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Pierre Nora, Ed., *Rethinking France. Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Vol. 2. Space. Translation directed by David P. Jordan. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. xiv + 480 pp. \$55.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-226-59133-6.

Review by Peter McPhee, University of Melbourne.

How might we begin to understand the substantive meaning of a state or of a nation? In the case of “France”, how might we go beyond its formal representation through territorial lines on maps or state institutions to comprehend the ways in which it has a conceptual coherence as well as a territory and formal existence? The contributions to this splendid volume show us how geographical and historical conceptions of “space” are linked and at the heart of the implications of “Frenchness.” The volume is predicated on the idea of “space” as multivalent and historical: the space where power is exercised and contested, where the natural environment is invested with cultural meanings, where multiple identities are made, taught and remembered. The resultant insights remain as fresh as when first published twenty years ago.

The 127 essays in Pierre Nora’s seven-volume series *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, published by Gallimard between 1984 and 1992, were together enormously influential in elaborating the potential and methodologies of the study of memory and identity. In 1996-98 Columbia University Press translated forty-four of the essays into the three-volume *Realms of Memory*. David Jordan is now overseeing the translation of forty-five additional essays for a four-volume series being published as *Rethinking France* by the University of Chicago Press. *Space* is the second of these volumes, following *The State* in 2001, which Lloyd Kramer reviewed for *H-France Review* in 2002.[1] The ten long essays collected here are drawn from the first three volumes of *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, and together they amount to a major achievement. The University of Chicago Press and David Jordan are to be congratulated on the initiative.

The volume is itself a monument to the highest qualities of research and writing, carefully translated, studded with telling illustrations, and beautifully produced. The contributors range across time, although concentrating on the last two centuries, and across expressions of space: “north and south”; the local, the department and the region; the coastline and the forest; the artistic and scholarly. The shapes they construct draw from the visual (paintings, cartography, architecture), the manuscript (from school texts to the records of government and its agencies), and the geographic. These are shapes which are historically defined and shifting, sometimes illusory and always ambivalent. It is a collection of extraordinary richness.

On the surface it might seem odd to begin a volume on the meanings of national space with a chapter entitled “North-South”; as in Italy, however, the dichotomy of north and south is fundamental to the actuality and imaginary of “difference” in France. Like Pierre Nora in his introduction to the volume, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie here contemplates the *longue durée* of the creation of “France” across two millennia. It is a contribution marked by its author’s customary mix of formidable knowledge and provocative suggestion, claiming, for example, that a core distinction between “north” and “south”—over inheritance practices—long survived the testamentary equality legislated by the French Revolution, as families in the south manoeuvred to continue to give one child priority.[2]

The authors agree that the Revolution was the pivotal period in the construction of a new relationship

between individual and state, between individual and collective identity. Every dimension of public life in Ancien Régime France had borne the marks of historical accretion and privilege: the fiscal obligations of the king's subjects, their experience of the law and administration was as much a function of where they lived as of their social rank. In 1789-91 revolutionaries reshaped public life according to principles of rationality, uniformity and efficiency. All French citizens, whatever their social background and residence, were now to be judged according to a single uniform legal code, and taxed according to the same measures of wealth. The administrative unity of France was strengthened by a new political culture of citizenship and the celebration of national heroes drawn from the revolutionary struggle. Not only was the Revolution a turning-point in the uniformity of state institutions, but, for the first time, the state was also understood as representing a more emotional entity, "the nation", based on citizenship.

The Revolution and Empire had a profound impact on collective identity. For ethnic and linguistic minorities in particular, these years represented an acceleration of the process of *francisation*, whereby they came to perceive themselves as citizens of the French nation as well as Alsatians, Bretons, Catalans, Occitans or Basques. This occurred regardless of whether speakers of minority languages were enthusiastic or hostile towards revolutionary change. This process did not begin in 1789, to be sure, nor was it unidirectional: it came from below as well as above, and was incomplete after the Revolutionary period. For ethnic minorities, "Frenchness" was limited to an acceptance of national institutions and the vocabulary of a new, French politics. French remained the daily language of only a minority of people and France a land of great cultural and linguistic diversity well into the nineteenth century.

There is therefore something of the surreal in writing about the cultural construction of a state or nation as if its later existence was a given. As Nora notes in his introduction (p. viii), "the idea of a preestablished harmony is fed by an imagined continuity with Gaul", but few of the contributors examine the contradiction inherent in writing histories of identity at periods where most people were not French in nationality, language or identity. One will find little in the volume about Bretons, Basques, Catalans or Wallons. There is a good deal, however, about Alsatians, the subject of an arresting case-study by Jean-Marie Mayeur, which combines a broad sweep of regional history with a series of insights into the creation of memory and identity.

Under the Third Republic, of course, far more attention was paid than ever before to the inculcation of values of patriotism and republican unity, with regional diversity used as a way of celebrating France's natural richness. Postcards, railway posters and schoolroom maps, of which many engrossing examples are reproduced in the volume, embedded stereotypical regional characteristics as markers of identity. For children, national heroes—certainly not regional ones—formed a pedigree of greatness culminating in the ideal world of the Third Republic, which boys had a natural duty to defend and girls had a duty to serve. It is here that this collection is at its strongest.

