First published by Verso 1983
This edition published by Verso 2006

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Verso
UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG
USA: 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014–4606
www.versobooks.com

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN–13: 978–1–84467–086–4
ISBN–10: 1–84467–086–4

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh
Printed by Quebecor World, Fairfield

For Mamma and Tantiette
in love and gratitude

11

Memory and Forgetting

SPACE NEW AND OLD

New York, Nueva Leon, Nouvelle Orléans, Nova Lisboa, Nieuw Amsterdam. Already in the sixteenth century Europeans had begun the strange habit of naming remote places, first in the Americas and Africa, later in Asia, Australia, and Oceania, as 'new' versions of (thereby) 'old' toponyms in their lands of origin. Moreover, they retained the tradition even when such places passed to different imperial masters, so the Nouvelle Orléans calmly became New Orleans, and Nieuw Zeeland New Zealand.

It was not that, in general, the naming of political or religious sites as 'new' was in itself so new. In Southeast Asia, for example, one finds towns of reasonable antiquity whose names also include a term for novelty: Chiangmai (New City), Kota Bahru (New Town), Pekanbaru (New Market). But in these names 'new' invariably has the meaning of 'successor' to, or 'inheritor' of, something vanished. 'New' and 'old' are aligned diachronically, and the former appears always to invoke an ambiguous blessing from the dead. What is startling in the American namings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is that 'new' and 'old' were understood synchronically, coexisting within homogeneous, empty time. Vizcaya is there *alongside* Nueva Vizcaya, New London *alongside* London: an idiom of sibling competition rather than of inheritance.

This new synchronic novelty could arise historically only when substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living lives *parallel* to those of other substantial groups of people – if never meeting, yet certainly proceeding along the same trajectory. Between 1500 and 1800 an accumulation of technological innovations in the fields of shipbuilding, navigation, horology and cartography, mediated through print-capitalism, was making this type of imagining possible.[1] It became conceivable to dwell on the Peruvian altiplano, on the pampas of Argentina, or by the harbours of 'New' England, and yet feel connected to certain regions or communities, thousands of miles away, in England or the Iberian peninsula. One could be fully aware of sharing a language and a religious faith (to varying degrees), customs and traditions, without any great expectation of ever meeting one's partners.[2]

For this sense of parallelism or simultaneity not merely to arise, but also to have vast political consequences, it was necessary that the distance between the parallel groups be large, and that the newer of them be substantial in size and permanently settled, as well as firmly subordinated to the older. These conditions were met in the Americas as they had never been before. In the first place, the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean and the utterly different geographical conditions existing on each side of it, made impossible the sort of gradual absorption of populations into larger politico-cultural units that transformed Las Españas into España and submerged Scotland into the United Kingdom. Secondly, as noted in Chapter 4, European migration to the Americas took place on an astonishing scale.

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1. The accumulation reached a frantic zenith in the 'international' (i.e., European) search for an accurate measure of longitude, amusingly recounted in Landes, *Revolution in Time*, chapter 9. In 1776, as the Thirteen Colonies declared their independence, the *Gentleman's Magazine* included this brief obituary for John Harrison: 'He was a most ingenious mechanic, and received the 20,000 pounds reward [from Westminster] for the discovery of the longitude [sic].'

2. The late spreading of this consciousness to Asia is deftly alluded to in the opening pages of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's great historical novel *Bumi Manusia* [Earth of Mankind]. The young nationalist hero muses that he was born on the same date as the future Queen Wilhelmina – 31 August 1880. 'But while my island was wrapped in the darkness of night, her country was bathed in sun; and if her country was embraced by night's blackness, my island glittered in the equatorial noon.' p. 4.

By the end of the eighteenth century there were no less than 3,200,000 'whites' (including no more than 150,000 *peninsulares*) within the 16,900,000 population of the Western empire of the Spanish Bourbons.[3] The sheer size of this immigrant community, no less than its overwhelming military, economic and technological power vis-à-vis the indigenous populations, ensured that it maintained its own cultural coherence and local political ascendancy.[4] Thirdly, the imperial metropole disposed of formidable bureaucratic and ideological apparatuses, which permitted them for many centuries to impose their will on the creoles. (When one thinks of the sheer logistical problems involved, the ability of London and Madrid to carry on long counter-revolutionary wars against rebel American colonists is quite impressive.)

