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"Ce Jour Immortel": The Storming of the Bastille and the Formation of Cultural Memory, 1789–1794

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“CE JOUR IMMORTEL”:
THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE AND THE FORMATION OF
CULTURAL MEMORY, 1789–1794

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Abstract

On 14 July 1789, a Parisian crowd stormed the Bastille prison in an act of popular violence that is now remembered as one of the most significant events of the French Revolution. During the ensuing five years, the French national memory of the storming of the Bastille was interpreted, guided, and contested by each dominating faction of the Revolution, and gradually came to manifest the central ideals and ironies of the Revolution itself. However, in the historiography of the French Revolution, the formation of this cultural memory has been strangely overlooked. This thesis seeks to fill the gap in the existing scholarship by drawing on a historiographical base that spans both French Revolution and cultural memory studies, as well as a diverse range of primary sources, to explore the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille as a new vantage point in the study of the Revolution. It covers the years between 1789 and 1794, focusing primarily on the annual anniversary celebrations, in order to illuminate both official and non-official interpretations and influences on this societal memory during the Revolution's major ideological and political phases. In the process, this thesis reveals the complex nature of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille, its crucial role in the ideological developments of the Revolution in the years 1789–1794, and its unique centrality to the French Revolution as a whole.

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Preface

In presenting a study of the formation of cultural memory surrounding the storming of the Bastille prison in 1789, this work aims to contribute to the existing historiography of the French Revolution, help to fill a distinct gap in that historiography, and put forward a story that provides a new angle from which to view the social, political and ideological developments of the Revolution. Due to the complexity of this story, I have decided to cover the period 1789–1794, which includes the moderate, liberal and radical phases of the Revolution, thus demonstrating the shifting cultural memory of the event in terms of each dominating faction of the Revolution. The long-term evolution of the cultural memory of 14 July 1789, extending to the present day, will be reserved for a future project. I have also focused primarily on Paris, the governmental and ideological center of the Revolution, because of the thoroughness of Parisian records and the importance of both the revolutionary government and the Parisian crowd in this narrative. Where possible, quotes have been reproduced in the original French; however, some old-style spellings have been converted to modern ones to prevent confusion. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Introduction

Within the vast historiography of the French Revolution, the storming of the Bastille prison by a Parisian crowd on 14 July 1789 has been surprisingly neglected. This may seem to be a remarkable claim given that historians have discussed it as a seminal event of the Revolution, but no existing scholarship has explored the legacy of the *prise de la Bastille* as a collective memory, one that was shared and contested by the whole revolutionary population and that continued to influence Revolutionary thinking and actions for years following the summer of 1789.¹ This story is relevant to the entire span of the Revolution, because it persisted even through the upheaval of factional discord and the turmoil of régime changes and shifting political ideologies that characterized the Revolution's early years. The story of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille manifests the Revolution's central principles alongside its moments of unity and its crippling conflicts. It lies at the heart of the Revolution's break with the past, a tangible event that, over the course of the Revolution, came to exist as a complex mixture of myth and reality, fact and interpretation. Today, we see the result of this collective memory in France's annual celebrations of Bastille Day on the 14th of July. However, the illusion of simplicity in this national festival, and the impression of unity and collective identity which it conveys, contribute to a mythical memory that hides a complicated and tumultuous history of cultural memory formation during the Revolution itself. Given that the *prise de la Bastille* is cast by historians as a critical opening moment of the Revolution, and celebrated each July as the day when France seized its liberty from an oppressive *ancien régime*, the crucial question is, How was the cultural memory of this event formed during the Revolution? How was it interpreted,

¹ Throughout this thesis, the crowd's attack on the Bastille on 14 July 1789 will be referred to as the *prise de la Bastille*, because the weak English translation "the fall of the Bastille" fails to convey the agency inherent in the term *prise*.

guided, and contested? How did it come to embody the core nature of the Revolution, the symbolic and violent rupture with the past that opened the way for a new France?

In the quest for answers to these questions, this thesis draws on and is contextualized by a historiographical base that spans both the French Revolution and the realm of cultural memory studies. In the historiography of the Revolution itself, some of the most pertinent works are those that discuss the history of the Bastille itself, and the role of festivals and commemorations in the Revolution. The most relevant existing works in this category are *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, and Mona Ozouf's *Festivals and the French Revolution*.² By analyzing the fortress's symbolic nature before, during and after the Revolution, and particularly addressing its emergence as a collective symbol of liberty between 1789 and the late twentieth century, Lüsebrink and Reichardt argue that 14 July 1789 has evolved as "a genuinely *national*, collective event...[whose] authors are the people, 'le peuple,' 'la Nation' as a whole."³ In this argument, their work is undoubtedly germane to the exploration of the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*. However, while Lüsebrink and Reichardt do indeed address some of the main tenets of the *prise de la Bastille*'s placement in cultural memory, the range of their work is at once too confined and too broad to fill the historiographical gap. In particular, they restrict themselves to very specific research on the Bastille and the events of 14 July 1789 as a revolutionary symbol of liberty, ranging from analyses of the pamphlet and newspaper accounts of the *prise de la Bastille* to a discussion of the various memorials planned for the Bastille site. While this research is

² Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt, *The Bastille: A History of a Symbol of Despotism and Freedom*, translated by Norbert Schürer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 241.

extremely useful because of its specificity, it does not explore the *prise de la Bastille* as an ideological force in the Revolution beyond being a dual symbol of both despotism and freedom, and it does not illuminate the process by which cultural memory formation came to be at the heart of the Revolution's story. On the other hand, the broad chronological span of the work, extending from pre-Revolutionary reports of the Bastille's horrors to the invocation of the Bastille symbol in modern France, and the effort to explain the Bastille's global symbolic resonance, prevent a consistently thorough examination of the evolution of the symbol within the Revolution itself. Certain aspects of the story are told in great detail, while in other places, large timespans are covered rather too briefly. The official anniversary celebrations of 1791, 1792 and 1793, for example, are practically ignored as the discussion of commemorative celebrations jumps directly from 1790 to 1794 and then to the Directory period.

The simultaneously restricted and expansive nature of Lüsebrink and Reichardt's research results in an oversimplification of the story of the symbol's evolution. In neglecting the less well-known anniversary celebrations and their broader revolutionary context, they lose much of the conflict and contestation surrounding the cultural memory's formation, along with its relationship with some of the Revolution's most crucial socio-political developments. Even as Lüsebrink and Reichardt discuss the formation of a revolutionary symbol and its legendary qualities, then, their work partakes of that legend because it does not reach the tumultuous story behind the myth. Thus, while Lüsebrink and Reichardt's work certainly contributes valuable knowledge and analysis to the discussion of cultural memory formation in the Revolution, it does not address some of the questions that are most necessary to filling the historiographical gap.

On the topic of revolutionary commemorations, Mona Ozouf's celebrated work *Festivals and the French Revolution* offers an analytical view of the revolutionary

commemorative process and the ways in which festivals both manifested and guided public opinion, interpretations, and the socio-political developments of the Revolution. In her examination of revolutionary festivals as both vehicles for and manifestations of cultural change, shifting viewpoints and revolutionary interpretation, Ozouf argues that though they failed in their attempts to create the “unified man”—which would embody the joining of nature, society and religion—the festivals embodied “the beginning of a new era.”⁴ This included “defining a new legitimacy and a hitherto inviolate patrimony, in which the cult of mankind and the religion of the social bond, the bounty of industry, and the future of France would coexist.”⁵ Ozouf addresses the agency of the festivals in the Revolution’s interpretation and cultural solidification. In this way, her work is highly relevant to this thesis. However, while the revolutionary festivals were often used to influence the formation of cultural memory in the Revolution, Ozouf’s book surprisingly does not cover this phenomenon in relation to the *prise de la Bastille*. Even her extensive discussion of the Festival of Federation on 14 July 1790, the first anniversary of the *prise de la Bastille*, does not really assess the influential memory of 14 July 1789. Thus, while *Festivals and the French Revolution* is highly germane to the aspect of this thesis that addresses commemorative festivals as vehicles of cultural memory formation, it is only a starting place in terms of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*.

The second historiographic base relevant to this thesis is that of cultural (or collective) memory studies. This field was pioneered by Maurice Halbwachs, whose influential work *On Collective Memory* addresses both the social frameworks of memory and his conception of collective memory as a memory shared by a group and subject to its common experience.⁶

⁴ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 282.

⁵ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 282.

⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

However, because this thesis is grounded in the historical record rather than in the theoretical study of memory, Halbwachs' work is only relevant as the first discussion of collective memory. The analysis of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille in this thesis is much more intimately connected to the work of Pierre Nora in his groundbreaking series *Lieux de Mémoire*, a collection of works by many historians that examines physical sites as repositories of French cultural memory or collective identity.⁷ While referencing Halbwachs' position that memory is "by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual," Nora envisions *lieux de mémoire* as meeting places between memory and history, and examines their role in preserving the sense of a collective past.⁸ Nora discusses *lieux de mémoire* in the following terms in his introduction to the collection:

Lieux de mémoire are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination...The *lieux* we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial—just as if gold were the only memory of money—all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.⁹

Because Nora conceives of *lieux de mémoire* within the context of what he views as a recent (mid-to-late twentieth century) "turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn," the essays in the collection are necessarily

⁷ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols., edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁸ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, in *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, ed. Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (New York: The New Press, 1995), 633.

⁹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," 639.

based on modern narratives.¹⁰ Thus, while the storming of the Bastille is indeed included as one of Nora's *lieux de mémoire* in an article by Christian Almavi titled, "Bastille Day: From Dies Irae to Holiday," it is presented from the vantage point of 1880, when 14 July became an official national holiday during the Third Republic, and not from the short-term viewpoint of the Revolution itself.

Here we see another central issue of this research. Strangely, when scholars allude to the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*, however indirectly, they neglect its early history, especially the years 1791-1794. Lüsebrink, Reichardt, and Nora all focus on the memory of the event as a moment of French liberation, but they do not address the process of memory formation in the first five years of the Revolution that resulted in that memory, beyond discussing the events of July 1789 and the 1790 Festival of Federation. They also do not contextualize that story of memory formation within the overall narrative of the Revolution, particularly in relation to its political and ideological shifts. Is this neglect due to lack of evidence, or is it a result of the continuing influence of the dominating cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille* itself?

Upon closer examination, the problem is not a lack of historical data. Rather, the problem stems from the very story which this thesis seeks to tell, a nuanced story of the interpretation, dissemination, and contestation of the cultural memory of 14 July 1789 in the five years immediately following its occurrence. Over those five years, amidst the clash of conflicting viewpoints, political agendas, and rival factions, the *prise de la Bastille* came to be viewed as a fountainhead of authority and legitimacy for the entire Revolution. However, this interpretation

¹⁰ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," 632.

Note: Translators of Nora's works address the inexistence of a suitable English translation for the term *lieux de mémoire*, which Nora invented. An approximation would be "commonplaces of memory."

did not go unchallenged, and the collective memory of the event was shaped through the agency of both the “official” Revolution, as constructed by the National Assembly and its successors, and the more radical street revolutionaries. The tools used to influence the collective memory of the event included commemorative festivals, the written word, the destruction of the fortress itself, and the establishment of a cult of Bastille relics. We can see the effects of this memory formation in the historiography today and in the common understanding of the 14 July holiday: it is either dealt with selectively or neglected, and the impression of the *prise de la Bastille* as a glorious seizure of liberty propagates an illusion of inevitability that is not founded on the facts of the story.

To fully understand the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*, and remedy the neglect of the topic in the existing scholarship, this thesis explores the official anniversary celebrations from 1789 through 1794 as illuminations of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille* and as a means of understanding the deep interconnection of that memory formation with the political and ideological developments of the Revolution. It differs from the work of Lüsebrink and Reichardt in its detailed examination of the process of cultural memory formation in a more restricted timeframe, which allows an understanding of how this memory formation was bound up with some of the Revolution’s central issues: popular sovereignty, popular violence, and the very meaning of the Revolution. While this approach is similar to Nora’s in its treatment of the *prise de la Bastille* as a repository of collective memory, its focused timeframe and analysis of the memory’s mythical qualities allow it to go further in providing understanding of the cultural memory’s role at the heart of the Revolution’s self-proclaimed rupture with the past.

The topic of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille* presents many layers of nuanced analysis and historical questions. The violent actions of the Parisian crowd on 14 July 1789 touched or sparked many of the issues we now see as key to the French Revolution—the ideals of liberty and popular sovereignty, the perpetual elusiveness and redefinition of “the people,” the concept of national regeneration, the Revolution’s internal fractures, and its symbolic, violent break with the past. Ultimately, all of these issues are combined in one central query: how did the many individual facets of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille* result in a story that is fundamental to the Revolution itself, one that ties seemingly unrelated components together and spans the complex ideological, political and social spectra of the Revolution? And in this fundamental story, did the *prise de la Bastille* exist within the Revolution as a *lieu de mémoire* of the type conceptualized by Nora—a repository of memory that forms in the vacuum left by the lost sense of a collective past—or did it go beyond those conceptual bounds to play an even more pervasive role in cultural memory, and in the Revolution itself? A thorough examination and analysis of the process of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille* between 1789 and 1794, viewed through the commemorations of the event and in the context of the broader narrative of the Revolution, illuminates the remarkable fundamentality of this story to the Revolution, as well as the cultural memory’s range of influence even beyond the parameters of a *lieu de mémoire* as seen by Pierre Nora.

To embark on the exploration of this cultural memory formation, we must first understand the place of the Bastille in collective memory before the Revolution, as well as the events of 14 July 1789 and the process of interpretation and cultural memory formation that began immediately after the *prise de la Bastille*. We can then examine the first anniversary

celebration of 14 July 1790, which took place at the height of the cooperation between Louis XVI and the Revolution, and its reflection of the memory of the storming of the Bastille. The developments of the following year, culminating in the 14 July 1791 celebration and the Champ de Mars Massacre, illuminate the shifting interpretations of the *prise de la Bastille* in light of the growing division between the monarchy and the revolutionaries. The radicalization of the Revolution is reflected in the years 1792–1793, in which this memory was reinterpreted and contested as factionalism splintered the revolutionary population. Finally, an investigation of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille, as it stood in July 1794, reveals the sacred and mythical qualities which it had come to possess, and its striking evolution to become a cornerstone of the Revolution's ideological pantheon.

