

*H-France Review* Vol. 16 (July 2016), No. 98

Philip Whalen and Patrick Young, eds. *Place and Locality in Modern France*. London and New Delhi: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. xl+221 pp. Illustrations, contributors, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-78093-686-4.

Review by Rebecca K. McCoy, Lebanon Valley College of Pennsylvania.

Regions, villages and local places have long been central to French history, the idea of France, and French national identity. From Michelet, to the Annalists, and now to the more recent focus on cultural history, French historians have used France's regions as frameworks for their studies and as microcosms of national economic, social, demographic, and cultural trends. Ideas of French localism have also marked French political discourse: the right has romanticized French regionalism and particularly French rural life, whereas the republican left has seen localism as something to be tamed and integrated as part of a project to construct the nation from the center outward and impose a unitary notion of national identity.<sup>[1]</sup> Despite this centralizing tendency, local and rural cultures have persisted and are integral to the idea of France. Numerous studies have shown that the construction of French identity has operated in a dialogue between the center and the periphery; that French men and women have held onto their regional and local cultures; and that identities are multivalent.<sup>[2]</sup>

More recent research has once again looked at the local to reformulate how France's regions can be used as a vehicle for understanding French history. The nineteen essays in this volume, including the introduction, provide an overview of the new scholarship using place and locality as categories of analysis. Influenced by globalization and new scholarship on colonialism, these essays challenge the nation as the default framework for analysis. Whereas earlier work used local studies to examine processes of modernization, these articles look at how local communities are reinventing themselves so as to remain sustainable. Taken together, they demonstrate the new avenues of research on the relationship among local, regional, national, and transnational and argue for the fluidity of conceptions of local spaces (p. xv). The editors have organized the essays into three parts, each of which addresses a different aspect of locality in history. The first section draws on multidisciplinary research on space, especially from the field of geography, as a tool of analysis. The second focuses on culture, and the third on politics. These sections are, however, hardly mutually exclusive and not always clearly delineated in method or focus.

The influence of geography on French history in the past, as summarized in the introduction, has informed the section on space but also provides the underpinning for all three sections. The intersection of geography and history in the study of France dates back to the work of Michelet and continued to Paul Vidal de la Blache. In the 1920s, the Annalists' first looked at the importance of geography and locality in situating their studies. Most notably, one of the founders of the Annales School, Lucien Lefebvre, circumscribed his early work within a regional framework. Although his collaborator, Marc Bloch, did not limit his studies to a particular region, the research of both historians emphasized rural France and paid attention to geographical variations.<sup>[3]</sup> Their student, Fernand Braudel, also situated his magisterial study on the Mediterranean within a regional framework.<sup>[4]</sup> A subsequent generation of historians used the framework of the region as microcosms in which they could analyze long-term

patterns of demographic, economic, and social changes.[5] These studies were based on a geographical determinism that has drawn fire from critics for minimizing human agency. Other challengers to the Annales formulation focused on how spaces could structure power relations.[6] They also rejected the Annaliste's conceptions of geographical spaces as structures that were relatively static by arguing that changing conceptions of space and social change were interactive processes (p. xix). As cultural approaches became important to historical analysis, Pierre Nora's work demonstrated the ways in which memory is grounded in specific places (p. xix).[7] More recently, researchers have grounded the concept of memory not just in terms of concrete places and territories, but also in terms of figurative space (p. xix).[8]

The essays in the section on space build on past applications of geography to French history. Joseph Tendler's article takes up the historiographical points made in the introduction. He argues that both the Annales School and its detractors fail to bring together space and temporality in a satisfactory way. Whereas the Annalistes emphasized space as a relatively unchanging structure, their detractors attributed the greatest importance to individual events. Tendler argues for looking at space as not just a surface over which events occur but as having a particular logic of change over time. Unlike Tendler's take on the Annales School directly, articles by Catherine Dunlop, and Philip Whalen explore the various ways in which local understandings of regions are not fixed in time but are reinvented. Dunlop analyzes maps from the prerevolutionary period, the German annexation of 1870-1919, and the French Interwar period. She argues that French and German conceptions of the relationship between the local, regional, and national revealed differing conceptions of identity that each government tried to impress upon the Alsatians. Whalen argues that in the late nineteenth century, Burgundians promoted gastronomic tourism that restructured their identity. The impetus provided by a national focus on regionalism and concerns about the forces of modernization that threatened to marginalize their region explains this change. This reinvention, moreover, transcended time and space because by purchasing Burgundian products, regional culture could be consumed at any place and any time. Both of these studies show how regional identities could change, how they were refashioned in relation to national trends, and how the meaning of the local could change over time by explicit and intentional processes.

