

## Introduction

*Briony Neilson*

Even before the COVID pandemic descended, throwing the world into disarray, the 22nd gathering of the George Rudé Seminar in French History and Civilization in 2020 was always going to be particularly special. For the first time, Australasia's Rudé Society had joined forces with North America's Society for French Historical Studies to convene a joint conference in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, on the theme of "France and Beyond: The Global World of 'Ngāti Wīwī'".

Just a few months before the conference was to take place, as the spread of the virus intensified and borders slammed shut, the conference organizers shifted gear and – with the incredible support of colleagues from H-France – transformed the large, in-person conference into an online gathering for participants across the globe. Inhospitable time differences were negotiated to enable real-time online broadcasting of keynote presentations by Prof. Dan Smail (Harvard) on "The Borderlands of Slavery in Medieval Mediterranean France"; Prof. Sophie Wahnich (EHESS/CNRS, Paris) on "Emotions, Democracy and the Laboratory of the Revolutionary Years 1789–96;" Prof. Pierre Serna (Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, Institut Universitaire de France) on "Revisiting the *Cahiers de Doléances*: 'What do the people really want?"; and Robin Gwynn (Massey University) on "The Huguenots and the Fall of Louis XIV"; along with a webinar exploring the "Rainbow Warrior Incident thirty-five years later" and salons. Panels, meanwhile, were recorded and broadcast via the H-France YouTube channel. At the time of writing, these panel presentations can still be publicly accessed at the following URL: [www.youtube.com/user/HFrance2/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/HFrance2/videos).

The present volume offers sixteen from the 100 papers delivered at the online conference. All of these papers have each been peer-reviewed by two specialist scholars on the subjects that they engage and have been revised by the authors following the anonymous reports received from the readers.

The first set of articles, in different ways, take up the theme of transnationalism or border crossings. Melissa Byrnes examines the militant participation of Portuguese students in the early protests in Paris that would culminate in the mass movement of May and June '68. Byrnes' work issues a corrective to existing scholarship which overlooks the role of international populations in '68 and to historical chronologies which date the emergence of human rights activism in the 1970s. In the next article, Matthew McDonald examines the enthusiasm of Frederick II for the French language, examining the exclusivity afforded to French in numerous official domains of the Prussian regime. The article pays particular attention to the French-speaking *Cabinets-Ministerium* based in Berlin and preoccupations with matters of style and taste within a regime determined to cement its status and prestige on a European scale. Carine Renoux's article provides a new cross-border understanding of the

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Department of Ain, on the eastern edge of France, at the time of the Revolution of 1848. Renoux studies the circulation of persons and ideas of 1848 to bring new insights into politicization in a segment of France usually represented as largely agricultural and divorced from major political hubs. Instead, Renoux demonstrates how Aix was, in fact, at the heart of political engagement between Lyon and Geneva, kept under increasingly close watch by the authorities. Practices of surveillance are similarly explored by Simon Burrows in his article. Burrows provides a preliminary reassessment of the geography and chronology of the pre-revolutionary clandestine book trade. Engaging in digital analysis of metadata of Parisian customs confiscation records, Burrows opens up new perspectives and a more complete view of these complex records than has been previously been possible.

A second group of papers, attentive to the original geographical location of the conference, examines connections between France and Aotearoa New Zealand. Charlotte Ann Legg analyses the experiences of Paul Robin, French anarchist and supporter of Malthusianism, in New Zealand while resident at Wainoni, the home of Alexander William Bickerton, a professor of Chemistry and forthright advocate of marriage reform and birth control, near Christchurch. Legg suggests that Robin's visit produced a radical rethinking on integral education and population control, which became more explicitly conceptualized as a form of racial improvement. Robin subsequently imported the ideas incubated in the antipodes back into the French metropole. In his article, Geoff Watson examines New Zealand accounts of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, analysing the ways in which these accounts dovetailed with attempts in New Zealand in this period to assert the superiority of New Zealand over the British metropole.