The novelty of all these conditions is suggested by the contrast they afford with the great (and roughly contemporaneous) Chinese and Arab migrations into Southeast Asia and East Africa. These migrations were rarely 'planned' by any metropole, and even more rarely produced stable relations of subordination. In the Chinese case, the only dim parallel is the extraordinary series of voyages far across the Indian ocean which were led, early in the fifteenth century, by the brilliant eunuch admiral Cheng-ho. These daring enterprises, carried out at the orders of the Yung-lo Emperor, were intended to enforce a court monopoly of external trade with

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3. Needless to say, 'whiteness' was a legal category which had a distinctly tangential relationship to complex social realities. As the Liberator himself put it, '*We* are the vile offspring of the predatory Spaniards who came to America to bleed her white and to breed with their victims. Later the illegitimate offspring of these unions joined with the offspring of slaves transported from Africa.' Italics added. Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions*, p. 249. One should beware of assuming anything 'eternally European' in this *criollismo*. Remembering all those devoutly Buddhist-Singhalese Da Souzas, those piously Catholic-Florinese Da Silvas, and those cynically Catholic-Manileño Sorianos who play unproblematic social, economic, and political roles in contemporary Ceylon, Indonesia, and the Philippines, helps one to recognize that, under the right circumstances, Europeans could be gently absorbed into non-European cultures.

4. Compare the fate of the huge African immigrant population. The brutal mechanisms of slavery ensured not merely its political-cultural fragmentation, but also very rapidly removed the possibility of imagining black communities in Venezuela and West Africa moving in parallel trajectory.

Southeast Asia and the regions further west, against the depredations of private Chinese merchants.[5] By mid-century the failure of the policy was clear; whereupon the Ming abandoned overseas adventures and did everything they could to prevent emigration from the Middle Kingdom. The fall of southern China to the Manchus in 1645 produced a substantial wave of refugees into Southeast Asia for whom any political ties with the new dynasty were unthinkable. Subsequent Ch'ing policy did not differ substantially from that of the later Ming. In 1712, for example, an edict of the K'ang-hsi Emperor prohibited all trade with Southeast Asia and declared that his government would 'request foreign governments to have those Chinese who have been abroad repatriated so that they may be executed.'[6] The last great wave of overseas migration took place in the nineteenth century as the dynasty disintegrated and a huge demand for unskilled Chinese labour opened up in colonial Southeast Asia and Siam. Since virtually all migrants were politically cut off from Peking, and were also illiterate people speaking mutually unintelligible languages, they were either more or less absorbed into local cultures or were decisively subordinated to the advancing Europeans.[7]

As for the Arabs, most of their migrations originated from the Hadramaut, never a real metropole in the era of the Ottoman and Mughal empires. Enterprising individuals might find ways to establish local principalities, such as the merchant who founded the kingdom of Pontianak in western Borneo in 1772; but he married locally, soon lost his 'Arabness' if not his Islam, and remained subordinated to the rising Dutch and English empires in Southeast Asia, not to any power in the Near East. In 1832 Sayyid Sa'id, lord of Muscat, established a powerful base on the East African coast and settled on the island of Zanzibar, which he made the centre of a flourishing clove-growing economy. But the British used military means to

5. See O.W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History*, Appendix C.

6. Cited in G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, pp. 15–16.

7. Overseas Chinese communities loomed large enough to stimulate deep European paranoia up to the mid eighteenth century, when vicious anti-Chinese pogroms by Westerners finally ceased. Thereafter, this unlovely tradition was passed on to indigenous populations.

compel him to sever his ties with Muscat.[8] Thus neither Arabs nor Chinese, though they ventured overseas in very large numbers during more or less the same centuries as the Western Europeans, successfully established coherent, wealthy, selfconsciously creole communities subordinated to a great metropolitan core. Hence, the world never saw the rise of New Basras or New Wuhans.

The doubleness of the Americas and the reasons for it, sketched out above, help to explain why nationalism emerged first in the New World, not the Old.[9] They also illuminate two peculiar features of the revolutionary wars that raged in the New World between 1776 and 1825. On the one hand, none of the creole revolutionaries dreamed of keeping the empire intact but rearranging its internal distribution of power, *reversing* the previous relationship of subjection by transferring the metropole from a European to an American site.[10] In other words, the aim was not to have New London succeed, overthrow, or destroy Old London, but rather to safeguard their continuing parallelism. (How new this style of thought was can be inferred from the history of earlier empires in decline, where there was often a dream of *replacing* the old centre.) On the other hand, although these wars caused a great deal of suffering and were marked by much barbarity, in an odd way the stakes were rather low. Neither in North nor in South America did the creoles have to fear physical extermination or reduction to servitude, as did so many other peoples who got in the way of the juggernaut of European imperialism. They were after all 'whites,' Christians, and Spanish- or English-speakers; they were also the intermediaries necessary to the metropoles if the economic wealth of the Western empires was to continue under Europe's control. Hence, they were the one significant extra-

8. See Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*; Vol. 3, pp. 233–5.

9. It is an astonishing sign of the depth of Eurocentrism that so many European scholars persist, in the face of all the evidence, in regarding nationalism as a European invention.