Chapter 1

The Prise de la Bastille, 1789

On 14 July 1789, tensions that had been simmering in the French capital for weeks came to a head as a Parisian crowd stormed the Bastille, a state prison in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, in a violent response to the prison governor's denial of their demand for a supply of arms and ammunition to protest escalating political upheaval. By the end of the day, they had successfully taken the fortress, released its seven prisoners, and beheaded the prison's governor, the Marquis de Launay. Within days, this event had come to be seen by some as an expression of the will of the French people, the legitimization of the new revolutionary government, and one of the most important acts of the budding Revolution. But why was the *prise de la Bastille* endowed with such symbolic significance, by the revolutionaries and the monarchy alike, in the context of widespread upheaval and the previous "official" acts of the new revolutionary government? From the outset, the interpretations of the *prise de la Bastille* were plagued by contradictions, ironies, and disparities, which continued to characterize the formation of cultural memory surrounding the event during the next five years. Nevertheless, through a complex process of interpretation and dissemination, this collective memory would have enormous repercussions through the following years of the Revolution, even as it was constantly reinterpreted, contested and altered. To understand the importance of this ongoing conflict and tension in the process of cultural memory formation, it is necessary to examine the tensions and contradictions that already surrounded the Bastille and characterized the socio-political situation in July 1789. By analyzing the circumstances of 14 July 1789 in the context of the pre-Revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille, we can understand the source of the simultaneous interpretive ambiguity

and ideological force which would come to be one of the most central aspects of the cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille*.

By the late 1780s, France was racked by financial troubles, the results of continuous and unsuccessful warfare and a massive national deficit. With a top-down system of levying taxes that placed the majority of the tax burden on the lower classes, France's revenue was drying up even as its population boomed and inflation soared. A series of efforts to raise revenue ended in clashes with the *parlements* (judicial courts that could veto royal legislation by refusing to register it) that boiled down to a standoff between the monarchy and the nobility over the attempted changes to the system of taxation and the nobility's traditional financial privileges.¹ Despite efforts at reform, the situation continued to deteriorate until by 1788, the French state was basically bankrupt and in dire need of raising taxes. Throughout the decade, a series of financial ministers attempted to reform the government financial system, but all were unsuccessful due to a double-headed social and cultural crisis that shook France.

Society in *ancien régime* France was divided into three orders: the clergy ("those who pray"), the nobility ("those who fight") and the commoners ("those who work"), with the monarch being supreme over all, ruler by divine right and the representative of divine authority. Despite the apparent staunchly traditional nature of the system, however, it was stressed by friction between the ancient traditional nobility and the new nobility, formed by members of a rising middle or merchant class who took advantage of economic opportunities and government offices to achieve noble status, as well as by the rising dissatisfaction of the lower classes, forced to bear the brunt of both labor and taxation. While the three orders were essentially a top-down hierarchical social structure, there were complex systems of vertical coalition, as well as layers

¹ Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016), 17 and 45.

of lateral hierarchies, incorporated into the overall structure. The stresses between the orders were further exacerbated by a crisis of social ideology, the clash between the self-sacrificial creed of the nobility—a legacy of the days when nobles protected their serfs through warfare—and the money-driven mindset of a rising *bourgeois* class.

At the same time, visions of an “ideal” society, based on reason and individual devotion to the public good, swept Europe through the writings of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment represented a revolution both of epistemology and of social and cultural practice, built on the application of Newtonian reasoning to society and politics, as well as to science. In his work “What is Enlightenment?”, philosopher Immanuel Kant defined it as “man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.”² Kant and his fellow *philosophes*, the most influential of whom were Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire (the *nom de plume* of François-Marie Arouet), envisioned a society wherein the enlightenment of both monarchy and people would result in an ideal cooperation between the two, with the monarchy fulfilling its traditional role as protector of the people, but without the corruption that stemmed from self-interest. Without being inherently revolutionary, Enlightenment philosophy encouraged the use of each individual’s reason for the public good, though it made a distinction between the private and the public use of reason. In the context of the economic and social crises of the late 1780s, these ideas were played out in the physical acts that opened the French Revolution.

By 1788, the social tensions caused by financial crisis had been increased by food shortages, high grain prices and harvest failures, followed by an especially cold winter.³ With the

² Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (1784), in Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck, trans. Lewis White Beck, Robert E. Anchor, and Emil L. Fackenheim (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 3-10. <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>.

³ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 54.

failure of the government to make even basic subsistence accessible to its poor subjects, ideals of the traditional roles of the monarchy and the social system were called into question. As historian Peter McPhee puts it,

Increasingly, the seigneurial system and its maze of privileges appeared as little more than a cash-racket rather than the backbone of the social order. Looking back from the mid-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that, by the 1780s, seigneurial dues could no longer be legitimized as the price the non-privileged paid for poor relief, protection and assistance from seigneurs who were rarely present in the community.⁴

This collapse of the basis for loyalty to the hierarchical social system contributed to a web of anger, panic and distrust that went all ways between the common people, the nobility and the monarchy. Cultural memory of the traditional duties of each order towards the others clashed with the developments caused by the necessities of long-term international warfare, the increasing leverage of a *bourgeois* middle class, and the ideals of individual intellectual empowerment that were promoted by the Enlightenment.

Everything began coming to a head in 1788, when the king was forced by circumstances to call a meeting of the Estates-General, a representative body of the three orders (or “estates”) whose consent was required to authorize new taxes. No meeting of the Estates-General had been held since 1614, and in the context of the widespread dissatisfaction of the era, this one represented a chance for each order (but especially the Third Estate, which represented commoners) to negotiate with the government for reform. Traditionally, the summoning of the Estates-General was accompanied by a call for the people to express their problems to the monarch through *cahiers de doléances* (lists of grievances). So, in the period of anticipation before the elected representatives of the three estates gathered at Versailles in May 1789, each individual community drafted its *cahier*, taking the opportunity to state its wishes in a form that

⁴ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 55.

was essentially—though few could foresee its effects—an invitation to popular participation in government, and which could easily transform into an encouragement of popular sovereignty. In general, all the *cahiers* called for a regular meeting of the Estates-General, religious reform, legal reform, and tax reform.⁵ However, there were large disagreements among the estates as to voting procedures in the meetings, especially since the monarchy had agreed to double the representation of the Third Estate.⁶ The question of whether voting in the Estates-General would be by order or by head was therefore of paramount importance for the accomplishment of the reforms desired by the Third Estate.

When the Estates-General finally met in May 1789, there was widespread anticipation and optimism throughout the country. However, the mood quickly soured in an ongoing debate over voting and representation, and whether the orders would deliberate separately or together. The deputies of the Third Estate, insistent that they should be allowed to vote by head and deliberate together with the other two orders, were joined by some deputies from the nobility and clergy. On 20 June, having been locked out of their meeting hall at Versailles, they declared themselves the National Assembly, stated their intention to draft a constitution, and invited the clergy and nobility to join them. Their statement was framed by references to the traditional responsibilities of the government (a manifestation of cultural memory), and, as Peter McPhee states, “was a stunning claim to legitimacy.”⁷ The declaration went as follows:

The National Assembly, whereas it is called on to lay down the constitution of the kingdom, implement the regeneration of public order, and maintain the true principles of the monarchy, declares that nothing can stop it from continuing its deliberations in whatever place it may be obliged to establish itself, and that finally, anywhere its members are gathered together, that is the National Assembly.⁸

⁵ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 60.

⁶ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 60-61.

⁷ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 70.

⁸ *Le Moniteur universel*, vol. 1, no. 10, 20-24 June 1789, 89. Quoted and translated in Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 70.

In this statement, we can identify several critical assertions on the part of the Third Estate. First, the National Assembly was claiming the prerogative to write and establish a constitution, rather than giving precedence to royal legislative powers. Second, it cast itself as responsible for restoring public order and maintaining “the true principles of the monarchy,” saying by implication that the current royal administration represented a perversion of the monarchy’s true nature. The only thing lacking in this action of self-constitution on the part of the new National Assembly was a definitive source of legitimacy to transform it from an act of outright rebellion, an illegitimate usurpation of legislative administration, into a genuine representation of the desires of the people of France.⁹ This sign of legitimacy would be found in an act of unexpectedly forceful verification by the people of Paris on 14 July.

By 11 July, tensions between the king and the Assembly had escalated, the king had dismissed Jacques Necker, the liberal minister who had won the good opinion of the public, and had commenced surrounding Paris and Versailles with troops. Rumor and anxiety spread in Paris, where the lower classes sided with the National Assembly and tried to decipher the king’s motives. As far as the Parisians could tell, the king was prepared to forcefully dissolve the National Assembly and attack the city of Paris itself, where support for the Third Estate was strong among the lower classes.¹⁰ In effect, the administration of France itself was in question. As historian William Sewell has discussed,

The dislocations that had occurred in the French state by early July 1789 were particularly sharp. What Leon Trotsky (1932) later called “dual power” had developed: two distinct and conflicting political apparatuses, the monarchy and the National Assembly, claimed to hold legitimate power. It was consequently difficult for an ordinarily prudent individual to know which apparatus to obey.¹¹

⁹ William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 230.

¹⁰ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 40.

¹¹ Sewell, *Logics of History*, 230.

Here we see evidence of a gradual shift in intent that would have great influence on the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille: while the reforms originally called for in the *cahiers de doléances* had been focused on restoring the traditional roles of government and people, with the protective responsibilities of the monarchy, the aims of the National Assembly and its support base were steadily shifting towards a complete reorientation of the French government, with popular sovereignty as the basis for administrative authority.

The growing tension between the monarchy and the Third Estate (backed by the Parisian bourgeoisie and urban poor) finally climaxed after the dismissal of Necker on 11 July. In Paris, just miles away from Versailles, anger over the threat of violence to the Third Estate was bolstered by fury over a spike in the price of bread, which was rumored to be the effect of an aristocratic plot to hoard grain and worsen the economic situation.¹² When news of Necker's dismissal arrived on 12 July, the food riots took on political meaning. As *Le Moniteur universel* recounted some days later, "The consternation was general, the exile of a single man became a public calamity...it was regarded as the precursor of the three horrendous plagues of famine, bankruptcy and death."¹³ In an atmosphere of suspicion, fear and distrust, the riots gathered momentum until they were outright rebellion. Crowds gathered in the Palais-Royal, "wearing on their faces the pallor of despair and on their lips the quivering of vengeance, preparing themselves like lions, although without weapons, to fly in the face of danger to save the motherland."¹⁴ The sense of desperation and loyalty to *la patrie*, rather than to the king, that

¹² McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 71.

¹³ "La consternation fut générale, l'exil d'un seul homme devint une calamité publique...on la regarde comme le signal des trois épouvantables fléaux de la famine, de la banqueroute et de la guerre civile." Léonard Gallois, ed., *Réimpression de L'ancien Moniteur, depuis la réunion des États-généraux jusqu'au Consulat (mai 1789-novembre 1799) avec des notes explicatives*, vol. 1, no. 20, 17-20 July 1789 (Paris: Au Bureau Central, 1840), 170. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=iK4qK43CpOoC>.

¹⁴ "L'indignation était au comble, et l'on vit des Français rassemblés en grand nombre, portant sur leur front la pâleur du désespoir et sur leurs lèvres le frémissement de la vengeance, s'appêtant comme des lions, quoique sans

saturates the reports of 12-14 July 1789 bears witness to the seriousness of the crisis which faced the French government, as the insurgents mentally dissociated the monarchy from “the nation” and began to cut the ties of loyalty that had stabilized the social structure of France for centuries.

The threatening crowds in the Palais-Royal were stirred by the oratory of men like journalist Camille Desmoulins, who, standing on a table, invoked old cultural memories of the religious wars of the late 1500s to stir the anger against the government:

Citizens, you know that the Nation had asked for Necker to be retained, and he has been driven out! Could you be more insolently flouted? After such an act they will dare anything, and they may perhaps be planning and preparing a Saint-Bartholomew massacre of patriots for this very night! . . . To arms! to arms! . . . At least they will not take me alive, and I am ready to die a glorious death! I can only meet with a single misfortune, and that would be to see France in bondage!¹⁵

Beginning on 13 July, the crowd searched for arms in the abbey of Saint-Lazare (where they also found a stock of hoarded grain, fueling their anger), the shops of gunsmiths and the military hospital called Les Invalides.¹⁶ Having obtained guns but no ammunition, the focus of the crowd soon turned to an assault of the Bastille, both as a storehouse of gunpowder and a tangible symbol of despotic government. As related by Lüsebrink and Reichardt,

The password “Marchons à la Bastille” [“We walk to the Bastille”] had already been issued sporadically because of the rumors circulating concerning the Bastille. But it turned into a stirring slogan when it became known that in the past night a large part of the gunpowder, which earlier had been kept in the arsenal and the other weapons depots, had been moved to the state prison, which was considered impregnable.¹⁷

As tensions continued to escalate, the crowd sent several deputations to the Marquis de Launay, governor of the Bastille, to request the surrender of the fortress and its stores of ammunition. De

armes, à voler au-devant du péril pour sauver la patrie.” *Réimpression de L’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 1, no. 20, 17-20 July 1789, 170.

¹⁵ Quoted and translated in Jacques Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 187-188. McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 71.

¹⁶ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 71-72.

¹⁷ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 41-42.

Launay refused and at length ordered his soldiers to fire on the crowd, later threatening to blow up the fortress and the surrounding area.¹⁸ However, following a key moment of shifting allegiances as two companies of *gardes-françaises* joined the crowd and focused their weapons on the Bastille, de Launay and his men were overwhelmed and surrendered the fortress.¹⁹ Around one hundred of the besiegers had been killed. The crowd rushed in and freed the prisoners, of whom there were only seven in the Bastille at the time: “four counterfeiters, the Count de Solages, who had been confined by his family for moral offenses, and two mentally disturbed men called Whyte and Tavernier.”²⁰ De Launay was seized and later beheaded by the crowd, his head paraded through the streets on a pike in retribution for his “treason” against the people in ordering his troops to fire on them.²¹

Here, at the moment of the event and on the cusp of its interpretation, we must pause to examine the pre-Revolutionary history and cultural memory of the Bastille, which now contributed hugely to the potential for dramatic revolutionary interpretations on 14 July 1789. Construction of the Bastille began in 1370, when it was erected as one of a series of fortified gates in the city walls of Paris. Located in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine on the right (northern) bank of the Seine, the structure was repurposed several times over the next four hundred years and was used as a military stronghold before being converted into a state prison by Cardinal Richelieu in the seventeenth century. By 1789, the “Bastille” (a name derived from the word *bastide*, meaning “fortress”) had earned a prominent reputation as one of several state prisons in the country, and the tool of an absolute monarchy for the unjust suppression of its subjects. Its reputation was bolstered and expanded by the scathing writings of former prisoners, as well as by

¹⁸ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 43.