Occasionally, the contributors' affection for France—which runs as deep as their erudition about its history—spills over into exhortation. The late Michel Mollat du Jourdin concludes a most remarkable survey of maritime history and of images of the coast and sea with a dream of France recapturing its greatness: "The technical achievements of the navy are expensive, commerce lacks freight, fishing no longer sustains competition, and shipyards are closing one after another. ...[But the] French can play a great part in exploiting the oceans. Initiative will likewise be necessary in dealing with European integration. France can usefully appeal to its experiences and remember that a part of itself is maritime, that peace like war is won on the sea..." (p. 76).

But Mollat gives us a fresh perspective on how one might understand the way people both imagine their inherent characteristics and are constrained by their environment and state regulation of it. It is matched by a beautiful contribution on forests by Andrée Corvol, who ranges from the thirteenth century to the present, across the representations of forests in Little Red Riding Hood and Beauty and

the Beast, Braque and Cézanne, Colbert and the Eaux et Forêts. Corvol takes us closer to the polyvalence of wood in the popular imaginary, even exploring the sensual ambivalences between humans and forest depths. Corvol delights with her insights, observing for example the fear of today's "consumers" of forests that, despite massive replantings (25 percent of France is now forested), "they will see tree populations disappear that once filled ancestral needs and now help overcome the trauma of modern life. This is what motivates the waves of ecologists and, in a more general way, every friend of the forest. Threatened nature, they insist, finds refuge only in the depth of the woods. Nature was once open to everyone. It is fitting now to protect it from everyone" (p. 85). At the same time, the new relationship consumers of the countryside have with the forest—a threatened place of beauty rather than a source of both fear and sustenance—have made the painting of the outdoors a national sport with much in common with angling. As Françoise Cachin observes, in her discussion of the extraordinary cultural power of impressionism (not only in France, of course), nostalgia for the national garden which the French countryside is imagined to be has made the familiar images of impressionism a "family album of public memory" (p. 338).

The essays by Thierry Gasnier, Marcel Roncayolo, and Jacques Revel, respectively on the "local", the department and the region, dovetail in interesting ways and together might be seen to constitute the core of the collection. In distinctive ways they explore the rise and decline of the *département* as one of the great markers of French identity and the contrasting resonance of locality and region or *pays*. It once appeared inevitable that the slow decline of nationalism in Western Europe since World War II (symbolised by the signing of the Elysée Treaty between Paris and Bonn in 1963) and the greater presence of "Europe" in every aspect of public life would have sounded the death-knell for regional and ethnic identities. Since the 1970s, however, such identities have become more rather than less assertive. Nation-states are now confronted by threats to their powers coming not only from expanding European structures but also, paradoxically, from regional demands long thought obsolete. In large measure this is a war over the veracity of competing versions of the past, each of which constructs and legitimizes a collective identity. Revel uses an extraordinary range of "object markers", from studies of languages and dialects to ethnographic and scientific literature and regional histories: "these have all been used by historians who, whether professional or not, have willingly given themselves the task of reconstructing and rehabilitating the pluralist past of a lost France" (p. 152). This pluralist past—appealed to by those with a deep affinity for their pays but also by revolutionary autonomists and royalists—remains a rich and powerful marker of identity.

As Revel concludes, "the Revolutionary moment was the time of this uncomfortable discovery" of the durability of the region or province (p. 178). Despite the centrality of the *département* to the revolutionary and republican project of uniformity, efficiency, and fraternity, it is increasingly anachronistic as an expression of the state in local life except as the domain of the provincial city. In the words of Marcel Roncayolo, "the crisis of the department signifies something other than the maladjustment of a model or boundary: it is a crisis of the old forms of territoriality, which no longer work...squeezed between micro-local roots and the abstraction of economic exchange" (p. 224). It is the power of those "micro-local roots" which are brilliantly examined by Thierry Gasnier in a survey of expressions of local pride, for example, in the proliferation of learned societies across the nineteenth century, peaking at 915 in 1903; the somewhat later surge in towns with museums (34 in 1814, 255 in 1907, 802 in 1982) and monuments to local contributions to national history; and the identification of local pride with national sentiment (20,777 of France's 36,172 mayors attended a national banquet in 1900).

Like his fellow contributors, however, Gasnier prefers examining the sentiments of those who articulated statements of identity or the monuments which symbolised these sentiments: there is little in any of the chapters which examine the popular reception of, for example, the school texts referred to by Jacques Revel and others. In *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* by G. Bruno (Augustine Fouillée), for example, which had sold eight million copies by 1914, French schoolchildren were presented with an

image of their nation as a land of natural beauty and social harmony, a largely pre-industrial society of peasants and artisans. What might the reports and autobiographies of schoolteachers tell us of the responses of children who struggled to use the French of Fouillée's texts? In other words, this volume is a monument to the 'new cultural history' of the 1980s and 1990s which invites us to extend its challenges to a social history perspective.[3]

The volume concludes with two engrossing case-studies, "The Vendée, Region of memory: the Blue and the White", by Jean-Clément Martin, and "A Frontier Memory: Alsace", by Jean-Marie Mayeur. These are very different in style--Martin's reflective and conceptual, Mayeur's detailed and analytical--but equally instructive. As Martin has demonstrated in his subsequent work, the images so powerful in the west today did not spring into being in 1794 and were not uncontested; rather, they have been--and remain--a memory in construction, in which other memories have been "forgotten" or repudiated.[4] Memory and the use of its space is itself a site of power: "Its social and economic consequences, on the one hand, and the focus of memory on great men and important places, supported by local examples, on the other, were what counted the most" (p. 404).

