing other than pure and simple xenophobia, pure and simple rejection of the others

not because they cannot or don't want to become "like us" but because we don't want them to. In this respect, it cannot be said that the champions of the old model have always done their duty by combating repugnance for the "invader." Their timidity in fighting xenophobia provides one reason why one cannot end this analysis on an unqualified hopeful note. The other reason is the new legislation the predominantly right-wing Parliament passed in the spring of 1993: the new provisions on naturalization and on the treatment of foreigners, even as softened by the Constitutional Council, are, to put it mildly, ungenerous and often mean. Much will depend on how they are enforced.

Fears about not the substance but the potency of French national identity are also fed by questions about the European enterprise. It was, as we have seen, initiated by the Fourth Republic both as the best way to defend French interests now that France had slipped in rank and power *and* as a bold endeavor in reconciliation (with Germany) and cooperation worthy of French ideals. The sacrifices of sovereignty entailed by supranationality had been, after the debacle of the European Defense Community, both reduced (insofar as the Common Market's Commission, unlike that of the Coal and Steel Community, was not a decision-making body) and postponed (majority rule in the Council). De Gaulle's *Blitzkrieg* against the EEC's Commission 1965, when the latter tried to increase its powers, led to the Luxembourg compromise, which eliminated the "threat" of majority rule in matters deemed of essential importance by a member. Under those conditions, the preservation of French independence seemed quite compatible with the construction of a West European entity in economic and monetary matters: the Community helped French modernization, French civil servants dominated its bureaucracy, and France was *prima inter pares*, the only nuclear power of the entity and a fully sovereign state next to a divided Germany with restrictions on its sovereignty. Moreover, in a world dominated by the cold war,

French military autonomy was widely seen as a great asset, offsetting whatever constraints the Community's rules might impose on French economic and financial freedom of maneuver. France was, in the eyes of many French leaders, still a great power: through Europe, by its presence outside Europe, especially in Africa, and by virtue of its nuclear nuisance power.²⁴

A certain complacent pride began to evaporate in the 1980s. The Socialist government's attempt to pursue a *dirigiste* policy of nationalizations and massive public spending disrupted France's balance of payments and trade and jeopardized France's ability to remain within the limits of the European Monetary System established in 1978. The sudden awareness of the costs that would have been imposed by the pursuit of such a policy in the midst of a recession, when most of France's European partners were tightening belts and fighting inflation — a huge loss of competitiveness and the need to insulate France from the EMS and the EEC's rules — revealed how much modernization and the abandonment of traditional industrial protectionism had made France dependent on the world market and especially the West European one and the impossibility of pursuing an economic and financial policy that would be both independent and beneficial. Having, so to speak, finally chosen Europe and austerity — the latter because of the former — Mitterrand needed a new political initiative and turned to a *relance* of Europe. It was, once more, presented as essential for French power and welfare. The switch to majority vote entailed by the Single Act of 1987 was accepted by Parliament with little turmoil: it was presented as a logical and necessary effect of the decision, unanimously made by the governments of the twelve members, to establish a single market by 1992. But clouds formed soon enough. The inevitable clash between sovereignty and integration, avoided

²⁴See my chapter on "French Dilemmas and Strategies in the New Europe," in Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann (eds.), *After the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

since 1965 when the latter had been set back, could not be postponed anymore.

First, there was the problem of agriculture. The Common Agricultural Policy imposed by de Gaulle had been a tremendous engine of modernization and expansion for French agriculture, just as the size of the rural population was falling to a new low. But the cost to consumers was high, and the accumulation of surpluses exorbitant. When Brussels, partly because of this and partly under GATT pressure, began demanding a reform of the CAP, French farmers ceased seeing in the Community their savior and instrument and turned their anger against its new policies. The “transfer of competence” that had made Brussels, not Paris, the locus of France’s agricultural policy was now seen as a fatal giveaway.

Second, it became gradually clear that the European Court of Justice was quietly but relentlessly giving a “Federalist” interpretation of Community competences and establishing the superiority of Community over national legislation. The French Conseil d’Etat was the last to accept this, but it finally did. Effectiveness within the Community clearly required the enforceability of its norms, regulations, and directives in the courts of the members. But French sovereignty, again, was being eroded.