¹⁹ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 72. Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, 237-242.

²⁰ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 44.

²¹ Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, 244.

the aura of secrecy that surrounded it. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the Bastille's infamous reputation became increasingly divergent from reality, as prison practices improved and the number of prisoners decreased. But regardless of the apparent efforts of the French government to ameliorate the conditions of prisoners and move away from more medieval forms of punishment, the Bastille remained a highly-colored image in the public imagination. Combined, the legendary quality of the Bastille's pre-Revolutionary reputation, the disparity between that reputation and the actual state of affairs by 1789, and its perceived identity as the symbolic embodiment of an arbitrary government system created a socio-political situation laced with tensions and contradictions, thus making the crisis of 1789 even more volatile.

After becoming a state prison in the seventeenth century, the Bastille was used to detain a wide range of prisoners including Protestants and Jansenists (imprisoned for religious nonconformism), seditious journalists, and the private enemies or rivals of court favorites.²² Prisoners were arrested and imprisoned by *lettres de cachet*, arbitrary orders issued by the king or his ministers that authorized imprisonment without trial or definite duration. While the main reasons for imprisonment generally included dealings in banned books, religion, criticism of the monarchy and government, madness, and vices such as fraud or immorality, *lettres de cachet* were also obtained by court favorites to suppress their enemies (or rivals) and by French families—both noble and commoner—to contain unruly family members and thus protect the family honor.²³ One such case was that of Count Mirabeau, whose father, the Marquis de Mirabeau, had him imprisoned multiple times by means of *lettres de cachet*, the majority of the

²² Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, 91.

²³ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 29.

total thirty-eight *lettres de cachet* the Marquis used against various members of his family.²⁴ The nature of the system meant that prisoners could be arrested and imprisoned without reason given, the king's seal on the *lettre de cachet* acting as an arbitrary and unopposable accusation; even their release could be sudden and unexplained. Furthermore, as historian Jacques Godechot has found, the veil of extraordinary secrecy surrounding all aspects of the imprisonment (even to Bastille doctors being forbidden to name their patients except by tower name and floor number) served to enhance the Bastille's gruesome reputation, even as memoirs and reports written by former prisoners fueled the public imagination.²⁵

These memoirs and reports emphasized the despotic characteristics of the Bastille and the horrendous experiences of its prisoners, and, because of their circulation through the underground literature market and the reticent nature of the judicial system, loomed much larger in the public mind than did accurate knowledge of conditions in the Bastille. Some reports reached the status of legend, particularly the story of the "man in the iron mask," who was imprisoned in the Bastille from 1698 until his death there in 1703. According to legend (as reported by Voltaire in his work *The Age of Louis XIV*), this prisoner wore an iron mask with a hinged jaw plate that allowed him to eat, and was treated with strange and unusual respect by all who knew his identity (which was a state secret and never revealed to anyone else). When he died, he was said to have been buried by night and under a false name, continuing the secrecy in which his imprisonment had been shrouded.²⁶ (As far as historians can judge, the mask was actually made of black velvet, and the prisoner might have been Ercole Matthioli, an agent of the Duke of Mantua.) In terms of the physical discomforts of torture and detention at the Bastille,

²⁴ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 27.

²⁵ Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, 92-93.

²⁶ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 13-15.

reports of horrible cells, insanitary conditions and vermin, as well as *oubliettes* and *cachots* (underground dungeons) were common. In a study conducted by historians Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt of seven “scandal histories” of the Bastille spanning the period 1715-1789, each of the seven authors described detention in a *cachot*. Out of thirteen total categories of scenarios included in the seven memoirs, only the disgusting nature of the cells, physical discomforts and illnesses, various humiliations inflicted by the prison’s governor, and detention in these underground dungeons were mentioned by all seven authors (not even the *lettres de cachet* were included in every account).²⁷ Medieval forms of torture were thus in the forefront of the public mind in connection with the Bastille. Combined, the horrific tales of imprisonment and the depictions of injustice included in these memoirs contributed to a pre-Revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille, which attained and retained a place in the public consciousness. This collective memory would be at the center of the events of 14 July 1789.

Two of the most influential reports of imprisonment in the Bastille were written by Henri Masers de Latude and Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet. Latude’s autobiography recounted his repeated imprisonments in various prisons (including the Bastille) between the years 1749 and 1784, stressing the mental and physical discomforts and the despotic cruelty of the system of incarceration in the Bastille.²⁸ Similarly, Linguet, who was a prisoner there from 1780 to 1782, published his *Mémoires sur la Bastille* in 1783. The book was eventually published in multiple editions and languages, and contributed to the formation of a collective understanding of the Bastille among the general population.²⁹ In the very first chapter, Linguet begins with a full-fledged attack on the legality and humanity of the Bastille:

²⁷ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 8.

²⁸ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 115.

²⁹ Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, 95.

I am no longer at the Bastille: it is necessary to prove that I never deserved to be there. It is necessary to do more: to demonstrate that none have ever deserved it: the innocent, because they are innocent; the guilty, because they ought not to be convicted, judged, and punished, but according to the laws, and because at the Bastille none of the laws are observed, or rather they are all violated; because there are no tortures, unless perhaps in the infernal regions, which will bear to be set in competition with those of the Bastille; and because, if the institution itself may in certain cases admit of justification, it is impossible, in any case whatever, to justify the *regimen* of it.—It is necessary to show that this regimen, no less disgraceful than cruel, is equally repugnant to all the principles of justice and humanity, to the manners of the Nation, to the mildness which characterises the Royal House of France, and especially to the goodness, the equity of the Sovereign who at present fills the throne.³⁰

Going on to say that the “regimen” of the Bastille “resembles nothing practised heretofore, or at this moment practised, in the known world,” Linguet discussed at length the mental tortures of imprisonment in the Bastille, painting a vivid picture of the prisoner’s agony of uncertainty about his fate and the extreme secrecy that could lead the prison’s officers to deny knowledge of a prisoner or of his imprisonment.³¹ Together, Linguet and Latude contributed largely to a widespread impression of the Bastille as the sinister tool of a despotic, almost feudal regime.

The great irony of the pre-Revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille was that by the late eighteenth century it diverged significantly from reality, and had become increasingly legendary in nature. Since the early 1700s, numbers of imprisonments had been steadily decreasing, conditions inside the prison improving, and confinement lengths shortening. The use of torture in the Bastille had ended in the 1600s, and the underground *cachots* were used only for temporary (and unusual) disciplinary confinement until even that practice was ended in 1776.

Records show that food was remarkably plentiful, prisoners could furnish their own apartments,

³⁰ Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille: Containing a Full Exposition of the Mysterious Policy and Despotic Oppression of the French Government, in the Interior Administration of that State-Prison; Interspersed with a Variety of Curious Anecdotes*, ed. Edmund Goldsmid, trans. from the French, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Privately printed, 1884), 7. https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=Qb_954uub04C&rdid=book-Qb_954uub04C&rdot=1.

³¹ Linguet, *Memoirs of the Bastille*, vol. 2, 7-15.

the government would pay for clothing for poor prisoners, and inmates had access to high-quality medical treatment.³² Since this information (if it was public) was overshadowed by the accounts previously discussed, however, it was the image of the Bastille as an embodiment of injustice and tyranny which remained in the forefront of the public mind, acting as a guiding force on the development of a new, Revolutionary cultural memory which was to arise in the summer of 1789. Citing the extensive references to the Bastille's infamous reputation among the bourgeoisie, in underground literature, and eventually even in the government, Lüsebrink and Reichardt claim that "[o]n the eve of the Revolution in 1789, the demonized Bastille had as a matter of fact become a general collective symbol," one so powerful that the demolition of the prison had already been suggested multiple times prior to 1789.³³

This portrayal of the "demonized Bastille" as a "general collective symbol" in 1789 merits further consideration. While it is amply justified by the evidence among the bourgeoisie and the underground literature market, which Lüsebrink and Reichardt discuss at length, it raises the question of the agency of the lower classes, particularly the Parisian crowd that stormed the Bastille. It is difficult to know, for example, whether the members of the crowd of 14 July 1789 were acquainted with Linguet's and Latude's memoirs, whether they patronized the underground literature market, or whether they understood the Bastille as a symbol of despotism in the context of the Enlightenment focus on human rights and intellectual freedom. For the workers of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the Bastille was a daily physical presence as it towered over the neighborhood, not just a malevolent image of the imagination. While the Bastille was not a commoners' prison, and most of the crowd of 14 July 1789 would probably never have experienced incarceration there, it can be argued that the physical, looming presence of the

³² Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 28-30.

³³ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 35-36.

Bastille would have just as much, if not more, of an effect on the collective impression of the prison as the tales told in Linguet's and Latude's memoirs.³⁴ In either case, the uncertainties of agency in this pre-Revolutionary cultural memory are worth noting, especially in light of broader questions of agency surrounding the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* in its immediate aftermath.

The interpretive process followed rapidly in the wake of the storming of the Bastille. News of the event quickly reached the National Assembly at Versailles, where, according to the records in *Le Moniteur universel*, it put a sudden damper on the spirits of the deputies:

The discussion begins, and the debates have become very lively when the Viscount de Noailles is announced, who comes from Paris bringing disastrous news. He enters into the Assembly surrounded by other deputies who rush around him. As soon as he appears a great silence falls. He reports what he saw; he says that the bourgeoisie of Paris is under arms and guided in its discipline by the *gardes-françaises* and the Swiss [troops]; that the Hôtel des Invalides was forced open; that canons and guns were taken; that the noble families were obliged to withdraw into their houses; that the Bastille was taken by assault; that M. de Launay, who was its governor, and who had ordered the citizens to be shot at, was seized, taken to la Grève, massacred by the people, and his head carried at the top of a pike. This account produces in the Assembly the saddest impression. All discussion ceases.³⁵

In this account, we can clearly see that this news was anything but welcome to the deputies gathered at Versailles. If the storming of the Bastille was taken by the king as an unforgiveable act of insubordination, as in all likelihood it would be, it would discredit the Assembly's newly

³⁴ The crowd's disconnection from the Bastille was later utilized to attack the cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille* by the editor of the royalist *Journal de la cour et de la ville*; see the relevant discussion in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

³⁵ "La discussion s'engage, et les débats devenaient très vifs lorsqu'on annonce M. le vicomte de Noailles, qui arrive de Paris portant des nouvelles désastreuses. Il entre dans l'Assemblée entouré d'autres députés qui se pressent autour de lui. Dès qu'il paraît il se fait le plus grand silence. Il rend compte de ce qu'il a vu; il dit que la bourgeoisie de Paris est sous les armes et dirigée dans sa discipline par les gardes-françaises et les Suisses; que l'hôtel des Invalides a été forcé; qu'on a enlevé les canons et les fusils; que les familles nobles ont été obligées de se renfermer dans leurs maisons; que la Bastille a été enlevée d'assaut; que M. de Launay qui en était le gouverneur, et qui avait fait tirer sur les citoyens, a été pris, conduit à la Grève, massacré par le peuple, et sa tête portée au haut d'une pique. Ce récit produit dans l'Assemblée l'impression la plus triste. Toute discussion cesse." *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 1, no. 18, 13-15 July 1789, 158.

claimed authority by association with violent rebellion and street militancy. A deputation was sent to the court, conveying the news and, no doubt, trying to gauge the king's reaction.³⁶ This began a whirlwind of interpretation and analysis, as the Assembly (and everyone else) endeavored to determine the significance of the event and its political implications. As William Sewell has found, the Assembly's initial dread was reversed when the king, instead of taking the event as justification for a violent repression of the insurrection, backed down, removed the troops, and recalled Necker as minister.

As the king made concessions to the Assembly's demands in the aftermath of the storming of the Bastille, one of the key interpretive developments surrounding the event occurred: the application of the ideal of popular sovereignty as a legitimizing argument.

According to Sewell,

In the excitement, terror, and elation that characterized the taking of the Bastille, orators, journalists, and the crowd itself seized on the political theory of popular sovereignty to explain and to justify the popular violence. This act of epoch-making cultural creativity occurred in a moment of ecstatic discovery: the taking of the Bastille, which had begun as an act of defense against the king's aggression, revealed itself in the days that followed as a concrete, unmediated, and sublime instance of the people expressing its sovereign will. . . . As the members of the National Assembly came to realize that the people of Paris had assured them a great victory, they not only began to echo the Parisians' view that the uprising was a blow for liberty against despotism and that it expressed the legitimate wishes of the people, but began to cast it as a decisive act of popular sovereignty that rightfully determined the fate of the nation. It took several days of political maneuvering and parliamentary debates for this to happen.³⁷

Here again we encounter the issue of agency in the *prise de la Bastille*. In many ways, the meaning of the event—at least in terms of its broader ideological implications—was only formulated in its aftermath. This opened the possibility of agency in its interpretation to a range of viewpoints, from the self-proclaimed “official” one of the National Assembly to the more

³⁶ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 1, no. 18, 13-15 July 1789, 158.

³⁷ Sewell, *Logics of History*, 235-238.

spontaneous ones of the Parisian crowd. At the same time, there is the question of agency in the event itself. While the crowd's actions were indeed relatively spontaneous and instinctual, they were also stirred by the rhetoric of instigators such as Camille Desmoulins. Here we see the ambiguity which would pervade the memory of the storming of the Bastille in the following years, opening it to a wide range of possible interpretations and invocations. In Sewell's analysis, the attribution of the "theory of popular sovereignty" to the *prise de la Bastille* facilitated its interpretation as the legitimization of the newly-claimed authority of the National Assembly. The inherent implication in this interpretation, however, depends on the agency of "the people" as acting in a deliberate implementation of the Enlightenment values of active citizenship and the use of individual reason towards the betterment of the entire population. This interpretation also touches on another crucial, but highly complex, aspect of the Revolution: the powerful invocation of *le peuple* as a sovereign body, which depends on an ever-shifting definition of "the people." In July 1789, "the people" were obviously those taking part in an act of defiance against a symbol of an absolutist monarchy. In later years of the Revolution, *le peuple* would change depending on the circumstances and which political faction dominated at the time.