10. But note the ironic case of Brazil. In 1808, King João VI fled to Rio de Janeiro to escape Napoléon's armies. Though Wellington had expelled the French by 1811, the emigrant monarch, fearing republican unrest at home, stayed on in South America until 1822, so that between 1808 and 1822 Rio was the centre of a world empire stretching to Angola, Mozambique, Macao, and East Timor. But this empire was ruled by a European, not an American.

European group, subjected to Europe, that at the same time had no need to be desperately afraid of Europe. The revolutionary wars, bitter as they were, were still reassuring in that they were wars between kinsmen.[11] This family link ensured that, after a certain period of acrimony had passed, close cultural, and sometimes political and economic, ties could be reknit between the former metropoles and the new nations.

TIME NEW AND OLD

If for the creoles of the New World the strange toponyms discussed above represented figuratively their emerging capacity to imagine themselves as communities *parallel and comparable to* those in Europe, extraordinary events in the last quarter of the eighteenth century gave this novelty, quite suddenly, a completely new meaning. The first of these events was certainly the Declaration of (the Thirteen Colonies') Independence in 1776, and the successful military defence of that declaration in the years following. This independence, and the fact that it was a *republican* independence, was felt to be something absolutely unprecedented, yet at the same time, once in existence, absolutely reasonable. Hence, when history made it possible, in 1811, for Venezuelan revolutionaries to draw up a constitution for the First Venezuelan Republic, they saw nothing slavish in borrowing verbatim from the Constitution of the United States of America.[12] For what the men in Philadelphia had written was in the Venezuelans' eyes not something North American, but rather something of universal truth and value. Shortly thereafter, in 1789, the explosion in the New World was *paralleled* in the Old by the volcanic outbreak of the French Revolution.[13]

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11. Doubtless this was what permitted the Liberator to exclaim at one point that a Negro, i.e. slave, revolt would be 'a thousand times worse than a Spanish invasion.' (See above, p. 49). A slave jacquerie, if successful, might mean the physical extermination of the creoles.

12. See Masur, *Bolívar*, p. 131.

13. The French Revolution was in turn *paralleled* in the New World by the outbreak of Toussaint L'Ouverture's insurrection in 1791, which by 1806 had resulted

It is difficult today to recreate in the imagination a condition of life in which the nation was felt to be something utterly new. But so it was in that epoch. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 makes absolutely no reference to Christopher Columbus, Roanoke, or the Pilgrim Fathers, nor are the grounds put forward to justify independence in any way 'historical,' in the sense of highlighting the antiquity of the American people. Indeed, marvellously, the American nation is not even mentioned. A profound feeling that a radical break with the past was occurring – a 'blasting open of the continuum of history'? – spread rapidly. Nothing exemplifies this intuition better than the decision, taken by the Convention *Nationale* on 5 October 1793, to scrap the centuries-old Christian calendar and to inaugurate a new world-era with the Year One, starting from the abolition of the *ancien régime* and the proclamation of the Republic on 22 September 1792.[14] (No subsequent revolution has had quite this sublime confidence of novelty, not least because the French Revolution has always been seen as an ancestor.)

Out of this profound sense of newness came also *nuestra santa revolución*, the beautiful neologism created by José María Morelos y Pavón (proclaimer in 1813 of the Republic of Mexico), not long before his execution by the Spaniards.[15] Out of it too came San Martín's 1821 decree that '*in the future* the aborigines shall not be called Indians or natives; they are children and citizens of Peru and they shall be known as Peruvians.'[16] This sentence does for 'Indians' and/or 'natives' what the Convention in Paris had done for the Christian calendar – it abolished the old time-dishonoured naming and inaugurated a completely new epoch. 'Peruvians' and 'Year One' thus mark rhetorically a profound rupture with the existing world.

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in Haiti's former slaves creating the second independent republic of the Western hemisphere.

14. The young Wordsworth was in France in 1791–1792, and later, in *The Prelude*, wrote these famous reminiscent lines:

> Bliss was it in that *dawn* to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven!

Italics added.

15. Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions*, pp. 314–15.