The other essays in this section on space address the ways in which the local was not only defined by national boundaries, but also could be understood in terms of transnational connections. Ian Collier explores the ways in which Marseilles had a historic connect to the Mediterranean, one that predated its attachment to France. He then traces how, after losing its identity after the revolt against Jacobin rule, the Napoleonic regime restored Marseilles as a municipality. Under the Bourbons, the city struck a bargain with the national government by accepting integration in exchange for Paris's recognition of its Mediterranean interests, now in the form of its role in colonialism in Algeria. Linda Guerry also focuses on the ways in which Marseilles was able to capitalize on its international connections. Her piece examines the International Migration Service that mediated between migrants and the French state, thereby also situating Marseilles at the nexus of the local, national, and transnational. Finally, Allison Carroll's contribution addresses the ways in which festival organizers used exhibitions to reintroduce Alsace not to the France they had known before 1870, but to a nation that had now become a colonial power. By juxtaposing displays on Alsatian culture with colonial exhibits, the organizers also sought to introduce the French to the formerly "lost Province." By so doing, the exhibition highlighted some of the difficulties of reintegrating this region and demonstrated the anxieties raised by the growing autonomous movement. All three of these articles demonstrate how the history of French imperialism has been entwined with changing notion of the local and the national in France.

The second section of the book draws on approaches to place and locality in terms of recent trends in cultural history, again, outlined in the introduction. The editors do not ground this scholarship as clearly, although the reader can surmise that they intended the discussion of cultural history in the introduction's section on space as the theoretical backdrop. In addition, some of the articles seem to overlap with the first section in the themes that they address. Articles by Jessica M. Dandona and Nathan Bracher address

artistic and literary traditions. The piece by Dandona addresses the invention a style of decorative arts in Lorraine that was negotiated between the local and national. The artists of the *École de Nancy* wanted a regional style that would also be typically French and so promote a recognizably French style abroad. Similar to the reinvention of Burgundian traditions, the Lorraine artists worked to create a recognizable artistic style associated with their region, one that could be marketed further afield and even internationally. As in Burgundy, the Lorrainers were responding to the new realities of modernity in which they had to adapt to a world beyond their region even as they tried to preserve it. The article by Bracher is quite different. It addresses the more abstract notion of belonging as defined by two Jewish authors caught up in Vichy and the Nazi occupation. Through their writing, these authors used their outside status to articulate a clear vision of national identity and responsibility to the nation that avoided overheated nationalism. Instead, they articulated values of responsible citizenship that were intrinsic to the republic. Although this article addresses the difference between the authors' previous internationalism and their responsibility to the nation, it focuses on the nation as an abstract space and has little to do with the local.

Two other articles in this section are particularly grounded in the reinvention of particular places. Elizabeth Vlossak's essay also addresses the difficulties posed by Vichy and the Second World War. She demonstrates the complicated relationship between local and national memories by showing how and why Schirmeck remained only a local site of memory. In contrast, Oradour moved beyond local commemoration by reinventing itself. This refashioning gave the site national and even international significance by situating it in a broader story about Nazi-occupied Europe and the Holocaust. This article connects to that by Bracher in that both address the difficulties of France in coming to terms with the memories and conceptions of the Second World War. Nonetheless, one focuses on the nation as an abstract or "imagined" space, whereas Vlossak's piece is much more grounded in the type of research pioneered by Pierre Nora.<sup>[9]</sup> Work by Stacy E. Holden, like the article by Vlossak, also addresses the reinvention of a specific site. She demonstrates the ways in which the French, in purportedly preserving the Oudaya casbah in Rabat, actually changed it architecturally to conform to their notions of what was historic at the expense of the colonial subjects they intended to protect. This article, like those on Marseilles, addresses the intersection of the local and transnational through the prism of colonial empire.