Despite the initial undefined nature of the event, it did not take long, following its interpretation, for the celebrations of the storming of the Bastille to begin. The National Assembly was soon referring to the crowd that had attacked the Bastille as the *vainqueurs de la Bastille*, "the winners of the Bastille."³⁸ They had been lauded even sooner by their peers in Paris, and on the evening of 14 July, a celebrating crowd reportedly decorated one *vainqueur*, Henri Dubois, with the cross of Saint Louis (taken from the clothing of the Marquis de Launay).³⁹ A committee of *vainqueurs* compiled an official list of their fellow attackers, and the

³⁸ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 1, no. 20, 17-20 July 1789, 174.

³⁹ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 86.

National Assembly eventually honored each of the 863 *vainqueurs* with formal recognition, including the grant of a personal uniform and set of personalized engraved weapons (free of charge), a document certifying their title of *Vainqueur de la Bastille*, and a place among the National Guard during the 14 July anniversary celebrations.⁴⁰ The connection between the *vainqueurs* and the National Guard here was key, because even though the National Guard had been organized on 13 July before the storming of the Bastille, the association between the National Guard as the Assembly's militia (not the king's army), the troops of the *gardes-françaises* which had deserted the king's cause to join the crowd at the Bastille, and the popular demonstration at the Bastille would later play a large role in the anniversary celebrations. Eventually, the Assembly also granted pensions to the *vainqueurs* (or their widows, in the event of their deaths).⁴¹ In this way, the National Assembly was able to draw legitimacy doubly from the *prise de la Bastille*: not only did the interpretation of the event as a manifestation of popular sovereignty cast the National Assembly as representatives of *le peuple* who were invested with its authority, subsequent developments like the awarding of pensions to *vainqueurs* provided opportunity for the Assembly to assert its authority to execute such matters.

Among the *vainqueurs*, the most prominent and influential (by his own making) was Pierre-François Palloy, also known as the "Patriote Palloy." A builder and craftsman, Palloy was caught up in the crowd with some of his employees on 14 July and took part in the siege of the fortress. Over the next years, Palloy would create a nationwide cult of relics surrounding the remnants of the Bastille, which he helped to demolish, first on his own initiative, then by order of the National Assembly. He sent model carvings of the fortress, made out of stones of the Bastille

⁴⁰ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 87-89.

⁴¹ Léonard Gallois, ed., *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 6, no. 354, 20 December 1790, 676. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=JYVXAAAAYAAJ>.

itself, to every *département* (paying for the enterprise himself), led tours through the building's ruins, and contributed to the many plans for commemorative festivals over the course of the Revolution.⁴² Palloy tried to embody the patriotic fervor against despotism, saying, "It did not suffice for me to have participated in the destruction of the fortress's walls, I had the desire to immortalize the memory of its terror."⁴³ His attitude towards the preservation of Bastille relics and the nurturing of a collective memory of the *prise de la Bastille* would play a central role in the development of that memory in the years to come.

Indeed, through Palloy's work beginning on the night of 14 July 1789, we begin to see the emergence of the ultimate paradox regarding the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*. With the pre-Revolutionary perception of the Bastille as a place of horrors and a tangible embodiment of arbitrary rule and despotic government, the storming and destruction of the structure created a new, Revolutionary cultural memory. This time, the potency of the symbol lay in its fragmentation: in the form of scattered ruins and the relics strewn around the country, the Bastille was reborn as a symbol of liberty and popular sovereignty. Thus, the power of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille as an ideological force in the Revolution lay in the Bastille's absence, not its presence. Because the event being commemorated through collective memory was, in fact, the *absence* and *destruction* of the Bastille, its commemoration required a perpetual disinterment of the past in order to prevent collective amnesia. Along with the question of agency in the *prise de la Bastille*, the ambiguous definition of *le peuple*, and the legitimizing power of the interpretation of the event as an expression of popular sovereignty, this commemorative paradox is part of a complex web of interlocking revolutionary issues that all converge in this story of the formation of cultural

⁴² Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 117-120.

⁴³ Quoted and translated in Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 118.

memory. In the following year, and particularly in the first anniversary celebrations of 14 July 1790, these conflicts and tensions which immediately surrounded the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* continued to affect it, contributing to an ongoing process of cultural memory formation which added to the importance of the storming of the Bastille at the ideological center of the Revolution.

Chapter 2

The Festival of Federation, 1790

In the story of the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*, one moment is particularly revealing as a snapshot in the long-term process: the first anniversary celebrations of July 1790. It showcases both the ideological legacies of the *prise de la Bastille* one year after its occurrence and the competing interpretations that struggled to leave their mark on the enduring cultural memory of the event. However, despite the social and political tensions that had surrounded the events of 14 July 1789, the official Fête de la Fédération (Festival of Federation) was focused on an idealistic, utopian interpretation of the Revolution in the aftermath of the *prise de la Bastille*. This fact, widely recognized by scholars of the Revolution, raises intriguing questions about the role of 14 July commemorations in the ideological rhetoric of the Revolution, and the ways in which they were used by the revolutionary government to project a powerful message about the nature and future of the Revolution. As might be expected, the Festival of Federation was characterized by intense symbolism and pageantry. Despite the Bastille's prominence in proposals for the celebrations, however, it was visible only in veiled references in the official celebrations of 14 July 1790. In examining this disparity, we can see the undercurrents of conflict that haunted the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* even a year after its occurrence, and the ongoing tensions between the Revolution's ideals and their implementation.

As early as December 1789, seven months after the storming of the Bastille, plans were being proposed for the first anniversary celebration. In the context of the potential for varying interpretations that had marked the events of the intervening year, the first anniversary celebration was a prime opportunity to guide the formation of a collective memory of the event.

Foremost among the plans for an anniversary celebration was one put forward by Clément Gonchon, a laborer from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine who specialized in design, dyes, metals and steel.¹ According to one biography, Gonchon became the voice of the people in Saint-Antoine through the demonstration of both his patriotism and his loyalty to the monarchy.² In his *Projet d'une fête nationale, pour être exécuté le 14 juillet 1790, anniversaire de la prise de la Bastille: dédié aux citoyens patriotes*, Gonchon envisioned a festival heavily focused on celebrating the fall of the Bastille. His plan featured an enormous balloon (a “Montgolfière”) mounted on decorative platforms and painted with a multi-scene story of the storming of the Bastille: the crowd obtaining weapons at the Hôtel des Invalides; the *prise de la Bastille*; the recall of Necker and his fellow ministers; France triumphing over Discord and the departure of the king’s troops; and finally, armed citizens of Paris welcoming the king into the city on 17 July 1789 and his display of joy and love.³ In Gonchon’s use of the storming of the Bastille as the pictorial centerpiece of his event, we can see that he, at least, saw it as one of the Revolution’s seminal acts. The proposal further included a reenactment of the storming of the Bastille and its demolition, artillery salutes, and the performance of the air “*Pour un Peuple amiable & sensible, le premier bien est un bon Roi*” (“For an amiable and sensible people, the greatest good is a good king”). The final display was to be the ascension of the balloon with the words *Vive la Roi* and three fleurs-de-lys on it, and the performance of an arriette from the drama *Le Déserteur*, titled

¹ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 152.

Victor Fournel, *Le patriote Palloy et l'exploitation de la Bastille; L'orateur du peuple Gonchon* (Paris: Honoré Champion, Libraire, 1892), 261. <https://archive.org/details/lepatriotepalloy00four>.

² Fournel, *Le patriote Palloy*, 261-263.

³ Clément Gonchon, *Projet d'une fête nationale, pour être exécuté le 14 juillet 1790, anniversaire de la prise de la Bastille : dédié aux citoyens patriotes* (Paris: L'imprimerie de Ve Herissant, 1790), 5. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k40609j>.

Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 152.

“*Vive le Roi, Vive à jamais, Vive le Roi*” (“Long Live the King, Live Forever, Long Live the King”).⁴

Other proposals were less light-hearted in character. One plan, called *Enterrement du despotisme, ou funérailles des aristocrates* (“The internment of despotism, or the funeral procession of the aristocrats”), outlined a ceremony to be conducted on the ruins of the Bastille, featuring an enormous tombstone, repulsive animals symbolizing the “vermin ministers,” a procession around a funeral pyre, the burning of tangible symbols of tyranny, and a final ceremony highlighting the utopian ideals of a new nation that had put despotism to death.⁵ While Gonchon’s proposal emphasized joy, unity and freedom in the context of fraternity and equality, this one celebrated them as the results of a necessarily violent elimination of the old régime, and completely avoided the participation of the monarch.⁶ In the contrast between these two proposals, we begin to see the tensions which were developing between the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille*. One possible interpretation was of the event as having effected a unification and reconciliation of French society, connected to the events of 17 July 1789 (when Louis XVI entered Paris, donned the revolutionary colors, and made peace with the people). Another interpretation of the same event saw it as the precedent for a more vindictive approach to revolution, as seen in the last proposal. Here we see crucial questions emerging about the course of the Revolution (whether the *prise de la Bastille* had started or completed it), the role of popular violence as a political tool, and the future of the French monarchy. The conflicting interpretations which raised these questions, and their attempted resolution, are evident in the actual celebrations which occurred on 14 July 1790.

⁴ Gonchon, *Projet d’une fête nationale*, 13-14.

⁵ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 153.

⁶ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 153.

The official Fête de la Fédération of 1790, sponsored by the National Assembly, ended up being closer to Gonchon's proposal, and was characterized by what historians Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Rolf Reichardt call a "martial aesthetic," due primarily to the context in which the festival occurred.⁷ Far from being the first or only such festival in France, the Festival of Federation was one of many that had apparently been taking place (more or less spontaneously) in towns around the country for several months before July 1790. Their military origins have been outlined by historian Mona Ozouf in her work *Festivals and the French Revolution*:

The federative festivals had a main agent in the National Guard. Against the brigands said to be hiding in the woods nearby, or against those enemies of the Revolution whose presence farther off was so obsessively evoked, the National Guard of a town or village would form a defensive pact with the next nearest National Guard or garrison. The festival was instituted to mark the alliance. It was, therefore, an essentially military festival, with colors unfurled, in which oaths were taken, swords in hand, and in which the heart of the religious ceremony was the blessing of the flag.⁸

What may not be immediately obvious in examining these festivals is the irony of their military nature, a result of the convoluted connections between popular violence and political legitimacy which were formed in the storming of the Bastille. In this irony, we see the conflict at the core of cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*, the conflict between aims and means which was inherent in the interpretation of a radical act of popular violence as the legitimization of political sovereignty. The *prise de la Bastille*, an act of spontaneous popular violence, had occurred almost simultaneously with the formation of the National Guard, an embodiment of the Assembly's authority that was created to counteract the threat of the king's troops in July 1789. The National Guard thereafter often served to impose the image of government authority on popular demonstration, such as during the October Days of 1789, when National Guard troops followed the Parisian women's march to Versailles in an attempt to infuse

⁷ Lüsebrink and Reichardt, *The Bastille*, 156.

⁸ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 40.

governmental order into the situation. At the same time, the National Guard was connected to “the people” by virtue of its having participated in the *prise de la Bastille*, and through the grant of a place of honor with the National Guard to the *vainqueurs de la Bastille*. Indeed, the National Guard was part of “the people,” but existed as a group whose potential for violence was sanctioned by their uniforms, which displayed the authorization of the Assembly. Thus, the National Guard was essentially at the center of the Assembly’s effort to maintain the delicate balance between, on one hand, celebrating an act of popular violence as a source of the Assembly’s legitimacy, and on the other, preventing a further explosion of popular violence that would threaten the Assembly’s authority.

Thus, it was in the National Assembly’s interest to cast the storming of the Bastille as a single, non-repeatable event, avoiding another such act of popular violence. To do this, the Assembly chose to represent the storming of the Bastille as a completed event, an accomplished transformation of the government system that needed no further action. This interpretive process is evident on a smaller scale in the local federative festivals, where the spontaneity of events recalled the unplanned nature of the storming of the Bastille. In the official Festival of Federation, however, the focus of popular engagement was shifted to be part of a symbolic gesture of determination to protect the liberal social coalition that had been achieved by the violence at the Bastille.

Gradually, the violence that was originally at the core of these local festivals decreased until it was no longer their prominent feature.⁹ By the time the official Festival of the Federation was being planned in Paris, the only legacy of violence in the proceedings was in the deputations of National Guardsmen invited to take part and the military air of the festival. The plans for the

⁹ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 41.

festival and relevant debates in the National Assembly show an intense focus on the image of national unity and the reconciliation of socio-political tensions through the celebration of a new constitutional monarchy. In the context of the local federative festivals which had sprung up around the country, the Assembly's official festival represented an overarching effort by the revolutionary government to manage the collective interpretation of events and prevent the principles of the storming of the Bastille from being carried to a socially chaotic end.¹⁰ However, the Bastille's legacy of popular engagement was abundantly clear in the preparations for the festival, when thousands of Parisians spontaneously gathered to clear the Champ de Mars and finish the site for the Festival, overcoming "administrative incompetence" in a tangible display of unity.¹¹ Witnesses marveled at the fraternity and amiability between people of different backgrounds who worked together, effectively living out the ideological legacy of the *prise de la Bastille* even as they helped produce a festival whose ceremonies were intended to preclude a repetition of the same popular uprising.

In keeping with the military origins of the federative festivals, much of the planning evident in the minutes of the National Assembly concerns the election of deputies of the divisions of the National Guard from around the country. Often, though, the ideological message of the festival is scattered among the logistical discussions. On 19 June 1790, *Le Moniteur universel* published an article outlining the spirit of the festival, as communicated by the National Assembly to the provinces:

The Address to the French, read in the National Assembly, honored with its vote and sent to all the municipalities with the related decrees, perfectly fulfilled this intention [to instruct all of France in the great object of the Festival]. In it we see the spirit that dictated this confederation; it is that of peace, harmony, submission to the law, much

¹⁰ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 42.