16. As cited above in chapter 4.

Yet things could not long remain this way – for precisely the same reasons that had precipitated the sense of rupture in the first place. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Britain alone was manufacturing between 150,000 and 200,000 watches a year, many of them for export. Total European manufacture is likely to have then been close to 500,000 items annually.[17] Serially published newspapers were by then a familiar part of urban civilization. So was the novel, with its spectacular possibilities for the representation of simultaneous actions in homogeneous empty time.[18] The cosmic clocking which had made intelligible our synchronic transoceanic pairings was increasingly felt to entail a wholly intramundane, *serial* view of social causality; and this sense of the world was now speedily deepening its grip on Western imaginations. It is thus understandable that less than two decades after the Proclamation of Year One came the establishment of the first academic chairs in History – in 1810 at the University of Berlin, and in 1812 at Napoléon's Sorbonne. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century History had become formally constituted as a 'discipline,' with its own elaborate array of professional journals.[19] Very quickly the Year One made way for 1792 A.D., and the revolutionary ruptures of 1776 and 1789 came to be figured as embedded in the historical series and *thus as historical precedents and models.*[20]

Hence, for the members of what we might call 'second-generation' nationalist movements, those which developed in Europe

17. Landes, *Revolution in Time*, pp. 230–31, 442–43.

18. See above, Chapter 2.

19. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, pp. 135–43, for a sophisticated discussion of this transformation.

20. But it was an A.D. with a difference. Before the rupture it still retained, however fragilely in enlightened quarters, a theological aura glowing from within its medieval Latin. Anno Domini recalled that irruption of eternity into mundane time which took place in Bethlehem. After the rupture, reduced monogrammatically to A.D., it joined an (English) vernacular B.C., Before Christ, that encompassed a serial cosmological history (to which the new science of geology was making signal contributions). We may judge how deep an abyss yawned between Anno Domini and A.D./B.C. by noting that neither the Buddhist nor the Islamic world, even today, imagines any epoch marked as 'Before the Gautama Buddha' or 'Before the Hegira.' Both make uneasy do with the alien monogram B.C.

between about 1815 to 1850, and also for the generation that inherited the independent national states of the Americas, it was no longer possible to 'recapture/The first fine careless rapture' of their revolutionary predecessors. For different reasons and with different consequences, the two groups thus began the process of reading nationalism *genealogically* – as the expression of an historical tradition of serial continuity.

In Europe, the new nationalisms almost immediately began to imagine themselves as 'awakening from sleep,' a trope wholly foreign to the Americas. Already in 1803 (as we have seen in Chapter 5) the young Greek nationalist Adamantios Koraes was telling a sympathetic Parisian audience: '*For the first time* the [Greek] nation surveys the hideous spectacle of its ignorance and *trembles* in measuring with the eye the distance separating it from its ancestors' glory.' Here is perfectly exemplified the transition from New Time to Old. 'For the first time' still echoes the ruptures of 1776 and 1789, but Koraes's sweet eyes are turned, not ahead to San Martín's future, but back, in trembling, to ancestral glories. It would not take long for this exhilarating doubleness to fade, replaced by a modular, 'continuous' awakening from a chronologically gauged, A.D.-style slumber: a guaranteed return to an aboriginal essence.

Undoubtedly, many different elements contributed to the astonishing popularity of this trope.[21] For present purposes, I would mention only two. In the first place, the trope took into account the sense of parallelism out of which the American nationalisms had been born and which the success of the American nationalist revolutions had greatly reinforced in Europe. It seemed to explain why nationalist movements had bizarrely cropped up in the civilized Old World so obviously *later than in the barbarous New.*[22] Read as late awakening, even if an awakening stimulated from afar, it opened up an immense antiquity

21. As late as 1951, the intelligent Indonesian socialist Lintong Mulia Sitorus could still write that: 'Till the end of the nineteenth century, the coloured peoples still slept soundly, while the whites were busily at work in every field.' *Sedjarah Pergerakan Kebangsaan Indonesia* [History of the Indonesian Nationalist Movement], p. 5.