Third, the reunification of Germany transformed the political context. The economic and monetary giant of the EC (however hampered, temporarily, by a hasty policy of absorption of former East Germany that was supposed to be painless) was now a full “sovereign” state with enormous political weight. In the absence of the Soviet threat, France’s exclusive card—the *force de frappe*—was devalued, and France’s nuclear preference meant that Paris lacked military freedom of action where it mattered: in the conventional domain (it was no consolation that Germany had voluntarily shackled its own freedom in this realm, since the addition of two *impuissances* left Western Europe still utterly dependent on the United States).

Fourth, the Maastricht treaty on European Union, despite its “essential conservatism,” seemed to assault French sovereignty sufficiently on three points to oblige the government to ask the Constitutional Council for a judgment on its compatibility with the French Constitution. The Union was receiving the power to regulate the entry of non-EC nationals into the Community, possibly by majority rule in the future. The Monetary Union meant that France would have to give up both the franc and the theoretical autonomy of its financial policy, symbolized by the existence of a Bank of France submitted to government orientation, in exchange for a dubious share in the control of a European Central Bank that would be fully independent of governments and a carbon copy of the Bundesbank. Indeed, in order to reach the nirvana of Monetary Union, France would have to meet the highly constraining “convergence criteria” that Germany had demanded concerning inflation, interest rates, deficits, and public debts. The treaty also gave to EC nationals the right to vote in local elections and for the European Parliament in whatever country of the Community they were living: a breach in the historic French association of nationality and citizenship, in behalf of foreigners, whereas the only past dissociation—in colonies—had been at the expense of foreigners.

The Constitutional Council and the French Parliament, which had to revise the Constitution so as to make it compatible with the treaty, focused on these points (the new title XVI reduces the right of non-French EC nationals to vote and be elected to a possibility and keeps them from becoming mayors or assistant mayors). The public debate, opened by Mitterrand’s decision to submit the treaty itself to the public, and not merely to Parliament, as we have seen, went far beyond this. What emerged from the sound and fury were two central issues. The first was the need to choose between two radically different conceptions of sovereignty—this trickiest of all concepts. An “absolutist” one, which happened to be deeply engraved in French culture, from the days of the Old Regime *and* the proclamation of national sovereignty, logically led

to a rejection of all the *abandons* and entrapments entailed by the infernal machine of the Community, with its treaties, its technocrats, and its judges. But the cost of keeping “free hands” risked being the lack of any hands at all: monetary sovereignty had already, *de facto*, been given up, and the champions of French independence were sufficiently lucid to realize that its recovery entailed jettisoning the EMS and weakening the single market altogether. The alternative economic policy they advocated, however, by imperiling French competitiveness and the franc through inflation and deficits, was no more attractive than in 1983 and no more likely to reduce unemployment than the official course.

A pragmatic and relative notion of sovereignty looked at it not as an indivisible substance but as a bundle of competences that could be gradually pooled or transferred to common bodies, so as to substitute the efficiency of the whole for the relative inefficiency of the members. But this raised as many questions as it answered. As Gaullist senators put it in a request to the Constitutional Council,²⁵ which had adopted the pragmatic version in its ruling in April, “if sovereignty is no longer anything but an addition of competences, if one can successively remove them as one would the leaves of an artichoke, at what point, or at what degree, do we arrive at the heart?” —a metaphor I had used many years ago!” (The Council declined to answer.) Also, who was collecting these leaves? A classical “international organization . . . invested with powers of decision by virtue of transfers of competences consented to it by the member-states,”²⁷ as the Council put it, or, as many “European” jurists see it (and contrary to the Council’s opinion), a supranational entity with a “distinct juridical order” of its own both superior to and part of the juridical order of the members? When the French Parliament, before the public debate on the treaty, amended the Constitution, it carefully avoided taking sides,

²⁵ See footnote 12.

²⁶ See “Obstinate or Obsolete,” in *Decline or Renewal*, p. 379.

²⁷ Stone, “Ratifying Maastricht,” p. 74.

but it just as carefully limited the “transfer of competences” to the establishment of economic and monetary union and to the setting of rules of entry into the Community.