¹¹ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 45.

more than a commendable, but fruitless enthusiasm, that only leaves the people a muddled feeling of physical power, without any link that ties it to happiness.¹²

Here again we see the conflict between the general perception of a triumph of liberty at the Bastille and the violence through which it had been achieved. Clearly, a main purpose of the Festival of the Federation was to outshine the actions of a “fruitless enthusiasm...without any link that ties it to happiness” (which would, apparently, characterize the further use of popular violence), with a collective feeling of unity and, most importantly, “submission to the law.” In this statement, peace, harmony, and submission to the law are specifically tied to happiness, while the alternative is presented as “muddled” and unfruitful. To encourage harmony, the Assembly invited all the municipalities of France to participate in the federative pact at noon on July 14, the moment when it would be made at the festival in Paris. Thus, in creating an official national festival, the Assembly used its political authority to incorporate the characteristics of local, spontaneous federative festivals into one that would outshine them all, overcoming any overly zealous pursuit of popular sovereignty with an image and interpretation of the Revolution as being complete, with France unified under the constitutional monarchy and government reform which had been won at the Bastille.

As described by eyewitness accounts and numerous illustrations of the event, the Festival of the Federation took place in the Champ de Mars, which had been transformed into an amphitheater, flanked on one end by a gallery and the king’s throne, and on the other by an *arc de triomphe*. The revolutionary scenes depicted on the *arc de triomphe* included soldiers taking

¹² “L’Adresse aux Français, lue à l’Assemblée nationale, honorée de son suffrage et envoyée à toutes les municipalités avec les décrets qui s’y rapportent, a parfaitement rempli cette intention. On a pu y voir l’esprit qui a dicté cette confédération; c’est celui de la paix, de l’union, de la soumission à la loi, bien plus encore qu’un louable, mais stérile enthousiasme, qui ne laisse au peuple qu’un sentiment confus de pouvoir physique, sans aucun lien qui l’attache au bonheur.” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 4, no. 170, 19 June 1790, 658. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=s5gFAAAAQAAJ&hl=en>.

the civic oath, heralds proclaiming peace to an empire of rejoicing people, and deputies from different peoples paying homage to the National Assembly.¹³ In the center of the Champ de Mars stood the *autel de la patrie* (altar of the motherland), which was decorated on each side with scenes representing the good brought to France by the Revolution, including the Constitution and legal equality. The deputies of the National Assembly and the royal family were escorted to the Champ de Mars in a solemn procession by representatives of the National Guard, who are pictured in illustrations of the event surrounding the *autel de la patrie* in an orderly throng. A mass was celebrated, and the climax of the festival was the swearing of the *serment civique* (the civic oath) by the deputies of the Assembly, the National Guard, and most notably the king himself, which was heralded by one report as “*le plus beau moment de la monarchie Française*” (“the most beautiful moment of the French monarchy”).¹⁴ The festival ended with a *Te Deum*, “sung to the sound of 300 drums and all the military instruments.”¹⁵

Notably missing from the Fête de la Fédération were explicit references, beyond that of the date, to the *prise de la Bastille*. While Gonchon had featured scenes from the storming of the Bastille in his proposal, the actual celebration was focused overwhelmingly on the unity of the French people under the beneficent influence of the new Constitution and constitutional monarchy. In the interests of the new government, the Fête de la Fédération was meant to manifest and promote the sense of completion and unity at the end of a revolution, rather than the celebration of an ongoing violent revolt. However, despite the lack of clear pictorial references to the Bastille, the ideological legacy of the *prise de la Bastille*, especially the ideal of popular

¹³ Anonymous. *Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790: Description fidelle de tout ce qui a précédé, accompagné et suivi cette auguste cérémonie* (Paris: S. et J. Sion, 1790), 18-19.
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k406907.r=confederation%20nationale%20du%2014%20juillet?rk=85837;2>.

¹⁴ *Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790*, 23.

¹⁵ “Le *Te Deum* a été chanté au son de 300 tambours & de tous les instrumens [*sic*] militaires.” *Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790*, 24.

sovereignty which had been attributed to the crowd actions of 14 July 1789, was evident everywhere. The verses inscribed on the *arc de triomphe*, not to mention the words of the oath that Louis XVI swore on the *autel de la patrie*, proclaimed a clear realization that the monarch was no longer in a position of absolute control, but rather in the role of ruling for the people. In these verses, as well as in the cries and chants heard throughout the day, the Constitution and the law came before the king.

Only the motherland or the law can arm us,
We die to defend it, we live to love one another.

The rights of man were unknown for centuries, they were recovered for all of humanity.

Only the king of a free people is a powerful king.¹⁶

Included in a description of the *autel de la patrie* is this verse:

THE NATION, THE LAW, THE KING.
The nation is you,
The law is also you, it is your will;
The king is the guardian of the law.¹⁷

The king's oath likewise proclaimed the preeminence of the Constitution over absolute monarchy:

¹⁶ La patrie ou la loi [*sic*] peut seule nous armer,
Mourons pour la défendre, vivons pour nous aimer.

Les droits de l'homme étoient [*sic*] méconnus depuis des siècles [*sic*], ils ont été reconquis pour l'humanité entière [*sic*].

Le Roi d'un peuple libre est seul un Roi puissant.
Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790, 18-19.

¹⁷ LA NATION, LA LOI, LE ROI.
La nation, c'est vous,
La loi, c'est encore vous, c'est votre volonté;
Le Roi, c'est le gardien de la Loi.

Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790, 21.

I, King of the French, swear to the nation to employ all the power relegated to me by the constitutional law of the state, to maintain the constitution and cause the laws to be executed.¹⁸

Especially illustrative of the changes in the ideals of society and government after July 1789 is the oath sworn by the National Guards on the *autel de la patrie*, which was also inscribed on the altar:

I swear to be forever loyal to the Nation; to the law and to the King, to maintain the constitution decreed by the national assembly, and accepted by the king, to protect in accordance with the law, the security of persons and of property. The free circulation of grains and subsistence in the interior of the kingdom, and the collection of public contributions, under several forms in which they exist, to live united with all French people by the indissoluble links of fraternity.¹⁹

The words of this oath are built not only around the ideal of popular sovereignty, but also around the key grievances that motivated the crowd actions of July 14, 1789. The oath to protect the “security of persons and of property” recalls the lack of that security in the past, and the *lettres de cachet* which could suddenly and indefinitely incarcerate a person in the Bastille. In the years leading up to the *prise de la Bastille*, this very insecurity of persons and property, and the arbitrary nature of the *lettres de cachet* had been a major component of the pre-Revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille, contributing to the image of the prison as a symbol for despotism and tyranny. The oath’s emphasis on the “free circulation of grains in the interior of the kingdom” hearkens back to the bread riots of 1789, the forerunners of the *prise de la Bastille*, and the bitterness that arose between liberals and popular radicals over the interpretation of the monarchy’s failure to fulfill its traditional role as protector and provider for its subjects, even at

¹⁸ “Moi, Roi des Français, [j]e jure à la nation d’employer tout le pouvoir qui m’est relégué par la loi constitutionnelle [sic] de l’état, à maintenir la constitution, & à faire exécuter les loix [sic].” *Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790*, 24.

¹⁹ “Je jure d’être à jamais fidèle à la nation ; à la loi et au Roi, de maintenir la constitution décrétée par l’assemblée nationale, & acceptée par le Roi, de protéger conformément aux loix [sic], la sûreté des personnes & des propriétés. La libre circulation des grains & subsistance dans l’intérieur du royaume, & la perception des contributions publiques, sous quelques formes qu’elles existent, de demeurer unis à tous les Français par les liens indissolubles de la fraternité.” *Confédération nationale du 14 juillet 1790*, 23-24.

the most basic level of subsistence. Finally, the euphemistic reference to taxes as “public contributions” recalls the deep resentment over the debilitating taxation of the lower classes, and the dire financial situation which finally drove the king to summon the meeting of the Estates-General to authorize new taxes in 1789. Ultimately, the lack of explicit references to the storming of the Bastille is what makes the Fête de la Fédération a particularly intriguing part of this story of cultural memory formation. This is because the Fête represents a moment of conflict and contradiction not just between varying interpretations of the *prise de la Bastille*, but also between the National Assembly’s interpretation of the event and its need to prevent another such event from occurring. Essentially, the authority wielded by the Assembly in 1790 was seen as being legitimized by the storming of the Bastille; however, in the official 14 July 1790 celebration, the Assembly focused on a message that precluded any further acts of popular violence, in the interests of order and deliberative government.

The examination of the 1790 Fête de la Fédération as an episode in the long-term process of cultural memory formation reveals the tensions that were at the core of that process, even within the revolutionary movement. Foremost was the continuing conflict between the idolization of the *prise de la Bastille* as the embodiment of an ideal of popular sovereignty and the National Assembly’s desire to avoid another outburst of popular violence. In the date of the Fête de la Fédération, the enthusiastic participation of thousands of Parisians, and the text of the festival’s oaths and songs, the ideological legacy of the storming of the Bastille was fully evident. However, in the National Assembly’s efforts to guide the collective memory of the Bastille, that legacy, and its unbreakable link with popular violence, were hidden in a general celebration of unity and the interpretation of the festival as celebrating the peaceful end of a revolution, rather than the beginning of one. Mona Ozouf perceptively states that in the view of

the National Assembly at least, the Festival of the Federation “was a way of bringing a turbulent period to a close rather than setting men in motion.”²⁰ However, it might also be understood as an attempt to channel the zeal which had characterized the people’s seizure of sovereignty at the Bastille, and their newfound sense of power, towards the protection of the fraternal revolutionary nationhood they had created. In effect, though the National Assembly avoided specific mention of the storming of the Bastille in the Festival of the Federation, it drew on the revolutionary ideals and interpretations of the event to direct and influence the formation of a long-term cultural memory which exists to this day. And yet, only one year later, the atmosphere of the Revolution, and the influence of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille, would have drastically changed.

²⁰ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 44.

Chapter 3

The *Prise de la Bastille*, Popular Violence and Political Fracturing, 1791

As the French Revolution progressed through another year and reached the second anniversary of the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1791, the legacy of the *prise de la Bastille* continued to gain importance as the ideological core of the Revolution. However, as the celebration of popular sovereignty became the basis for ever more drastic reforms by the National Assembly, the utopian ideal of national unity that had been celebrated in the 1790 Fête de la Fédération began to crumble under the force of internal stresses and divisions. At the end of June 1791, increasing tensions between the monarchy and the revolutionaries came to a head when the King's attempted flight from Paris forced a serious discussion of the monarch's role in the new France. Within days of the second anniversary of the *prise de la Bastille*, the celebrations were overshadowed by the violent social and political rupture of the Champ de Mars Massacre. The events of June and July 1791 would prove to be a turning point in the Revolution, as differing interpretations of the legacy of the Bastille came to the fore and factions fought each other over the fate of the monarchy. In the story of this short period is found a crucial development in the cultural memory formation surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*, a time when the rapid increase in factional discord, and the invocation of the storming of the Bastille as the source of legitimacy by each faction, made the cultural memory of the event a key to guiding the Revolution. Over the next several years, intense factional polarization, violence, and an ongoing debate over the meaning of the Revolution itself would be mirrored by the continuing battle over interpretation and implementation of the *prise de la Bastille*'s legacy and its place in cultural memory.

The early results of the storming of the Bastille, as seen in the festivities of the Festival of the Federation in July 1790, were the recognition of popular sovereignty and the joining of the monarchy, legislative government and the French people as a unified France, with liberty, equality, fraternity and loyalty to the nation being its paramount characteristics. However, the Assembly's effort to promote these revolutionary values while precluding another such outburst of popular violence became difficult when widespread religious reform tugged at traditional social structures, from poor relief to the foundations of the monarchy. Beginning with the nationalization of church lands in December 1789, and the government's disbanding of monasteries in February 1790, the National Assembly had already instituted sweeping changes to the centuries-old social infrastructure that was the Catholic Church in France. The most contentious of these was the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (July 1790), which placed the French Catholic Church under government authority, redrew parish lines, instituted elections for bishops, and required priests to swear a *serment civique*, or civic oath, of loyalty to the new government. The inclusion of the word "civil" in the title of the legislation referenced the idea that the reform only dealt with the nonspiritual structure of the Catholic Church, legitimizing the Assembly's reform independent of the church government itself.¹ As historians Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee have pointed out, the implementation of the ideal of popular sovereignty, as conceived in the storming of the Bastille, and its application to the election of church officers went too far to retain the division between spiritual and nonspiritual life.² "In the end, it proved impossible to reconcile a Church based on divinely ordained hierarchy and dogma and a certainty of one true faith with a Revolution based on popular sovereignty, tolerance and the

¹ Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee, eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.

² Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, 45.

certainty of earthly fulfilment through the application of secular reason.”³ In the social dilemma that resulted from the extension of the Assembly’s jurisdiction over religion, one can trace the growing stresses between a national regeneration based on Enlightenment values and the traditional hierarchies and beliefs which had been the nation’s social infrastructure for centuries. These issues would come to identify the primary dilemmas of the Revolution, but came directly to the fore in the debate over the king’s position in the new France.

In effect, the tensions between Louis XVI and the Revolution were fostered and exacerbated by the religious tensions that swept the nation in the wake of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. While the king at first assented to the reforms it set forth, he became more and more hesitant as the split between “constitutional” clergy (those who took the oath of loyalty) and “refractory” (nonjuring) clergy widened. The clerical oath was required of those elected to clerical office, and the Assembly directed the first elections to be held in early 1791.⁴ The oath required of the clergy was “to carefully watch over the faithful of the dioceses and parishes that are entrusted to them, to be faithful to the nation, to the law and to the king, to maintain the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the king, to the best of their ability.”⁵ On 3 January 1791, nonjuring clergymen were banned from office by the Assembly, in a move that associated nonjuring clergy with counter-revolutionary sympathies. When Pope Pius IV proclaimed his condemnation of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy on 10 March 1791, Louis XVI was placed in the difficult double role of being a king traditionally empowered by divine right and the religious blessing of the Pope, while simultaneously being a monarch delegated to a new constitutional role and endeavoring to maintain his relationship with the

³ Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, 45.

⁴ Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, 47.

⁵ Translated in Dwyer and McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, 48.