22. One could perhaps say that these revolutions were, in European eyes, the first really important *political* events that had ever occurred across the Atlantic.

behind the epochal sleep. In the second place, the trope provided a crucial metaphorical link between the new European nationalisms and language. As observed earlier, the major states of nineteenth-century Europe were vast polyglot polities, of which the boundaries almost never coincided with language-communities. Most of their literate members had inherited from mediaeval times the habit of thinking of certain languages – if no longer Latin, then French, English, Spanish or German – as languages of civilization. Rich eighteenth-century Dutch burghers were proud to speak only French at home; German was the language of cultivation in much of the western Czarist empire, no less than in 'Czech' Bohemia. Until late in the eighteenth century no one thought of these languages as belonging to any territorially defined group. But soon thereafter, for reasons sketched out in Chapter 3, 'uncivilized' vernaculars began to function politically in the same way as the Atlantic Ocean had earlier done: i.e. to 'separate' subjected national communities off from ancient dynastic realms. And since in the vanguard of most European popular nationalist movements were literate people often *unaccustomed* to using these vernaculars, this anomaly needed explanation. None seemed better than 'sleep,' for it permitted those intelligentsias and bourgeoisies who were becoming conscious of themselves as Czechs, Hungarians, or Finns to figure their study of Czech, Magyar, or Finnish languages, folklores, and musics as 'rediscovering' something deep-down always known. (Furthermore, once one starts thinking about nationality in terms of continuity, few things seem as historically deep-rooted as languages, for which no dated origins can ever be given.)[23]

In the Americas the problem was differently posed. On the one hand, national independence had almost everywhere been internationally acknowledged by the 1830s. It had thus become an inheritance, and, *as an inheritance*, it was compelled to enter a genealogical series. Yet the developing European instrumentalities were not readily available. Language had never been an issue in the

23. Still, historical depth is not infinite. At some point English vanishes into Norman French and Anglo-Saxon; French into Latin and 'German' Frankish; and so on. We shall see below how additional depth of field came to be achieved.

American nationalist movements. As we have seen, it was precisely the sharing with the metropole of a common language (and common religion and common culture) that had made the first national imaginings possible. To be sure, there are some interesting cases where one detects a sort of 'European' thinking early at work. For example, Noah Webster's 1828 (i.e., 'second-generation') *American Dictionary of the English Language* was intended to give an official imprimatur to an American language whose lineage was distinct from that of English. In Paraguay, the eighteenth-century Jesuit tradition of using Guaraní made it possible for a radically non-Spanish 'native' language to become a *national* language, under the long, xenophobic dictatorship of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1814–1840). But, on the whole, any attempt to give historical depth to nationality via linguistic means faced insuperable obstacles. Virtually all the creoles were institutionally committed (via schools, print media, administrative habits, and so on) to European rather than indigenous American tongues. Any excessive emphasis on linguistic lineages threatened to blur precisely that 'memory of independence' which it was essential to retain.

The solution, eventually applicable in both New and Old Worlds, was found in History, or rather History emplotted in particular ways. We have observed the speed with which Chairs in History succeeded the Year One. As Hayden White remarks, it is no less striking that the five presiding geniuses of European historiography were all born within the quarter century following the Convention's rupturing of time: Ranke in 1795, Michelet in 1798, Tocqueville in 1805, and Marx and Burckhardt in 1818.[24] Of the five, it is perhaps natural that Michelet, self-appointed historian of the Revolution, most clearly exemplifies the national imagining being born, for he was the first selfconsciously to write *on behalf* of the dead.[25] The following passage is characteristic:

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24. *Metahistory*, p. 140. Hegel, born in 1770, was already in his late teens when the Revolution broke out, but his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* were only published in 1837, six years after his death.

25. White, *Metahistory*, p. 159.

> Oui, chaque mort laisse un petit bien, sa mémoire, et demande qu'on la soigne. Pour celui qui n'a pas d'amis, il faut que le magistrat y supplée. Car la loi, la justice, est plus sûre que toutes nos tendresses oublieuses, nos larmes si vite séchées. Cette magistrature, c'est l'Histoire. Et les morts sont, pour dire comme le Droit romain, ces *miserabiles personae* dont le magistrat doit se préoccuper. Jamais dans ma carrière je n'ai pas perdu de vue ce devoir de l'historien. J'ai donné à beaucoup de morts trop oubliés l'assistance dont moi-même j'aurai besoin. Je les ai exhumés pour une seconde vie . . . Ils vivent maintenant avec nous qui nous sentons leurs parents, leurs amis. Ainsi se fait une famille, une cité commune entre les vivants et les morts.[26]

Here and elsewhere Michelet made it clear that those whom he was exhuming were by no means a random assemblage of forgotten, anonymous dead. They were those whose sacrifices, throughout History, made possible the rupture of 1789 and the selfconscious appearance of the French nation, *even when these sacrifices were not understood as such by the victims*. In 1842, he noted of these dead: 'Il leur faut un Oedipe qui leur explique leur propre énigme dont ils n'ont pas eu le sens, qui leur apprenne ce que voulaient dire leurs paroles, leurs actes, qu'ils n'ont pas compris.'[27]

This formulation is probably unprecedented. Michelet not only claimed to speak on behalf of large numbers of anonymous dead people, but insisted, with poignant authority, that he could say what they 'really' meant and 'really' wanted, since they themselves 'did not understand.' From then on, the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires.