This section also includes two articles that address how specific towns, as opposed to regions, reinvented themselves over time in order to remain sustainable in the face of globalization and declining economies, again overlapping with themes in section one. Essays by Audra Merfield-Langston and N. Christine Brooks demonstrate the ways in which several French villages have used tourism and marketing to national and international audiences to revitalize and perpetuate their communities. This process operated at the village level but shared many characteristics with the reinventions in Burgundy, Lorraine, and Marseilles discussed by Whalen, Dandona, and Coller. The book villages described by Merfeld-Langston and Barclonnette as described by Brookes differed in that these towns reinvented a totally new tradition whereas the other cases drew on reinvented traditions.

The last section of the book addresses politics as a way to understand the role of place and locality in French history. It examines how "local actors, constituencies, and agendas have played in French politics, and how local fealties have been brokered in specific institutional arrangements and settings" (p. xxv). This section draws on scholarship about center versus periphery discussed in the introduction. In contrast to earlier interpretations of politics as modern only if understood in national terms, these studies understand local and national politics as linked and in dialogue with one another.<sup>[10]</sup> These articles go beyond earlier studies by demonstrating that loyalties are not exclusively national or local. They argue that people can have multiple political loyalties that are simultaneously local, regional, national, and transnational. The articles in this section address such themes as mobility, psychological attachment to pays, political symbolism, political constructions of space, and the leftist realignment of the 1970s and 1980s. Compared to the part of the book on culture, the themes in this section fit the categorization of "political" more clearly.

Essays by Denise Z. Davidson, Christopher Tozzi, and Thomas Dodman address how people preserved local identities even as they moved among regions. Davidson looks at a network of friends and relatives who were firmly grounded in Lyon but left due to the political upheaval of the revolution in the city. Inter-marriage and the pull of new economic opportunities in Rouen also provided reasons to settle permanently outside of the Lyonnais even as the migrants maintained networks of family and friends linked to their native city. Tozzi's article argues that the army was more than a force for centralization and integration because its methods of recruitment and regional units actually preserved local identities. Dodman also examines the role of soldiers in the army. He emphasizes how the growing importance of psychology between the early nineteenth and late twentieth century changed the military view of homesickness and soldiers' attachments to their pays. At the beginning of the period, doctors treated homesickness as a medical illness that resulted from absence from home. By the end of the century, although doctors still treated conscripts as having a physical malady, they viewed the issue of homesickness also as one of nostalgia for the past. All three of these articles clearly show how removal from the native locality of region did not erase local identities.

The other articles in this section address different aspects of the intersection between politics and the local thereby demonstrating the variety of ways in which local and national politics were entwined. Andrew W. M. Smith discusses how the Occitan cross, a long-standing symbol, was repurposed in the post-war period. People in Languedoc first used the cross to protest grievances against the French state. This symbol later became institutionalized in ways that reconciled the region and the state as the government moved away from being threatened by regionalism and implemented the decentralization laws of the early 1980s. Emile Chabal similarly addresses regionalism by focusing on the long-time mayor of Montpellier and later president of the regional council, Georges Frêche. Chabal shows how Frêche was able to draw on local tradition as well as commercialism to revive Montpellier as a regional center. In so doing, he navigated national political trends such as integrating the *Pieds-Noirs*, the economic downturn after 1973, and the reconfiguration of socialist politics. The article by Thomas Procureur returns to the idea of space as a changing phenomenon by showing how, although departments as territories have changed little since the revolution, their political function and meaning have been redefined, especially in the wake of the decentralization laws.

Taken together, these articles show the breadth and innovativeness in new scholarship on place and locality. All of the articles address the intersection of change over time with that of space. Unlike the Annalists they do not see territories or regions as structures over which change occurs, but as having meanings that can vary over time. The conceptual framework that defines the three sections of the book, however, is not always clear. Because the book is about space and place, the section on space seems to be implicit in the other sections rather than a totally separate category. The theoretical section on culture in the introductory essay is under defined and perhaps this explains why there was overlap between the articles on culture and those of other sections. The section on politics fit together more clearly, although it, too, relies on the theoretical concerns in the editors' discussion of space.

The commonality of the themes that these articles address ties them together more clearly. All demonstrate that place, region, nation, and transnational are not mutually exclusive either in how the French imagine them or in shaping identities. The issue of globalization and economic modernization and how villages or regions reshaped themselves through reinvention also runs through many of these studies. This look at modernization, however, is no longer a "one size fits all" set of economic and political changes imposed by the state. In these essays, national and local have been negotiated with differing results. Similarly, the nation is no longer the only framework for understanding French history; instead, connections overseas through trade, immigration, or colonialism have extended the determinants of local and national identity beyond the borders of metropolitan France.