Revolution. The results of religious reform (which had originally been called for in many of the *cahiers de doléances* of 1789) underline the paradoxical effects of the popular sovereignty that was heralded by the storming of the Bastille. While the Assembly's fulfillment of the desire for reform expressed in the *cahiers*, and Louis XVI's consent to that reform, demonstrates the ascendance of popular sovereignty in the aftermath of 14 July 1789, the repercussions which followed revealed the strain put on social stability and the idea of a unified society.

The tension engendered by religious reform appears especially clearly in the royalist newspapers and pamphlets of early 1791. An excellent example is the *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, a royalist newspaper published by Jacques Louis Gautier de Syonnet, in which the storming of the Bastille, the Revolution in general, and religious reform in particular, were the objects of biting criticism. On the 21st of March 1791, Gautier de Syonnet remarked,

The people, in destroying the Bastille, were moved by vanity. This prison was not made for them – they escaped it by their obscurity. None of the *vainqueurs de la Bastille* would have had the honor of having been held there. Bicêtre or the *salle de discipline* was the prison of the people. It [the storming of the Bastille] served the vengeance and the fury of some maniacal philosophers, of some scribblers, of some ingrate courtiers, who prudently did not want to risk the slight dangers to which they would be exposed through the surrender of a fort that does not exist outside the memory of contemporaries and in the shelves of history.⁶

In this article, Gautier de Syonnet specifically references the early revolutionary memory of the Bastille as shaped by the writings of “maniacal philosophers, scribblers and ingrate courtiers” (i.e., prisoners like Linguet and Latude), pointing out that the members of “the people” were, in

⁶ “Le peuple, en détruisant la bastille, a été mû par la vanité. Cette prison n’était pas faite pour lui, il y échappait par son obscurité. Aucun des vainqueurs de la Bastille n’aurait eu l’honneur d’y être renfermé. Bicêtre ou la salle de discipline étaient la prison du peuple. Il a servi la vengeance & la fureur de quelques philosophes énergumènes, de quelques écrivailleurs, & de quelques courtisans ingrats, qui prudemment n’ont pas voulu courir les dangers très-peu considerables [*sic*] auxquels pouvait les exposer la reddition de ce fort qui n’existe plus que dans le souvenir des contemporains, & dans les tablettes de l’histoire.” *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, vol. 2, no. 21, 21 March 1791, 201.
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=0DxhAAAAcAAJ>.

fact, prevented by their low social station from being honored by confinement in the Bastille. Through this argument, and the statement that the *vainqueurs* were “moved by vanity,” Gautier de Syonnet directly attacks the entire image of popular sovereignty which the storming of the Bastille had come to represent. Instead of an oppressed people seizing the power to free themselves, he casts the revolutionaries as a presumptuous lower-class mob who destroyed a prison they were not even worthy to inhabit, incited by the writings of hypocrites who attacked the Bastille for selfish purposes but would not have wanted to face the dangers accompanying its surrender. Gautier de Syonnet frequently used similar insinuations to question the legitimacy of the Revolution, effectively using the revolutionaries’ most self-legitimizing action to undermine them.

Frequently, Gautier de Syonnet particularly targeted the plebeian portion of the revolutionary population through comic songs, poems, and articles. In his edition of 17 January, he included a short but caustic attack on social equality: “In every society, for it to exist, it is necessary to have inequalities, privileges and distinctions.”⁷ Immediately below this, Gautier de Syonnet printed a song entitled “La Liberté.”

Before the revolution,
I confined my ambition
To making my work perfect.
Abundance accompanied my gain,
Therefore I was in slavery.
I wanted to be sovereign.

Here I am free, but idle:
I am no longer the captive of a king...⁸

⁷ “Dans toute société, il faut, pour qu’elle subsiste, des inégalités, des privilèges & des distinctions.” *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, vol. 1, no. 17, 17 January 1791, 132.
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=CnUwAAAAYAAJ>.

⁸ Avant la révolution,
Je bornais mon ambition
A rendre parfait mon ouvrage.

It is clear in these and similar sources that royalist strategy centered on discrediting the core ideas of the Revolution, especially by denigrating the values of popular engagement and individual citizenship that had thrived after the storming of the Bastille. Religious reform was the other primary target of criticism, particularly the civic oath required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Judging from Gautier de Syonnet's angry language about the social impacts of the Civil Constitution, this was among the worst of the actions of the National Assembly:

Apostates!... What oath do you take in this place?
 To whom? Is it to Franklin, to *Mir*... the impious,
 To religion, or philosophy?
 To protestant, to Jew, to the odious atheist?
 To cowardly plotters, to factious louts,
 (The altar forming the garnish of the sacrilege?)
 To your first oaths, what? Are you perjured?
 Where are the holy laws of your investiture?
 Is it necessary then to sacrifice reason, worship, nature,
 Rites, communion, pious priesthood?
 To be a citizen, is it necessary to abjure God?⁹

The picture of loyalist thought and persuasive strategy evident in these passages reveals that a

L'abondance suivait mon gain;
 Alors j'étais en esclavage.
 Je voulais être souverain.

Me voici libre, mais oisif:
 D'un roi je ne suis plus captif...

Journal de la Cour et de la Ville, vol. 1, no. 17, 17 January 1791, 132-133.

⁹ Apostats!... quel serment prêtez-vous en ce lieu?
 A qui? est-ce à Franklin, à *Mir*... l'impie,
 A la religion, ou la philosophie?
 Au protestant, au juif, à l'athée odieux?
 Aux lâches cabaleurs, aux goujats factieux,
 (Du sacrilège autel formant la garniture?)
 A vos premiers sermens [*sic*], quoi? vous êtes parjures?
 Où sont les saintes lois de votre investiture?
 Faut-il donc immoler, raison, culte, nature,

Rites, communion, sacerdoce pieux?
 Pour être citoyen, faut-il abjurer Dieu?

Journal de la Cour et de la Ville, vol. 1, no. 16, 16 January 1791, 127.

distinct effort was made not only to undermine the credibility of the Assembly and its reforms, but also the ideal of popular sovereignty (stemming from the storming of the Bastille) that supported it. And while the National Assembly may have been reluctant to recall the example of the storming of the Bastille, Gautier de Syonnet alluded to it frequently, remarking sarcastically that “the breaking down of an open door is indeed a great miracle, in the sense of the revolution,” and claiming that “Franklin, J. J. Rousseau and Washington replaced the Holy Trinity, and the storming of the Bastille had taken the place of the mystery of the incarnation.”¹⁰ Clearly, the royalist faction was quick to notice and point out the type of almost divine significance which the Revolution was coming to associate with the *prise de la Bastille*, and attack it in an attempt to counteract the growing revolutionary cultural memory of the event and its sociopolitical consequences.

By April 1791, Louis XVI had become very disturbed by the religious situation, especially after the Pope published his denunciation of the clerical oath required by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (forcing the king to choose where his loyalties were strongest). On 17 April, the king took communion in a ceremony led by a non-juring priest at the Tuileries palace, and then planned to skip the more official Easter ceremony, which would be led by a constitutional priest.¹¹ When the private communion with a non-juring priest was observed by a grenadier in the royal chapel and the story spread, public disapproval was immediately stirred and focused on the king’s intent to depart Paris for his summer home at St.-Cloud the next day.¹² When the departure was attempted, Parisians and National Guardsmen surrounded the king’s

¹⁰ “Franklin, J. J. Rousseau & Wasington [*sic*], ont remplacé la Ste.-Trinité, & la prise de la Bastille a été substituée au mystère de l’Incarnation...Quant à la prise de la Bastille, l’enfoncement d’une porte ouverte est vraiment un grand miracle, dans le sens de la révolution.” *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, no. 16, 16 January 1791, 128.

¹¹ David Andress, *Massacre at the Champ de Mars: Popular Dissent and Political Culture in the French Revolution* (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2000), 109.

¹² Andress, 109.

carriage, prevented the trip and returned the royal family to the palace. As historian David Andress has discussed, the delicacy of the relationship between the monarch and the Revolution made it an easy step for many people to conclude that the king, instead of merely leaving for a stay at his summer residence, was actually embarking on a longer trip, an escape from France.¹³ In the light of the distrust that was spread by these developments, the precarious alliance between the *ancien régime* and the new France began to collapse. It was, as Andress writes, a “difficult double position” for the authorities:

As revolutionaries themselves, they were fearful of the possibility of aristocratic plots and the flight of the king, but they still viewed the *peuple* as a body prone to panic and to primitive reactions, and of course to subornation, fit only to be lectured to and ordered around. The radicals had quite different ideas. They had no particular reason to trust the authorities, whose behavior was often questionable, whereas the people, in their idealised view, had solid revolutionary credentials.¹⁴

Here we see the foreshadowing of a divide in the revolutionary population itself, as interpretations of how the revolutionary ideals should be implemented were split between the government and *le peuple*, as well as between classes and political ideologies.

The pressure put on the political and social situation by the St.-Cloud affair finally reached a breaking point on 20 June, when the king, disgusted by his lesser role in the revolutionary government and outraged by perceived insults to himself and to the monarchy, fled Paris with his family and set off for Austria in disguise. The next morning, Paris was buzzing with the news; revolutionaries and royalists alike were horrified at the turn affairs had taken. The records of the National Assembly, printed in *Le Moniteur universel*, show the surprise of the delegates, the “profound silence” which followed the news that the king was gone, and the quick

¹³ Andress, 109-113.

¹⁴ Andress, 112-113.

measures which were taken to recover the royal family.¹⁵ Immediately, the image of the *prise de la Bastille* was invoked as a precedent for determination and competence; as the deputy from Saint-Jean d'Angely said,

It is doubtless unnecessary to recount to the Assembly the courageous and impressive conduct that it held, two years ago, in conditions perhaps less important and less difficult. The men who knew at that time to win liberty will know today to conserve and defend it, and all the friends of the constitution will rush and unite to maintain it.¹⁶

Particularly interesting here is the coupling of the monarchy with the benefits of liberty, and the Assembly's reaction to the news that the king was gone. As Jean Bailly, mayor of Paris, announced to the city on 21 June, "The king was kidnapped last night, around two a.m., without anyone knowing the route that he took. As soon as the municipality was informed of the departure, it took the promptest measures to discover his route."¹⁷ What is clear is that the Assembly, rather than accusing the king of abandoning the Revolution, immediately cast the situation as a kidnapping, and dispatched couriers to the *départements* "to arrest those who conspired and effected the kidnapping of the royal family and the king."¹⁸ As David Andress points out, "[t]he truth was evident to all, but, as the authorities must have instantly realised, this fiction was their only chance of saving the Constitution from the crisis."¹⁹ However, the official "kidnapping" narrative did not convince all of the population. With hindsight, we can see that

¹⁵ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 715.
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=3YxXAAAAAYAAJ>.

¹⁶ "Il est sans doute inutile de retracer à l'Assemblée la conduite courageuse et imposante qu'elle a tenue, il y a deux ans, dans des conjonctures moins importantes peut-être et moins difficiles. Les hommes qui ont su à cette époque conquérir la liberté sauront aujourd'hui la conserver et la défendre, et tous les amis de la constitution vont se presser et s'unir pour la maintenir."

Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 715.

¹⁷ "Le roi a été enlevé cette nuit, vers les deux heures, sans que l'on sache la route qu'il a prise. Aussitôt que la municipalité a été instruite de ce départ, elle a pris les mesures les plus promptes pour découvrir sa route."

Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 715.

¹⁸ M. Regnault put forth a proposal, to which the Assembly agreed, "d'expédier des couriers dans les départements pour faire arrêter ceux qui ont conspiré et effectué l'enlèvement de la famille royale et du roi." *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 715.

¹⁹ Andress, 148.

this was a crucial moment in the development of the Revolution, a moment when opinions and loyalties began to split between three main demographic groups, rather than two. Instead of the rift being (in generalized terms) only between revolutionaries and royalists, there was now also a divide between the more moderate and order-focused revolutionaries (the delegates of the National Assembly and the government as a whole) and the radical the Parisian crowd. The king's flight finally forced the confrontation of a dilemma that had long been lurking in the background of revolutionary policy: what should be done with Louis XVI's role in the new government, and how was his position in the absolute monarchy of the *ancien régime* to be converted into a that of a constitutional, less potent monarch?

When the king was finally recognized on 22 July and prevented from going further, the National Guard escorted him and his family back to Paris. Though they reached Paris without harm, the king's flight had roused the anger of the radical revolutionary population, and the Revolution had taken a distinct turn towards factionalism and discord. In the time between the royal family's departure and return, rumors of conspiracies had spread and the population had become increasingly unsettled.²⁰ The episode had caused what historian James L. Osen characterizes as "a veritable frenzy in the press," which reflected the general unrest.²¹ The monarchist *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville* exclaimed,

With what frightening rapidity the most disastrous tidings succeed each other! Fear, hope, all the most painful sentiments tear us, and far from foreseeing an end to our sorrows, the future only presents us with signs of the most formidable storms.

Yesterday, while we were abandoning ourselves to transports of imprudent joy, while we enjoyed depicting the touching moment when the king pressed faithful subjects in his arms and against his heart; well, in the same moment, this monarch was returning in the chains that he had vainly tried to break.²²

²⁰ Address, 148-156.

²¹ James L. Osen, *Royalist Political Thought in the French Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 39. See also: Address, 151.

²² "Avec quelle effrayante rapidité se sont succédées les nouvelles les plus desastreuses [*sic*]! La crainte, l'espoir, tous les sentimens [*sic*] les plus penibles [*sic*] nous déchirent tout-à-tout, & bien loin de prévoir un terme à nos

The situation was exacerbated by a letter which the king left behind, listing his grievances with the current state of affairs and stating unequivocally that “the king does not think it is possible to preserve such a government.”²³ It also specifically referenced the 1790 Fête de la Fédération, stating that “[a]t the federation of 14 July, the National Assembly declared that the king was its head; this was to show that it had the power to name another.”²⁴ Thus between the king and the monarchist newspapers, both the worthiness of *le peuple* to claim to represent the nation, and the authority of the National Assembly to represent *le peuple* (things which the storming of the Bastille had been interpreted to represent) were under attack.

The more radical revolutionaries struck back quickly. On the 21st of June, the Club des Cordeliers (also known as the Société des Amis des droits de l’homme, which had risen to prominence as a political club under leaders such as Jean-Paul Marat and Georges Danton) issued a petition to the “representatives of the nation” which perfectly illustrates the fracturing between the revolutionaries aligned with the Parisian crowd and the more deliberate, conventional government of the National Assembly:

We were slaves in 1789; we had thought ourselves liberated in 1790; we are at the end of June 1791.