The third section of papers are concerned with issues of gender and feminism. Helen Gramotnev explores the innovative depiction of hats in images of female nudes by Paris-based artists in the early twentieth century. Gramotnev shows how, in their artistic work, painters including Kees van Dongen, Charles Guérin, Jacqueline Marval, Amedeo Modigliani, and Philip Wilson Steer ushered in a new genre of the female nude in which the public and the private, the concealed and the revealed were brought into highly productive tension. Contributing to the emerging field of the transnational history of French feminism, Jean Elisabeth Pedersen examines the pivotal role of French women (Hubertine Auclert, Isabel Bogelot, Marie d'Abbadie d'Arrast, and Ghénia Avril de Sainte-Croix) in the International Council of Women in the period from its formation in 1888 through to the First World War. Pedersen suggests that these figures' feminist philanthropy be appreciated as an important source of inspiration for a long-reaching and long-lasting form of international feminist activism.

The fourth set of papers is broadly concerned with ideas, experiences and impacts of the French Revolution of 1789. Timothy Tackett pulls back the curtain on the social and economic situation of non-nobles in France at the end of the Old Regime, focusing on a certain Adrien-Joseph Colson. Colson's unusually substantial personal correspondence enables a close analysis of the attitudes and experiences of a commoner agent – a category of person who became increasingly important in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries following the removal of nobles from their landed estates and relocation to large towns. Robert H. Blackman explores the dynamics of rhetoric and action, circumstance and discourse during the French Revolution. Engaging with the major historiographical debate over the relationship between the Terror and the Revolution of 1789, Blackman seeks to examine how the discourse of classical republicanism changed as the circumstances surrounding it shifted. David Briscoe examines petitions submitted by vulnerable inhabitants of Bordeaux for poor relief during the French Revolution. Analysing several hundred such petitions presented to the Société des Amies de la Constitution and the Club National in the 1790s, Briscoe provides insights into conceptions of belonging, perceptions of duty and deservingness, and tacit understandings of the relationship

between private need and collective social responsibility at the end of the eighteenth century. In his article, Jeffrey Ryan Harris reminds us that while references to the “general will” during the French Revolution are commonly attributed to Rousseau, various versions of this idea were put forward in this period. Harris examines the arguments of the Capuchin faction, corporatist enemies of Rousseauism who were among the mostly clerical and aristocratic extreme-Right of the *Constituante*, and makes the case for understanding their political arguments as being grounded in the assumption that a government’s legitimacy was bound by the general will of a sovereign People. Julie Johnson examines the “Affaire Petit” of January 1792 in which the corpse of a wealthy woman from a family of militant supporters of refractory priests was removed from the coffin in which it had been placed awaiting burial and desecrated in a church in Nevers. The article examines the ways in which this particular case fed popular views on revolutionary transformation and considers the explanatory force of this act of desecration on the atheistic trends that developed in this region of central France. Finally, Patrick Harris examines the émigré, a figure produced by the French Revolution’s simultaneously universalist political doctrine and its territorially bound conception of citizenship. Expanding existing historical perspectives beyond the metropole-colony framework, Harris explores the condition of displaced colonials within the context of transatlantic slavery, thereby tracing the global and imperial dimensions of revolutionary French emigration.

Rounding out the volume are a pair of historiographical reflections. Pamela Pilbeam assesses the position of Alfred Cobban within the historiography of the French Revolution, placing recent attempts to modify historical understandings of 1789 in context, and revisiting the origins and development of historians of France and their historical interpretations. Doug Munro offers an account of the professional life of George Rudé. He adopts a lens of “respectability” in order to challenge some of the assumptions relating to the scholar’s life and career.

These papers demonstrate the enduring richness of the field of French and francophone history. Their authors, in managing to produce expert scholarly material in the face of the unprecedented challenges of the global pandemic, deserve particular praise and acknowledgement.

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