In this vein, more and more 'second-generation' nationalists, in the Americas and elsewhere, learned to speak 'for' dead people with whom it was impossible or undesirable to establish a linguistic connection. This reversed ventriloquism helped to open the way for a selfconscious *indigenismo*, especially in the southern Americas. At

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26. Jules Michelet, *Oeuvres Complètes*, XXI, p. 268, in the preface to volume 2 ('Jusqu'au 18e Brumaire') of his uncompleted *Histoire du XIXe Siècle*. I owe the reference to *Metahistory*, but the translation White uses is unsatisfactory.

27. Cited in Roland Barthes, ed., *Michelet par lui-même*, p. 92. The volume of the *Oeuvres Complètes* containing this quotation has not yet been published.

the edge: Mexicans speaking in Spanish 'for' pre-Columbian 'Indian' civilizations whose languages they do not understand.[28] How revolutionary this kind of exhumation was appears most clearly if we contrast it with the formulation of Fermín de Vargas, cited in chapter 2. For where Fermín still thought cheerfully of 'extinguishing' living Indians, many of his political grandchildren became obsessed with 'remembering,' indeed 'speaking for' them, perhaps precisely because they had, by then, so often been *extinguished.*

THE REASSURANCE OF FRATRICIDE

It is striking that in Michelet's 'second generation' formulations the focus of attention is always the exhumation of people and events which stand in danger of oblivion.[29] He sees no need to think about 'forgetting.' But when, in 1882 – more than a century after the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, and eight years after the death of Michelet himself – Renan published his *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, it was precisely the need for forgetting that preoccupied him. Reconsider, for example, the formulation cited earlier in chapter 1:[30]

> Or, l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. . . . Tout citoyen français *doit avoir oublié* la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle.

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28. Conversely, in all Mexico there is only one statue of Hernán Cortés. This monument, tucked discreetly away in a niche of Mexico City, was only put up at the end of the 1970s, by the odious regime of José López Portillo.

29. Doubtless because for much of his life he suffered under restored or ersatz legitimacies. His commitment to 1789 and to France is movingly shown by his refusal to swear an oath of loyalty to Louis Napoléon. Abruptly dismissed from his post as National Archivist, he lived in near-poverty till his death in 1874 – long enough, however, to witness the mountebank's fall and the restoration of republican institutions.

30. Renan was born in 1823, a quarter of a century after Michelet, and passed much of his youth under the cynically official-nationalist regime of Michelet's persecutor.

At first sight these two sentences may seem straightforward.[31] Yet a few moments reflection reveals how bizarre they actually are. One notices, for example, that Renan saw no reason to explain for his readers what either 'la Saint-Barthélemy' or 'les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle' meant. Yet who but 'Frenchmen,' as it were, would have at once understood that 'la Saint-Barthélemy' referred to the ferocious anti-Huguenot pogrom launched on 24 August 1572 by the Valois dynast Charles IX and his Florentine mother; or that 'les massacres du Midi' alluded to the extermination of the Albigensians across the broad zone between the Pyrenees and the Southern Alps, instigated by Innocent III, one of the guiltier in a long line of guilty popes? Nor did Renan find anything queer about assuming 'memories' in his readers' minds even though the events themselves occurred 300 and 600 years previously. One is also struck by the peremptory syntax of *doit avoir oublié* (not *doit oublier*) – 'obliged already to have forgotten' – which suggests, in the ominous tone of revenue-codes and military conscription laws, that 'already having forgotten' ancient tragedies is a prime contemporary civic duty. In effect, Renan's readers were being told to 'have already forgotten' what Renan's own words assumed that they naturally remembered!