Legislators, you had distributed the powers of the nation that you represent; you had invested Louis XVI with an excessive authority; you had sanctioned tyranny, in instituting him as an irremovable, inviolable and hereditary king; you had sanctioned the slavery of the French, in declaring that France was a monarchy.

The good citizens moaned; opposing opinions fought vehemently. But the law existed, and we had obeyed it; we awaited our salvation by the progress of the Enlightenment and philosophy....

maux, l’avenir ne nous présente que les signes précurseurs de l’orage le plus redoutable.

Pendant que nous nous livrions hier aux transports d’une joye [*sic*] imprudente, pendant que nous aimions à nous représenter le moment touchant où le roi presserait dans ses bras, contre son coeur, des sujets fideles; eh bien, dans ce moment même, ce monarque rentrait dans les fers qu’il a vainement essayé de briser.” *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, vol. 3, no. 55, 24 June 1791, 434. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=xDxhAAAAcAAJ>.

²³ “Le roi ne pense pas qu’il soit possible de conserver un pareil gouvernement: plus on voit s’approcher le terme des travaux de l’Assemblée....” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 722.

²⁴ “A la fédération du 14 juillet, l’Assemblée nationale a déclaré que le roi en était le chef; c’était montrer qu’elle en pouvait nommer un autre....” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 8, no. 173, 22 June 1791, 722.

But times have changed: this supposed convention of a people with its king no longer exists. Louis abdicated the royalty; from now on Louis is nothing for us, unless he is now our enemy.

So here we are in the same state as we were after the storming of the Bastille: liberated and without a king. The question is, whether it is advantageous to name another.²⁵

We now see the fundamental issue that faced the Revolution by the second anniversary of the *prise de la Bastille*.

In hindsight, the 14 July 1791 anniversary itself is overshadowed first by the king's flight and the ongoing debate that it provoked, and then by the violence of the Champ de Mars Massacre on 17 July. However, according to *Le Moniteur universel*, "[t]his commemoration...came about with a brilliance and majesty of which it is difficult to form an idea."²⁶ As in 1790, the official revolutionary narrative of this celebration was centered on official and constitutional actions—one of the faces of the new *autel de la patrie* depicted the history of France, beginning with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen on 4 August 1789 and continuing to the Festival of Federation on 14 July 1790.²⁷ It notably excluded the date of 14 July 1789, thereby implying that the regeneration of France was begun with deliberate government action and completed in utopian unity at the Festival of Federation, just as

²⁵ “Nous étions esclaves en 1789; nous nous étions crus libres en 1790; nous le sommes à la fin de juin 1791.

Législateurs, vous aviez distribué les pouvoirs de la nation que vous représentez; vous aviez investi Louis XVI d'une autorité démesurée; vous aviez consacré la tyrannie, en l'instituant roi inamovible, inviolable et héréditaire; vous aviez consacré l'esclavage des Français, en déclarant que la France était une monarchie.

Les bons citoyens ont gémi; les opinions se sont choquées avec véhémence. Mais la loi existait, et nous lui avons obéi; nous attendions notre salut du progrès des lumières et de la philosophie....

Mais les temps sont changés: elle n'existe plus, cette prétendue convention d'un peuple avec son roi. Louis a abdicé la royauté; désormais Louis n'est plus rien pour nous, à moins qu'il ne devienne notre ennemi.

Nous voilà donc au même état où nous étions après la prise de la Bastille: libres et sans roi. Reste à savoir s'il est avantageux d'en nommer un autre.” Reprinted in Sigismond Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5 (Paris: L. Cerf, 1907), 111. <https://archive.org/details/s2actesdelacommune05lacroift>.

²⁶ “Cette commémoration, comme nous l'avons dit hier, s'est faite avec un éclat et une majesté dont on se forme difficilement une idée.” *Courrier des 83 départements*, 16 July 1791. Reprinted in Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 346.

²⁷ Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 347.

the narrative of that festival had proclaimed. During the ceremony, however, the Bastille was rather more prominent as a symbol than in 1790. National Guardsmen who had been at the storming of the Bastille escorted a model of the fortress and the construction workers who had demolished it, who walked with Palloy, their leader and the creator of a cult of Bastille relics, at their head.²⁸ After a *Te Deum* was sung, the flags of the National Guard were brought to the base of the altar, where a representative of the National Assembly attached tricolored ribbons to each one. According to the *Courrier des 83 départements*, cries of “*Vive la liberté!*” broke out when a flag taken at the Bastille was decorated with the new national colors.²⁹ In the evening, the festivities continued on the site of the Bastille, which was decorated, lit up, and transformed into a ballroom for the occasion.³⁰

Perhaps what is most notable in this anniversary celebration are the discrepancies in how the storming of the Bastille was referenced. Most important is the fact that the day was essentially treated as an anniversary of the Festival of Federation, rather than of the *prise de la Bastille*. For example, the mass that was celebrated at the Champ de Mars was printed with the title *Mass for Solemn Days and Anniversaries of the Confederation of the French, First Celebrated on 14 July 1790*.³¹ However, the storming of the Bastille was included in the celebration multiple ways: the official procession started its route on the site of the Bastille before making its way to the Champ de Mars; Palloy and his workers were present with a model of the fortress; a flag captured at the Bastille was symbolically redecorated with the colors of the Revolution; and a dance for the people took place on the Bastille site.³² This discrepancy of

²⁸ Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 348.

²⁹ Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 348.

³⁰ Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 348.

³¹ “Messe pour les jours solennels et anniversaires de la Confédération des Français, célébrée pour la première fois le 14 juillet 1790.” Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 348.

³² Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 345-348.

rhetoric concerning the *prise de la Bastille* was echoed in the threads of tension over the future of the monarchy that ran through the celebration. The *Courrier des 83 départements* reported that the National Guardsmen from the area around Paris removed the king's name from their flags, and that it was removed from the *autel de la patrie* as well: where the altar should have read, "God, the King, and the Law," it now read "God, the... and the Law."³³ We can see, then, that the 14 July 1791 celebration was a meeting place where the official narrative of the National Assembly came into conflict, however subtly, with the undercurrent of dissension and antiroyalism that was spreading across Paris and the rest of France.

Though the official event of 14 July 1791 on the Champ de Mars (now also called the Champ de la Fédération), or at least its official message, celebrated the peaceful federation formed the year before, what goodwill remained from the Fête de la Fédération was threatened by the agitation that filled Paris. On the evening of 16 July, Mayor Bailly called a special meeting of the *Corps municipal* to report "the fermentation that reigns in the capital" and the crowds that had been gathering for two days in various locations around the city.³⁴ Most of this turmoil centered around the Assembly's ongoing deliberation over its response to the king's flight. According to the *Journal du Club des Cordeliers* and the newspaper *Bouche de fer*, on 24 June around 30,000 people went to the National Assembly bearing a petition put forth by the Club des Cordeliers requesting that the Assembly "decide nothing about the former king without the wishes of the 83 départements."³⁵ This petition manifests a distinct break in the practice of

³³ "Dieu, le... et la loi." Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 346.

³⁴ "M. le Maire a annoncé qu'il avait cru devoir convoquer extraordinairement le Corps municipal pour lui rendre compte de la fermentation qui règne dans la capitale.... M. le Maire a ajouté que plusieurs attroupements s'étaient manifestés hier et aujourd'hui aux environs de l'Assemblée nationale, dans les quartiers du Palais-royal et des Tuileries, à la place Vendôme, au Champ de la Fédération...." Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 371.

³⁵ "La Société des Amis des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, accompagnée d'environ 30,000 citoyens porte-piques, s'est présentée pour offrir une pétition individuelle à l'Assemblée nationale. C'était pour lui demander de ne rien

the ideals embraced in the storming of the Bastille; it is one of the first major instances when the will of “the people” was set against that of their governing body, and it raised crucial questions about which one was truly legitimized by the seizure of sovereignty on 14 July 1789. In the following weeks, other petitions and writings were published, following the Club des Cordeliers in denouncing the king and queen as traitors to France. Besides frequently referring to Louis XVI as the *ci-devant* (former) king, their writers declared him a citizen of France like anyone else, removing the shell of inviolability that had surrounded the monarchy for centuries. In the days before the Assembly published its official position regarding the king, the rights and freedoms won at the Bastille were the rallying cry for radical revolutionaries. The Société fraternelle des patriotes des deux sexes, défenseurs de la constitution proclaimed on 13 July, “Sovereignty resides uniquely and essentially in the nation: all powers, all authorities emanate and can only emanate from it.”³⁶ Clearly, the future of popular sovereignty as conceived at the Bastille was now the crux of the Revolution, and was quickly becoming the issue at the very core of the Revolution’s meaning, since the question of legitimate authority and administration would effectively decide whether the Revolution would follow a radical, moderate or conservative path.

With the ideological legacy of the *prise de la Bastille* (and therefore the cultural memory of the event itself) now unequivocally at the center of the Revolution, the contrast between the radical movement, comprised of both the Parisian crowd and its allies in the National Assembly, and the more conservative elements of the Assembly grew more and more important. This is clear in the Assembly’s discussions that followed a three-week long process of inquiry into the

décider sur le ci-devant roi sans avoir le vœu des 83 départements.” Quoted in Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 373.

³⁶ “La souveraineté réside uniquement et essentiellement dans la nation: tous les pouvoirs, toutes les autorités émanent et ne peuvent émaner que d’elle...” Quoted in Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, series 2, vol. 5, 383.

king's flight. As historian Timothy Tackett has discussed, the ensuing debate in the Assembly concerned the core structure of the new France itself. Following the recommendation by the investigating committees that the king be exonerated and not put on trial, seventeen of the Assembly's most eloquent and brilliant deputies, both moderates and radicals, debated the question over the course of 13-15 July. The Committees maintained that Louis XVI had been kidnapped, at least ideologically if not actually physically; that he was inviolable, according to an Assembly vote two years earlier; and finally, that a king was necessary to hold the nation together. The radical delegates, in contrast, declared that Louis XVI had betrayed the people's trust by repeatedly swearing loyalty to the constitution and then abandoning the nation, and that he no longer had the support of public opinion; however, though they called for some sort of punishment for the king, they did not go so far as to demand the abolition of the monarchy. The moderates countered with the notable claim that the Parisian crowds were not an accurate measure of the national sentiment, that most French people were still inclined towards the king as their monarch, and that those demanding the king's trial were actually calling for a republic, which would lead to anarchy. Finally, on 15 July, the motion to exonerate the king was passed, but with added amendments providing for circumstances under which a king could be deposed in the future.³⁷

Outside the Assembly's walls, the decision not to punish the king was met with responses ranging from approval to fury. Demonstrations reminiscent of July 1789 swept Paris, protesting crowds gathered outside the National Assembly and speakers at political clubs began to demand a national referendum on the issue, directly questioning the Assembly's authority.³⁸ Political allegiances became more and more polarized, as the radical Parisians' increasingly extreme

³⁷ Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 137-141.

³⁸ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 144.

demands caused the more moderate left-leaning deputies to abandon their political clubs, thus making the differences between radicals and moderates ever more stark.³⁹ In the turmoil, the issue of sovereignty was once more contested: calls for the Assembly to reconsider its decision mixed with calls for a republic and the abolition of the Assembly itself. The illusion of unity and finality that had been so carefully fostered in the 1790 Fête de la Fédération dissolved, leaving in its place a population riddled with divisions, mistrust and internal tensions. On 16 July, the Club des Cordeliers planned a ceremony for the following day, in which, as Timothy Tackett states, “[m]ilitants from all over the city would assemble at the open square near the demolished Bastille at eleven in the morning and then march across town to the stadium of the Champ de Mars, following the very path taken by municipal and national leaders three days earlier during the July 14 celebration.”⁴⁰ Here, the memory of the *prise de la Bastille* was being directly invoked as a source of authority for the crowd (and the radical political clubs in particular), who would sign a petition on the Champ de Mars. While the Assembly’s desire to avoid popular militancy had meant the storming of the Bastille was not often directly referenced in the official events of the last two years, the event was once again being cited as the source of legitimacy for popular action, and the plan to trace the route of the official 14 July anniversary parade clearly challenged the authority of the National Assembly and city leaders. The following morning, the National Guard blocked the protesters from reaching the Place de la Bastille, and they were forced to abandon the idea of a symbolic march.⁴¹

In this moment, we see a vivid representation of the burgeoning divide between the legislative government and “the people” (represented here by the Parisian crowd and radical

³⁹ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 144.

⁴⁰ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 145.

⁴¹ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 146.

political societies). The National Guard, which had been at the center of the federative oaths sworn on 14 July 1790, was (presumably at the orders of the National Assembly) preventing “the people”—the stars of 14 July 1789—from reaching the site of the *prise de la Bastille*. The storming of the Bastille already held near-sacred status in revolutionary memory and had essentially formed the basis of the Assembly’s power for two years; now it was once again the hinge of a violent political upheaval and the emblem of rightful sovereignty in a popular uprising. Despite the plans for a peaceful demonstration, the almost uncanny similarities to 14 July 1789 continued after the protesters made their way haphazardly to the Champ de Mars. Two men found hiding under the *autel de la patrie* were accused of plotting to blow up a bomb under the petitioners as they signed the document, and, in spite of an effort to take them to local law enforcement for questioning, were hung from lampposts and decapitated (it was later thought they had simply intended to spy on the women petitioners).⁴² The similarities of their treatment with that of the Marquis de Launay and Jacques de Flesselles on 14 July 1789 are obvious. Likewise hearkening back to 1789, the final petition signed on the Champ de Mars that day called for a new governing body and a judgment against the king; as Tackett states, “[i]t was a clear call for a new revolution and the election of a national Convention to create a central authority without a king.”⁴³

Even though most of the protesters were peaceful, the demonstration on the Champ de Mars alarmed the National Assembly. Indeed, a development like this was essentially what the Assembly had dreaded since 1789, a redirection of the popular collective action that had characterized the storming of the Bastille. In the language of the Assembly and the city council, the protesters were *factieux* (rebels or dissenters), and Bailly even went so far as to blame a

⁴² Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 146.

