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Sarah Blowen, Marion Demoisier and Jeanne Picard, Eds., *Recollections of France. Memories, Identities and Heritage in Contemporary France*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000. vi + 264 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$ 69.95 (cl). ISBN 1-57181-728-X. \$25.00 (pb). ISBN 1-57181-499-X.

Review by Robert Gildea, Oxford University.

Since Pierre Nora edited his *Lieux de mémoire* on the sacred sites of French identity, notably that of the Republic and the Nation, a sense has developed that the official unity of France—emancipating, civilising, and secular—masks with difficulty its pluralism and diversity.^[1] Only recently has this pluralism and diversity been acknowledged within France, and this rich and suggestive collection of essays takes a number of promising angles in its exploration of that fragmentation. It argues that globalisation has weakened the French state as multiculturalism has imposed a *France plurielle* and that fragmented identities are being powerfully cultivated by groups and institutions which are intent on constructing specific memories, heritages, and cultures.

One section of the book is devoted to memories of war as articulated by museums, with contributions from Sarah Blowen, Marie-Hélène Joly, and Jay Winter. It suggests that while the first generation of Second World War museums were promoted by Resistance veterans and gave priority to their heroic story, the second generation were more centrally organised through the Direction des Musées de France (DMF) and put a new emphasis both on material artefacts and on different narratives of what happened during the war, competing with that of the Resistance. The key notion was that of a *musée de société* which would promote consensus around a set of civic values. The DMF was keener on material artefacts than on immaterial memories, and large enterprises such as the Memorial de Caen went not only down the civic road, as a museum of peace, but down the commercial one too, as a major tourist magnet in the Normandy region. The Historial of Péronne, devoted to the memory of the First World War, says Jay Winter, was both similar and different. It valued material artefacts and offered a narrative from the British and German as well as from the French point of view, but involved from the outset a team of international historians who both advised on the profile of the museum and used the museum as a research centre for making links to the everyday experience of war and advancing their own work in new ways.

Another section of the book deals with heritage which, says Françoise Péron, "unites people who identify with a corpus of artefacts and inherited values which are considered worthy enough to be transmitted to the following generation" (p. 93). Given the importance of artefacts in museums and the fact that memories as well as heritages are constructed, the difference between memory and heritage is blurred a little. In their exploration of heritage the editors concentrate on two areas: first, the maritime heritage and, second, the culinary one. The maritime heritage, argues Françoise Péron, was consciously developed in Brittany, which hitherto had more of a rural identity, in order to compensate for the economic decline of the fishing industry. It took the form of sea-life centres but above all the saving and reconstructing of old ships. Some of these projects were successful, while others, Jeanine Picard shows, such as the Boat Museum at Douarnenez, which involved building a replica 1860s clipper, came to grief, underlining the importance both of commercial viability and of a town having political influence in the right places. The culinary heritage chapters, written by Marion Demoisier, Laurence Bérard, Philippe

Marchenay, and François Portet, similarly demonstrate the dual importance of economic factors and of local identity. One response to globalisation was to develop local foodstuffs known as *produits du terroir*, such as the corn-fed chicken of Bresse or Charolais beef. Foods produced in certain regions under certain conditions became eligible after 1990, like wines, for the Origine d'Appellation Contrôlée label, which was both economically beneficial and reinforced the solidarity of the local population that was identified with the product.

The last main section of the book explores the production of new urban cultures in contemporary France. It explores ways in which cities have developed cultural policies, partly as a result of greater decentralization since 1982, for the purposes of urban regeneration, social integration, or simply image promotion. This has been done with great success in Grenoble and Rennes, argues Susan Milner, although there have been losers as well as winners. Cultural projects have also been on a neighbourhood basis, the *projets culturels de quartier*, which have tried to promote neighbourhood identity and solidarity. Most interesting has been the interface between cultural promotion and the hip-hop culture, manifested in the streets by break-dancing, rap, and tagging of the black and *beur* inner-city populations. François Ménard and Chris Warne look at attempts to give official recognition and media expression to this new culture in order to integrate disaffected young people, although these were soon perceived by them as tricks to mediatise a rebellious culture and detach it from its natural environment, if not to hijack it politically.

This collection is valuable contribution to work on identity, memory, and culture in contemporary France. Its emphasis is laudably local and marginal and seeks to understand whether a cohesive French identity can survive the current degree of fragmentation. It shows how memory and heritage are produced by the complex interactions of the state, local authorities, local interest groups, professional historians, media, and the market. Ironically the most stimulating part of the book, on urban cultures, has no resonance with heritage or memory and thus sits rather uneasily within the overall project. But this is a must for all students of contemporary French identity.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-93).

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