How are we to make sense of this paradox? We may start by observing that the singular *French* noun 'la Saint-Barthélemy' occludes killers and killed – i.e., those Catholics and Protestants who played one local part in the vast unholy Holy War that raged across central and northern Europe in the sixteenth century, and who certainly did not think of themselves cosily together as 'Frenchmen.' Similarly, 'thirteenth-century massacres of the Midi' blurs unnamed victims and assassins behind the pure Frenchness of 'Midi.' No need to remind his readers that most of the murdered Albigensians spoke Provençal or Catalan, and that their murderers came from many parts of Western Europe. The effect of this tropology is to figure episodes in the colossal religious conflicts of mediaeval and early modern Europe as reassuringly fratricidal wars between – who else? – *fellow Frenchmen.* Since we can be confident that, left to themselves, the overwhelming majority of Renan's French contemporaries would never have heard

31. I understood them so in 1983, alas.

of 'la Saint-Barthélemy' or 'les massacres du Midi,' we become aware of a systematic historiographical campaign, deployed by the state mainly through the state's school system, to 'remind' every young Frenchwoman and Frenchman of a series of antique slaughters which are now inscribed as 'family history.' Having to 'have already forgotten' tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be 'reminded' turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies. (It is instructive that Renan does *not* say that each French citizen is obliged to 'have already forgotten' the Paris Commune. In 1882 its memory was still real rather than mythic, and sufficiently painful to make it difficult to read under the sign of 'reassuring fratricide.')

Needless to say, in all this there was, and is, nothing especially French. A vast pedagogical industry works ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861–65 as a great 'civil' war between 'brothers' rather than between – as they briefly were – two sovereign nation-states. (We can be sure, however, that if the Confederacy had succeeded in maintaining its independence, this 'civil war' would have been replaced in memory by something quite unbrotherly.) English history textbooks offer the diverting spectacle of a great Founding Father whom every schoolchild is taught to call William the Conqueror. The same child is not informed that William spoke no English, indeed could not have done so, since the English language did not exist in his epoch; nor is he or she told 'Conqueror of what?'. For the only intelligible modern answer would have to be 'Conqueror of the English,' which would turn the old Norman predator into a more successful precursor of Napoléon and Hitler. Hence 'the Conqueror' operates as the same kind of ellipsis as 'la Saint-Barthélemy,' to remind one of something which it is immediately obligatory to forget. Norman William and Saxon Harold thus meet on the battlefield of Hastings, if not as dancing partners, at least as brothers.

But it is surely too easy to attribute these reassuring ancient fratricides simply to the icy calculations of state functionaries. At another level they reflect a deep reshaping of the imagination of which the state was barely conscious, and over which it had, and still has, only exiguous control. In the 1930s people of many nationalities

went to fight in the Iberian peninsula because they viewed it as the arena in which global historical forces and causes were at stake. When the long-lived Franco regime constructed the Valley of the Fallen, it restricted membership in the gloomy necropolis to those who, in its eyes, had died in the world-struggle against Bolshevism and atheism. But, at the state's margins, a 'memory' was already emerging of a 'Spanish' Civil War. Only after the crafty tyrant's death, and the subsequent, startlingly smooth transition to bourgeois democracy – in which it played a crucial role – did this 'memory' become official. In much the same way, the colossal class war that, from 1918 to 1920, raged between the Pamirs and the Vistula came to be remembered/forgotten in Soviet film and fiction as 'our' civil war, while the Soviet state, on the whole, held to an orthodox Marxist reading of the struggle.

In this regard the creole nationalisms of the Americas are especially instructive. For on the one hand, the American states were for many decades weak, effectively decentralized, and rather modest in their educational ambitions. On the other hand, the American societies, in which 'white' settlers were counterposed to 'black' slaves and half-exterminated 'natives,' were internally riven to a degree quite unmatched in Europe. Yet the imagining of that fraternity, without which the reassurance of fratricide can not be born, shows up remarkably early, and not without a curious authentic popularity. In the United States of America this paradox is particularly well exemplified.

In 1840, in the midst of a brutal eight-year war against the Seminoles of Florida (and as Michelet was summoning his Oedipus), James Fenimore Cooper published *The Pathfinder*, the fourth of his five, hugely popular, Leatherstocking Tales. Central to this novel (and to all but the first of its companions) is what Leslie Fiedler called the 'austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love' binding the 'white' woodsman Natty Bumppo and the noble Delaware chieftain Chingachgook ('Chicago'!).[32] Yet the Renanesque setting for their

32. See his *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 192. Fiedler read this relationship psychologically, and ahistorically, as an instance of American fiction's failure to deal with adult heterosexual love and its obsession with death, incest, and innocent homoeroticism. Rather than a national eroticism, it is, I suspect, an

bloodbrotherhood is not the murderous 1830s but the last forgotten/remembered years of British imperial rule. Both men are figured as 'Americans,' fighting for survival – against the French, their 'native' allies (the 'devilish Mingos'), and treacherous agents of George III.