The second issue that dominated the public debate was the famous democratic deficit. Here again, the Rousseauistic, revolutionary, and Republican tradition weighed heavily. It attributes legitimacy only to decisions either taken by representatives of the nation, who have full legislative power, or controlled by these representatives. There is, so far, no European nation. The structure of the Community is such that decisions are taken either by “irresponsible” bureaucrats (the supranational Commission) or by ministers of the various member-states who exert jointly the Community’s legislative power; even after Maastricht, which increases the European Parliament’s powers, the Council will remain the main legislator and the Parliament a body that can more easily plead and remonstrate than decide and control.

Here the defenders of the treaty were at a disadvantage. They could try to argue that a “transfer of competences” was a better choice for France than a jealous defense of sovereignty because a strong collective hand is better than a weak and empty national one. But there was no way they could argue that this transfer was to a fully democratic system. If the EC was just an international organization, the question of democracy was secondary, but the effectiveness of such an entity would continue to be impaired (the French government had to reassure Parliament that the Luxembourg compromise was still valid). If the new Union was going to become what its name implied, the absence of democratic institutions was a major handicap (the two countries most responsible for this were Britain and France —logically in the former case, since Britain is now the most ardent champion of national sovereignty or rather, in Thatcherian words, the sovereignty of the British Parliament; but illogically in the French case, since it is the French government that wants the Union to have the broadest possible jurisdiction). The treaty’s opponents were able to use the

“democratic deficit” as a major part of their case: France, they said, was caught in an *engrenage* in which more and more decisions affecting its future were going to be taken by faceless figures operating on their own, and in which the representatives of the French people were being doubly dispossessed: by an executive that defined the European policy of France all by itself (it is true that the French Parliament has debated European policy only rarely, but it is also true that these debates were remarkably ill-attended) and by European institutions that eat up, one by one, the leaves of the national artichoke.

The debate on Maastricht also raised two broader issues, one directly, the other indirectly. The first is the relation of the French nation-state to the European Community or Union. The Community, so far, is not a classical confederation — it goes far beyond — or a federal union — it falls far short — or an ordinary international (i.e., intergovernmental) organization. The more it evolves, the more *sui generis* it becomes: its range expands, but its “supranationality” gets diluted (except insofar as the European Parliament’s powers are grudgingly increased); its institutional structure becomes more byzantine, its legal homogeneity more cracked. Pooled sovereignty means, in practice, that agents of the members behave both as guardians of national interests and as European trustees. To present the Community enterprise as a zero sum game for the members is wrong: what the states “give up” is not necessarily lost, and much of what is “transferred” does not go to Brussels but to the private actors of the new European economy. Each of the members — by which I mean their governing elites — believes that, left to itself, the European small or medium-size nation-state is doomed to being less prosperous at home and less effective abroad than if it pursues the complex course of European integration.

But this is not the whole answer. What is this course leading to? It has kept advancing, despite periods of stagnation and set-

backs, partly for the reason just given and partly because it has kept its ultimate configuration in the dark. Ambiguity, which preserves most alternatives, has been both the condition and the price of progress. But there is something about the French mind that resists ambiguity: the pragmatism and open-endedness of the “Monnet method” appeals more to businesspeople) and often to bureaucrats) than to lawyers, political thinkers, and intellectual politicians. De Gaulle’s insistence on setting goals, on eliminating alternatives, and on prescribing policies, while it always left room for pragmatic adaptation to *les circonstances*, aimed at ruling out shackles on French hands; and the formal anxiety about being governed from Brussels barely conceals a real anguish about being dictated by Bonn (or Berlin), entrapped in a Community that would be an extension of German might rather than, as was hoped originally, French power. For even though all the European nation-states are, in dozens of ways, dependent on each other, on the world economy) and on the country that still appears to have the greatest influence in shaping the world economy —the United States —some European states have greater means of affecting their milieu than others) and the new Germany is seen as potentially the most able to do so. There exists, at present, a gnawing fear of being caught in an enterprise that either will lead to a Federation in which the nation will lose its identity as a political unit (with its political powers going both upward) to the new central institutions of the Union, and downward, to the regions) or else will result in a Baroque or Gaudiesque construction, multi-leveled and multispeed, manipulated above all by Germany. There is a fear that the Community is beginning to resemble much more the German model of federalism and “social market economy” than the French model of the unitary and regulatory state.