The volume does have some gaps. Although international forces are part of the discussion, few of them explicitly explored the impact of the European Union and its regulations or cross-border regional cooperation. Only a few of these articles directly engage the relationship between memory and place articulated by Pierre Nora, but many of the others do imply memory in that the villages, regions, and even internal migrants, made reference to past traditions in order to reinvent or depart from them. Finally, this set of essays does not address how gendered conceptions of space played a role in how the people of France invented and reinvented their concepts of the local, the nation, and Greater France.

In conclusion, the strength of the collection is the ways in which the articles represent new directions in the long tradition of French historiography on the role of the regional or local. By showing the intersections among villages, regions, the national, and the transnational, this collection validates the usefulness of micro history and yet puts the local into broader context. These articles also transcend or show how seeming polarities in French politics, culture, and society actually work together. The essays move beyond previous historiography and set an agenda for future work. The collection does this especially well in defining themes such as economic change, reinvention of tradition, the redefinition of local spaces and places, and the significance of France's overseas empire and post-colonial issues.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Patrick Young and Philip Whalen, "The Local in French History: Changing Paradigms and Possibilities"

##### Part 1 Space

Ian Coller, "The Republic of Marseille and the Making of Imperial France"

Catherine T. Dunlop, "The Cartographic Language of Locality: Lessons from Alsace"

Philip Whalen, "Gastronomic Burgundy as a Regional Modernization Project"

Alison Carrol, "Imagining Greater France in the Provinces: The Strasbourg Colonial Exhibition of 1924"

Joseph Tendler, "*Annales* Historians' Contested Transformations"

Linda, Guerry, "A Local and Transnational Approach to Migration:" the International Migration Service and its Marseilles Office in the First Half of the Twentieth Century"

##### Part 2 Culture

Jessica Dandona, "La Lorraine Artiste: Modernity, Nature, and the Nation in the Work of Émile Gallé and the École de Nancy"

Stacy E. Holden, "The Casbah des Oudaya: The Colonial Production of a Historic District in Morocco"

Nathan Bracher, "Facing the Nation: National Sentiment and National Belonging in the Wartime Writings of Irène Nemirovsky and Léon Werth"

Elizabeth Vlossak, "Remembering Oradour and Schirmeck: Struggles of Regional Memory and National Commemoration"

Audra Merfeld-Langston, "Judging a Book Town by its Cover: Marketing French *Villages de Livre*"

N. Christine Brookes, "Our Cousins in the new World: Celebrating Mexico in the French Alps"

Part 3 Politics

Denise Z. Davidson, "Local Identities and Internal Migration: Networking as a Survival Strategy in Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary France"

Christopher Tozzi, "Soldiers of the *Pays*: Localism and Nationalism"

Thomas Dodman, "From *mal du pays* to *l'amour du pays*: Fatal Nostalgia and the Local in Nineteenth-Century France"

Andrew W. M. Smith, "An Uncertain Icon: The Changing Significance of the *Croix Occitane* in the Postwar Midi"

Thomas Procureur, "Adoption and Adaptation: The Survival of French *Départements*"

Emile Chabal, "*Le Président?* Georges Frêche and the Making of a Local *Notable* in late Twentieth-Century France"

NOTES

[1] One of the most prominent proponents of this view has been Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[2] James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in France during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Rural France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of Rural France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and Rebecca K. McCoy, "Alsations into Frenchmen: The Construction of national identities at Saint-Marie-aux-Mines, 1815-1851," *French History* 12:4, 429-451.

[3] Lucien Febvre, *Phillippe II et le Franche-Comté* (1912); and Marc Bloch, *La Societe rurale française and la Société Féodale*, 2 v. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[4] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 3v. (1949)

[5] Among these studies are Pierre Goubert's *Beauvais et les Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (1960); and Emmanuel la Roy Ladurie's *Les Paysans de Languedoc* (1966).

[6] Most notably, Michel Foucault in studies such as *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Pantheon, 1961) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1975).

[7] Among these critics are Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1984)

[8] Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 3 v. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

[9] Ibid; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

[10] Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*. These articles reject Weber's conception of how politics spread from the center to the periphery.

Rebecca K. McCoy  
Lebanon Valley College of Pennsylvania  
[mccoy@lvc.edu](mailto:mccoy@lvc.edu)

Copyright © 2016 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172