In response to a question in a 1985 survey in *Le Point* about the strength of feelings about regional identity, 92.3 percent of the inhabitants of Alsace said those feelings were intense, as compared with 85.5 percent for Brittany, 64.5 percent for the Limousin, and less than 50 percent for most of the rest of France (p. 409). This is the sort of evidence which has led Jean-Marie Mayeur to explore two paradoxes: why "this land, which owes so much to German culture, now affirms its attachment to France with such intensity", and also why, despite the fact that "several provinces have witnessed the intensification of regionalist demands to the point that the sense of belonging to the nation almost became a real issue, but Alsace experienced no comparable movement." (p. 412) His answers lie in a confident, instructive sweep through the history of Alsace and its frontier which leave one wondering whether the absence of an equivalent intensity of French nationalism in the Basque country or the Roussillon stems largely from the fact that the last military invasion by Spain was in 1794 rather than also in 1870. The early Third Republic again seems pivotal.

Thanks to the departmental network of the national archive system, two centuries of historical research has contributed to a "departmentalized" map of France, in the same way that school and university teachers have both worked in and inculcated a system which has understood France as a nested hierarchy of communes, cantons, districts and departments. Marcel Roncayolo's second contribution to the volume, on "the scholar's landscape", traces the interdependency of national history and the cognitive apparatus of professional life: "the ordeal of 1870 led to a renaissance in the teaching of geography, which became in a short time a central piece in republican pedagogy. Knowledge of the land and knowledge of the national history appeared to come together and reach their peak in the monumental work to which the geographer Vidal de La Blache lent his assistance, Ernest Lavisse's *Histoire de France*, and which opened the twentieth century" (pp. 343-4).

So the process of constructing history and identity is not simply rooted in reference to territory, state formation, or language; the coordinates of identity are also to be found in the elusive processes of collective remembering and collective forgetting within parameters of space. In France--as everywhere else--collective memory provides the social frameworks of family, social class, religion, and ethnicity that are used to authenticate and explain individual experience and memory. Through the continual reproduction and transmission of socially constructed memories, as Martin reminds us, this sense of identity is perpetuated but is never frozen. At the level of nation-building, the politics of commemoration and the creation of 'sites of memory' have a specific pedagogical role in consolidating national identity. Like Lavisse, historians are themselves agents in such pedagogy: in this case, the achievement of Pierre Nora and his collaborators has been both to elucidate these processes and to create an historical monument of their own.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Pierre Nora (translated by Richard C. Holbrook), "Introduction"

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (translated by Jennifer Gage), "North-South"

Michel Mollat du Jourdin (translated by Richard C. Holbrook), "France, the Coast, and the Sea"

Andrée Corvol (translated by Richard C. Holbrook), "The Forest"

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Jean-Clément Martin (translated by Richard C. Holbrook), "The Vendée, Region of Memory: The Blue and the White"

Jean-Marie Mayeur (translated by Richard C. Holbrook). "A Frontier Memory: Alsace"

NOTES

[1] <http://www.h-france.net/vol2reviews/kramer.html>

[2] Other scholarship has concluded that the impact of the Revolutionary legislation on inheritance was indeed profound in the south. See, for example, Jacques Poumarède, "La législation successorale de la Révolution entre l'idéologie et la pratique," in Irène Thery and Christian Biet, eds., *La Famille, la loi, l'État. De la Révolution au Code Civil* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989); James R. Lehning, *The Peasants of Marllhes. Economic Development and Family Organization in Nineteenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Margaret Darrow, *Revolution in the House: Family, Class and Inheritance in Southern France, 1775-1825* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); and, more generally, Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary*

France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[3] Some examples of this recent interaction of cultural and social history are Claire Andrieu, Gilles Le Béguec, and Danielle Tartakowsky, eds, *Associations et champ politique: La loi de 1901 à l'épreuve de siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001); Tamara Whited, *Forests and Peasant Politics in Modern France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000); Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling and Nation-building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); Jean-François Chanet, *L'École républicaine et les petites patries* (Paris: Aubin, 1996); and Alain Corbin, ed., *L'Avènement des loisirs 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubin, 1995).

[4] See, for example, the works by Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris: Seuil, 1987); *La Vendée de la mémoire: 1800-1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1989); "Histoire et polémique: Les massacres de Machecoul," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 291 (1993): 33-60; and, with Xavier Lardière, *Le massacre des Lucs-Vendée 1794* (Vouillé: Geste éditions, 1992).

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