The second large issue is the relation of the French nation-state to the new global system that is now emerging. The French conception of political rule is heavily territorial: the soil and the hexagon are inseparable from French conceptions of authority. But in

the new system, as many observers have noted, what one of them has, somewhat inelegantly, called “nonterritorial functional space” is developing²⁸ systems of regulation that are collective and apply to specific activities across geographical space. This “unbundling of territoriality” also takes the form of unregulated transnational economic and financial transactions. Both kinds affect all nations and states, but hardest hit, of course, are those that participate least or carry least weight in the regulatory institutions or in the “transnationalized microeconomic links” and economic and financial flows and those that find it hardest to conceptualize a system not based on sharp territorial demarcation. Nations such as the United States, Japan, potentially China, perhaps Germany, although their capabilities are obviously uneven (among countries and among sectors) may be able to control the nonterritorial flows and institutions more than France. There is little solace to be found, for French men and women attached to the nation-state, in the emergence of so many new ones on the ruins of the former Soviet internal and external empire and of Yugoslavia: these are either eager to join the Community or else degenerating into economic mess and violent conflict.

However, the French predicament is one that all nation-states will face (worse is that of states that have not succeeded in becoming nations, either because, like Russia, they are still multinational, or because, like many African countries, they have failed to integrate their disparate and feuding elements). The nation-state has been a blend of cultural unity (often compatible, as in Britain, with the survival of regional cultures) and political unity; as Ernest Gellner has put it,²⁹ culture became the access card to citizenship and dignity. How far can these two elements be dissociated? What will happen to cultural identity if they are separated?

²⁸ John Gerard Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1993), 171.

²⁹ In *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 6–28.

And where should, or will, the political component of nationhood go, in this divorce?

To this last question, different countries may give different answers. Some, in Western Europe, for instance, may be quite ready for a leap into Federation, others (Switzerland, it appears) not at all. If Auguste Comte's old principle still applies —that one can only destroy what one can replace —then the nation-state, including in its political dimension, still has a bright future: there is, so far, no higher allegiance, nothing that replaces the nation as a legitimate source of social identity —even though, as Judith Shklar has pointed out,³⁰ the modern nation-state has so often been nothing but a war machine and a source of oppression for minorities and deviants. International institutions, although increasingly endowed with powers, remain utilitarian enterprises —they are not objects of loyalty. An entity such as the European Community is still, when it comes to allegiance, primarily a collection of cooperating national loyalties, with loyalty to “Europe” superimposed on national loyalty (just as allegiance to Britain is over, say, loyalty to Scotland) only in the rare cases of devoted Eurocrats.

It may well be that my judgment of 1965 still stands: the nation will survive, with diminished political powers, and those powers that it will keep losing or has already lost will not go to a single, concentrated higher source. The model of modern state-building out of dispersed and overlapping earlier units may not tell us anything about the future. There may well be no European Federation, at least in the foreseeable future and unless all the members of such a potential Federation are willing to begin by establishing both a genuine European electorate and an effective European Parliament; and there will be no world state. But the surviving nation-state will bear little resemblance to the Rousseauistic sovereign community, or even to the liberal, Mazzinian, or Millian, or Wilsonian model of cooperating, homogeneous nation-states. It will no longer be possible to write a purely,

³⁰ Unpublished remarks on nationalism.

fiercely, proudly “hexagonal” history. A world of “pooled” and “unbundled” sovereignties, in which states collectively decide on the attribution and on the use of the powers that they put in common and that they are no longer strong enough to apply effectively all by themselves—even in the military realm: this may well be the immediate future of the nation-state, the natural result of an evolution marked both by increasing interpenetration and by the continuing elusiveness of that general society of humankind whose absence Rousseau has noted—with, Todorov notwithstanding, more complacency than regret.³¹