When, in 1851, Herman Melville depicted Ishmael and Queequeg cosily in bed together at the Spouter Inn ('there, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg'), the noble Polynesian savage was sardonically Americanized as follows:[33]

> . . . . certain it was that his head was phrenologically an excellent one. It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of George Washington's head, as seen in popular busts of him. It had the same long regularly graded retreating slope above the brows, which were likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed.

It remained for Mark Twain to create in 1881, well after the 'Civil War' and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the first indelible image of black and white as American 'brothers': Jim and Huck companionably adrift on the wide Mississippi.[34] But the setting is a remembered/forgotten antebellum in which the black is still a slave.

These striking nineteenth-century imaginings of fraternity, emerging 'naturally' in a society fractured by the most violent racial, class and regional antagonisms, show as clearly as anything else that nationalism in the age of Michelet and Renan represented a new form of consciousness – a consciousness that arose when it was no longer possible to experience the nation as new, at the wave-top moment of rupture.

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eroticized nationalism that is at work. Male-male bondings in a Protestant society which from the start rigidly prohibited miscegenation are paralleled by male-female 'holy loves' in the nationalist fiction of Latin America, where Catholicism permitted the growth of a large mestizo population. (It is telling that English has had to borrow 'mestizo' from Spanish.)

33. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, p. 71. How the author must have savoured the malignant final phrase!

34. It is agreeable to note that the publication of *Huckleberry Finn* preceded by only a few months Renan's evocation of 'la Saint-Barthélemy.'

THE BIOGRAPHY OF NATIONS

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives. After experiencing the physiological and emotional changes produced by puberty, it is impossible to 'remember' the consciousness of childhood. How many thousands of days passed between infancy and early adulthood vanish beyond direct recall! How strange it is to need another's help to learn that this naked baby in the yellowed photograph, sprawled happily on rug or cot, is you. The photograph, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, is only the most peremptory of a huge modern accumulation of documentary evidence (birth certificates, diaries, report cards, letters, medical records, and the like) which simultaneously records a certain apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, *identity* (yes, you and that naked baby are identical) which, because it can not be 'remembered,' must be narrated. Against biology's demonstration that every single cell in a human body is replaced over seven years, the narratives of autobiography and biography flood print-capitalism's markets year by year.

These narratives, like the novels and newspapers discussed in Chapter 2, are set in homogeneous, empty time. Hence their frame is historical and their setting sociological. This is why so many autobiographies begin with the circumstances of parents and grandparents, for which the autobiographer can have only circumstantial, textual evidence; and why the biographer is at pains to record the calendrical, A.D. dates of two biographical events which his or her subject can never remember: birth-day and death-day. Nothing affords a sharper reminder of this narrative's modernity than the opening of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. For the Evangelist gives us an austere list of thirty males successively begetting one another, from the Patriarch Abraham down to Jesus Christ. (Only once is a woman mentioned, not because she is a begetter, but because she is a non-Jewish Moabite). No dates are given for any of Jesus's forebears, let alone sociological, cultural, physiological or political information about them. This narrative

style (which also reflects the rupture-in-Bethlehem become memory) was entirely reasonable to the sainted genealogist because he did not conceive of Christ as an historical 'personality,' but only as the true Son of God.

As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity – product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century – engenders the need for a narrative of 'identity.' The task is set for Michelet's magistrate. Yet between narratives of person and nation there is a central difference of emplotment. In the secular story of the 'person' there is a beginning and an end. She emerges from parental genes and social circumstances onto a brief historical stage, there to play a role until her death. After that, nothing but the penumbra of lingering fame or influence. (Imagine how strange it would be, today, to end a life of Hitler by observing that on 30 April 1945 he proceeded straight to Hell). Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural.[35] Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography can not be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' – towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversion of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present. World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel.

Yet the deaths that structure the nation's biography are of a special kind. In all the 1,200 pages of his awesome *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* Fernand Braudel mentions Renan's 'la Saint-Barthélemy' only in passing, though it occurred exactly *nel mezzo del camino* of the Habsburg dynast's reign. 'Les événements,' writes the Master (vol. 2, p. 223) 'sont poussière; ils traversent l'histoire comme des lueurs brèves; à peine naissent-ils qu'ils retournent déjà à la nuit et souvent à l'oubli.' For Braudel, the deaths that matter are those myriad anonymous events, which,

35. For such apocalypses the neologism 'genocide' was quite recently coined.

aggregated and averaged into secular mortality rates, permit him to chart the slow-changing conditions of life for millions of anonymous human beings of whom the last question asked is their nationality.

From Braudel's remorselessly accumulating cemeteries, however, the nation's biography snatches, against the going mortality rate, exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts. But, to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own.'