As for French cultural identity, it has never been detachable from French political institutions and programs—it has always been tied to the state. The abandonment by the French state of many of its powers over the French economy, the “Europeanization” or “globalization” of that economy, cannot therefore fail to affect French cultural identity. The French have in the past been proud of their unique economic “balance”: this was a significant component of their sense of social distinctiveness, as well as a major component of Michelet’s nationalism, vis-à-vis England, and later of right-wing nationalism, especially in its anti-American incarnation. This singularity began to fade with post-World War II industrialization, urbanization, and the lowering of trade barriers. It is bound to vanish with the creation of a single European market open to the world. The very dispossession to which the state has thus consented will produce sharp reactions of national sentiment and resistance, as in the case of French farmers, and renewed demands for greater state management and control of whatever can still be managed and controlled from Paris. But insofar as the strategic, high-tech sectors of the industry are concerned, regulation will make sense only at the European level. It may be true that the more European and global economic integration intensify, the greater will be the temptation to defend and to mythologize all the remaining components, social and political, of French national

³¹ Cf. T. Todorov, *Nous et les autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), pp. 206ff.

identity (just as global economic integration feeds the tendency of the “Eurocrats” to insist on Europe’s distinctiveness —not always obvious— vis-à-vis the United States and Japan). But the nationalist reactions are more likely to be recurrent bouts of fever than returns to the dominant ideologies, policies, and practices of the self-contained past.

French national consciousness will therefore have to concentrate increasingly on such components of identity as, in the public sphere, virtues of France’s constitutional system —which, despite the consensus around it, are far from uncontroversial —as well as those of France’s system of social protection, and the many elements of cultural distinctiveness still provided by French education, the French intellectual tradition, whatever persists in the French style of authority, the sometimes frivolous, but permanent belief in the importance of high culture (which state policies have strengthened since André Malraux) as well as a certain art of life and leisure, a unique rapport with nature, an “agreement of earth and foot” (to quote from a character in Albert Camus’s *Caligula*) —that is, what the French have done and will continue to do with the imprint of their history and of geography. What may, therefore, occur is something that would be most welcome: the end of the need Rousseau had posited: to choose between being a human being and being a citizen. The French revolutionary and Republican nationalism tried, heroically but falteringly, to bridge the gap by making of France the universal carrier of the citizen model. If the operational content of citizenship and sovereignty continues to shrink, then the emotional charge of a national feeling all too ready to veer into chauvinistic nationalism may shrink as well, despite occasional surges, and cosmopolitanism will no longer have to be either a chosen nation’s “mission” or a term of insult.

It may turn out that French national identity will actually be reinforced by current churning about immigrants and about Europe

and that this renewed vigor will make a more self-confident nation less hesitant to accept the transfers, losses, poolings, and dilutions that currently affect the political dimension of nationality, as well as more willing to let foreigners —and not only the nationals of other Community members —share some of the rights of citizenship.³² This would mean a nation without the claws of nationalism —expansive or defensive —without the powerful impetus of external threat and external loss as a goad to internal conformity, without the trappings of full international sovereignty to buttress the assertion of the supremacy of the nation's claims and values.³³

Nationalism, in French history, *has* served as a catalyst of unity, but only at certain times: in the heady confusion of a Revolution that seemed, in July 1790, to have won almost too easily —an illusion that quickly dissolved in blood—and, much more usually, in moments of war fervor. At least as often, it has been divisive. If grave external threats were to appear again —and this cannot be ruled out: the great Kantian idea of universal pacification through commerce and the evident horror of modern war remains a seductive but unrealized dream —nationalist ardor will be necessary again. The trouble is that it feeds fears of imaginary threats and magnifies existing dangers.

There are signs that the present-day French are, more or less prosaically, ready to give up the inspiring myths of universalist exceptionalism and the mythical views of their past. This is suggested, not by a turning away from their history, but by a new look at it, which is far more critical *and* objective. The dark story of Vichy, of its French roots and of its crimes, has come out of the closet; foreign historians such as Robert Paxton, who was first vilified for having opened the door, are now honored as pioneers —

³² See Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le sacre du citoyen* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 4368.

³³ See the cogent and powerful analysis of Isaiah Berlin in his *Against the Current* (New York: Viking, 1980), pp. 327–55.

except of course on the far Right.³⁴ The dignified debate over France's responsibility for the persecution of Jews in 1940–44 — with the Resisters, understandably, denying with indignation that Vichy was France, and those who disagree pointing out that the civil servants and police who gave and carried out the evil orders had been the functionaries of the Republic — is a sign not of continuing “Franco-French warfare,” but of strength. The Algerian war is also beginning to come out of the closet; it is no longer a war without a name; and this, again, is the way to overcome “the black violence of family secrets.”³⁵ A huge mass of historical publications — competing histories of France as well as fragmented examinations of all the facets of national consciousness and sensibility — shows the industry of the French historical profession, always the bellwether of French national feelings, in looking for all that may have remained hidden under unturned stones, the thirst of the public for a scrutiny of France's rich past that comforts a bruised sense of national identity without encouraging illusions, and the possibility of finding a middle course between debunking and mystifying.

The rage of commemorations noted by Pierre Nora gives a similar indication.³⁶ It isn't simply that “the emptier they are the more they succeed.” It is the fact that almost every part of France's multicolored past can now be publicly remembered, including some of the shameful episodes (from the revocation of the *édit de Nantes* that threw the Protestants out of the French community to the deportation of the Jews in July 1942). The “commemoration” of 1789 was a particularly bizarre and remarkable affair. The authorities — Socialist, and therefore heirs of a tradition that sees the Revolution as a single bloc and, like Renouvier, attributes its

³⁴ See for instance Jean-Pierre Azema and François Bédarida (eds.), *Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

³⁵ Stora, *La gangrène*, p. 11. See also Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La guerre d'Algérie et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

³⁶ In *Le Point*, February 14–21, 1993.

cruelties to the need to save France from its enemies³⁷—were careful to select for celebration only the uncontroversial aspects of the Revolution (the Rights of Man), and to give show business precedence over intellectual argument. The historians, especially those who had once been Communist or *gauchisants* and had now discovered the virtues of liberal moderation, basically explained that there was nothing to celebrate: either because the Revolution was a thing of the past and it was time for the French to put it behind them or because of its “totalitarian” deviation (*dérápage*) of 1793. Only in France, perhaps, would the idea that the Revolution ended circa 1880 (an idea I don’t share) cause an ideological quarrel, but what was remarkable was not the fact of the dispute, but its coolness. After the terrible, real, and recurrent “Franco-French” wars (the Revolution, the June days of 1848, the Commune, Vichy vs. the Resistance, Algeria) and the intellectual and political “wars” (such as the Dreyfus case, the Popular Front, and the battle over EDC in 1952–54 or even over Maastricht) — when the French had to decide each time what national loyalty meant and to whom or to what allegiance was due — perhaps battle fatigue will bring appeasement or a modicum of serenity. When national feeling is at a fever pitch, it usually means war, foreign or civil.

There can only be a partial, and temporary, and tentative conclusion to this interrogation, which has been both protracted and condensed. As of now, I would say that Isaiah Berlin was right when he wrote that “no political movement today . . . seems likely to succeed unless it allies itself to national sentiment”³⁸ —including those in the Western world. But that sentiment need not be so red-hot as to follow nationalist ideology; it may be reasonable and realize that openness, tolerance, and the acceptance of limitations of external sovereignty are both right morally and in the nation’s

³⁷ *Manuel républicain de l’homme et du citoyen* (Paris: Garnier, 1981), p. 117.

³⁸ *Against the Current*, p. 355.

interest. A lively national sentiment remains necessary to give a people self-confidence and self-esteem; but other loyalties need not be distrusted or downgraded; in the world of the twenty-first century, cosmopolitan practices, indeed a cosmopolitan ethics that accommodates national sentiment, will be the only answer to mounting problems. In the case of France, its national identity is strong, and the French national consciousness is also vigorous, although less confident than it ought to be. French nationalism is down, if not out, and only nostalgic manifestations of it, some honorable, some ugly, are left. As for the French nation-state, if, like nostalgia, it isn't what it used to be, it is still a significant actor on the scene, whatever the constraints and the shackles, and a worthy object of interest and study. It is fitting to end with de Gaulle: France lives — “elle vit.”³⁹

³⁹ *Mémoires d'espoir*, p. 7.