⁴³ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 147.

foreign conspiracy for causing the divisions among revolutionaries.⁴⁴ He declared martial law at 5:30 in the afternoon, and an hour later made his way to the Champ de Mars with armed National Guardsmen, joined General Lafayette, and National Guardsmen began entering the stadium where the protesters were gathered. As Timothy Tackett recounts,

What happened thereafter is somewhat confused, and interpretations depended in part on the political positions of witnesses. Apparently, after a few moments a lone gunshot rang out, the ball passing precariously close to Bailly himself and hitting a cavalryman in the hip, knocking him off his horse. Alarmed by the violence against them, the guardsmen then entered rapidly with their drums beating a double-time cadence and took up position inside the stadium, facing the central altar from the north.... Soon a second column of guardsmen entered from the opposite side of the altar and charged to the north, catching many demonstrators in a pincers movement.... When the troops finally ceased their attack, many dozens of men and women, wounded or dying, lay inside the stadium or in the surrounding fields.⁴⁵

When the National Guard broke up the ceremony, approximately 6,000 people from all strata of Parisian life had signed the petition, and about 50,000 others were present to watch the ceremony.⁴⁶ The Champ de Mars Massacre, then, was an ironic shifting of the use of popular violence (which had played such a memorable role in 1789)—while from the liberal viewpoint the National Guard was still part of *le peuple* (and therefore could be considered to be using popular violence to suppress the petitioners), from the emerging radical viewpoint, they were impostors attacking *le peuple*. Unlike 1789, the people's government was now making a decisive effort to repress actions which, according to one's allegiances, represented either popular sovereignty or the foolish rage of a crowd incited by seditious journalists.

⁴⁴ “Le corps municipal délibérant de nouveau sur cette question, et considérant... Que tous les rapports qui lui parviennent annoncent une conjuration bien caractérisée contre la Constitution et la patrie.... Que des étrangers payés pour nous diviser sont récemment arrivés à Paris, et que, tant par eux que par des émissaires, tous fomentent, sous différents déguisements, des mouvements populaires....” Jérôme Mavidal et al., eds., *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860, recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises, Première série (1787-1799)*, (Paris: Imprimerie administrative de Paul Dupont, 1867-1913), 28:400. https://frda.stanford.edu/en/catalog/rh872zc0184_00_0005. Also quoted in Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 147-148.

⁴⁵ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 148-150.

⁴⁶ Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*, 147.

While multiple parallels can be drawn between the physical occurrences of 14 July 1789 and 17 July 1791, one fundamental difference between the mental atmosphere of the two is the underlying allegiance to the political process in 1791, as opposed to the complete overthrow of government tradition in 1789. Though the potential for collective violent action in such a huge crowd made it unpredictable, the peaceful intentions of the ceremony's organizers and the very act of petitioning was a recognition of the supremacy of the law. From the petitioners' point of view, which was more radical in political terms, the revolutionary government could be seen as occupying the former position of the *ancien régime* government: something good that had been corrupted by a failure to remain true to the source of its power—the people. From the liberal Assembly's point of view, however, the crowd gathered on the Champ de Mars was a direct threat to the safety of the Revolution itself. The estrangement was not only between the crowd and the Assembly, however; in the days leading up to the Champ de Mars Massacre, divisions had grown between radicals and moderates, republicans and constitutional monarchists. Since all claimed the same event (the storming of the Bastille) as the fountainhead of their authority, the interpretation of the meaning and legacy of that event was now a key to guiding the Revolution. In the year between the Fête de la Fédération and the Champ de Mars Massacre, the character of the Revolution had shifted drastically. In 1790, the official interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* as a completed event focused on the resulting utopian unity of all French. In 1791, the deep tensions stemming from religious reforms and the disagreements over the king's role led to intense controversy about the future of the Revolution itself, its fundamental goals, and the very ideals that guided it. In 1792, the nature of the 14 July anniversary celebrations would be starkly different, reflecting the growing violence and radicalism of the Revolution as a whole.

Chapter 4

Sacralization, Myth and Invocation, 1792–1793

The developments in the formation of cultural memory surrounding the storming of the Bastille that were in motion by July 1791 continued to evolve in the following year as the political trajectory of the Revolution veered ever more towards radicalization and factionalism. The conflict over religious reform and the role of the king in the spring and summer of 1791 escalated, rather than calmed, over the ensuing year. But even as the political situation became increasingly fraught, the story of cultural memory formation in terms of the Bastille's material and physical legacy continued. While the sociopolitical complexities of the Revolution became more and more intricate, the cult of Bastille relics and the commemoration of the building itself often proved to be direct manifestations of attitudes towards the increasingly contested memory of the *prise de la Bastille*. At the heart of this story of material legacy and commemoration is a paradox that also lies at the center of the Revolution itself: the interdependence of the past and the present, the new France and the old one it tried to erase. For the Revolution to define itself as a regenerative process, it was necessary to nurture a vivid collective memory of the past to prevent an ideological weakening through collective amnesia. Maintaining that vivid memory, however, required a continual resurrection and re-destruction of the past in order to counteract the inevitable blankness of its absence. In short, for the *prise de la Bastille* to remain an ideological cornerstone of the Revolution, the revolutionaries were forced to perpetually resurrect and demolish the Bastille in order to conserve the symbolism and ideological power of its absence. The same was true for the role of the broader political context of the Revolution, beyond the material history of Bastille relics. When the Revolution became drastically radicalized in the time around the fall of the monarchy in August 1792 and the leadership of the

Revolution constantly changed, the *prise de la Bastille* continued to be cited as a seminal moment in its history. Thus, even amidst changes in the revolutionary demographic, the rise of factionalism and the ascension of an increasingly violent and suppressive interpretation of revolutionary ideals, the cultural memory of 14 July continued to be adapted to fit the shifting needs of the Revolution itself.

Following the Champ de Mars Massacre in July 1791, the French Revolution moved further onto the broader European stage as a political shake-up put the Brissotins (also known as Girondins), a republican antiroyalist faction, in power in the new Legislative Assembly (successor to the National Assembly). In October 1791, their leader, Jacques Brissot, called for European powers to return all French *émigrés* (emigrants) to France and proclaimed that those who did not return would have their property confiscated by the revolutionary government. This was just one of a series of events that pulled European monarchies into interaction with the Revolution, forcing them to decide whether to meet the revolutionaries' demands or protect their own interests as traditional absolute monarchies. These events, in combination with others, led to the declaration of war against Austria in April 1792, which forced the Revolution to juggle the demands of international war (which would soon spread over multiple fronts in an ideological clash between the Revolution and European monarchies) with the unstable social, financial and religious situations at home. Most importantly, the continued rise of factionalism and dissent opened a struggle for guidance of the Revolution and deepening distrust between the monarchy and the revolutionaries. In this context, the cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille* continued to be viewed as a seminal event of the Revolution, something that each revolutionary faction could claim as a source of legitimacy and authority. It especially came to symbolize the ideal of

revolutionary regeneration, especially through the work of one man who created a cult of Bastille relics which eventually spread throughout France.

The man at the center of the material legacy of the Bastille, the “architect patriot” Pierre-François Palloy, was responsible for the establishment of a cult of Bastille relics which perpetuated the memory of the Bastille through tangible objects such as models, medals, certificates, commemorative celebrations and sculptures. Palloy, in large measure singlehandedly, steered the formation of a tangible collective memory of the Bastille and perpetuated the mythical aura surrounding its physical remnants. The largest-scale and most obvious example was, of course, Palloy’s oversight of the demolition of the Bastille. He and his construction team began this work on the night of 14 July 1789, even without official sanction from the National Assembly, which did approve the demolition of the prison on 16 July and funded the project until the site was closed in May 1791.¹ While other prominent architects were also put in oversight of the demolition, it was Palloy who became synonymous with the material history and legacy of the Bastille. During the time that the construction crew was active on the site, visitors could go on tours led by Palloy and his men, take personal part in the destruction of the building by removing stones from its walls, and purchase the opportunity to spend the night in its cells.² In this way, the popular participation in the overthrow of a pre-Revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille was continued through symbolic and tangible acts at its ruins.

Throughout the Revolution, Palloy’s workshops turned out a myriad of Bastille souvenirs, ranging from the trivial to the significant. Among the most important were models of

¹ Keith Bresnahan, “Remaking the Bastille: Architectural destruction and revolutionary consciousness in France, 1789-94” in *Architecture and Armed Conflict: The Politics of Destruction*, ed. J. M. Mancini and Keith Bresnahan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 61.

² Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 107; Lüsebrink and Reichardt, 120; Bresnahan, 64.

the Bastille, first formed out of full-size Bastille stones and then out of plaster made from the pulverized stones, and sent to each of the 83 *départements* (often with a message urging the local authorities to display the models to the public or use them in festivals).³ Medals were cast from prison's chains, printings made of its design, and statues carved out of its stones. Through this cult of relics, the Bastille came to be not only an ideological cornerstone of the Revolution but also a visual icon that could be easily transmitted far beyond the bounds of Paris. Of course, the cult of Bastille relics was highly influential in the more psychological components of the Revolution as well. We have already touched on the sacred position which the storming of the Bastille came to hold in revolutionary memory. The nature of that sacredness was nuanced and imbued with a mythical or legendary quality that was given tangible dimensions by the building's demolition and the transmission of a revolutionary interpretation through its material remains. As historian Keith Bresnahan has pointed out,

[w]hatever animus the crowd bore toward the fortress itself as symbol of arbitrary and capricious abuses of power (and a site of real or imagined tortures), its destruction was in every sense an afterthought. And yet it is this destruction, carried out over the next two years and sustained afterwards through its material remains, which helped make the Bastille an icon of revolutionary mythology.⁴

In the case of the Bastille, the status of "icon" resulted in a sacralization that was not purely metaphorical. In many ways, the treatment of the Bastille relics and the commemoration of 14 July corresponded with the sacraments and attitudes of the Catholic Church, even as religious reforms and the radical trajectory of the Revolution marginalized traditional religion. In a revolutionary sense, the Bastille came to be a secular substitution for a saint, or possibly for something even more central. As the royalist *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville* had lamented in 1791, "Franklin, J. J. Rousseau and Washington replaced the Holy Trinity, and the storming of

³ Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional*, 99.

⁴ Bresnahan, "Remaking the Bastille," 59.

the Bastille substituted for the mystery of the incarnation.”⁵ While the revolutionaries may not have specifically articulated the nature of this phenomenon, it was evident in the cult of relics and the pageantry and symbolism of commemorative celebrations.

Through the reception of the relics sent by Palloy, the French people could take part in the commemoration of the *prise de la Bastille* even though they had not been there; and as Keith Bresnahan has found, this communal participation, “[t]he affective dimension of individual encounters with the sites and artifacts of revolution, and the value of this for the shaping of revolutionary consciousness, was recognized from the outset at the Bastille site.”⁶ This was especially important in 1792, when the growing factionalism meant that the liberal part of the Assembly was struggling to maintain control of the Revolution, and Palloy’s relics represented the alternate avenues of cultural memory formation that existed along with, or in spite of, the more official ones. And along with the sense of remote participation, there was the interpretation being projected through these material objects, at the core of which was the role of the Bastille as a hinge in cultural memory, an object that metamorphosed to figure largely in the collective impression of both regimes. Referencing Palloy’s own words, historian Richard Taws states that “From an old image, a new image was formed, ‘the grave of the living,’ which was itself mythic and subject to fresh manipulations; given the absence of prisoners in the Bastille at the moment of its invasion, tales of manacled skeletons and aged prisoners were fabricated swiftly to disguise a potentially embarrassing lack.”⁷ Here we see the flexibility that had characterized the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* from the outset, which essentially resulted in the

⁵ “Franklin, J. J. Rousseau & Wasington [sic], ont remplacé la Ste.-Trinité, & la prise de la Bastille a été substituée au mystère de l’Incarnation.” *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, 16 January 1791, vol. 1, no. 16, 16 January 1791, 128.

⁶ Bresnahan, “Remaking the Bastille,” 64.

⁷ Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional*, 103-105.

perpetuation of a mythical Bastille. In terms of the physical artifacts that played such a big part in this process, Palloy was truly an architect of memory and not just of buildings. While most of this story of cultural memory formation was influenced by groups of people and their ideologies, Palloy is one of the few individuals who directly and significantly affected the process. Indeed, his efforts were made with a clear view to preserving the Bastille in the public consciousness: as he wrote in 1790, “it did not suffice...to have participated in destroying the fortress’s walls; I had the desire to immortalize the memory of its terror.”⁸ Of course, his goal of preserving the memory of the Bastille’s horrors was inseparable from the act of promulgating the revolutionary cultural memory of the Bastille, since a memory of the prison’s past was inherently a comparison with its present.

By the spring of 1792, discussions of that present were becoming increasingly focused on the commemoration of the Bastille site, which was now almost completely empty. Ideas for a monument had been presented to the National Assembly as early as November 1791, and on 11 March 1792, Palloy visited the Assembly to give each member of the Assembly a medal made from the chains of the Bastille, and to propose his plan for a monument to liberty to be erected on the site.⁹ Palloy’s visit was discussed more thoroughly in the Assembly on 16 June, when the topic arose again, and a representative of the Committee of Public Instruction (note the potential for cultural memory guidance) recalled how Palloy had “purified...all the elements that composed [the Bastille], in making civic medals from its chains and carving images of the

⁸ Quoted and translated in Keith Bresnahan, “Remaking the Bastille,” 68.

⁹ An early proposal is spoken of in *Le Moniteur universel* on 4 November 1791. See *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 10, no. 208, 4 November 1791, 288. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=IYpHkYLIZIgC>. Palloy’s visit is recorded here: *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 11, no. 73, 13 March 1792, 612. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=tJkFAAAAQAAJ>.

nation's benefactors [Rousseau and Mirabeau, for example] on its stones."¹⁰ Palloy's current plan would similarly purify the Bastille's location by forming a public space called the Place de la Liberté.¹¹ As a gesture of national gratitude, the Assembly voted that day to grant Palloy a portion of the Bastille site for his own possession. The Assembly would decide how to use or sell the rest of it, and a contest would be held for artists from around France to submit ideas for a column to be built there (the first stone of which would be laid by a delegation from the Assembly on 14 July).¹² Here, again, is evidence of Palloy's centrality in the formation of the cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille*: not only did the National Assembly view his work as "purification" of the prison (and its role in pre-Revolutionary cultural memory), but it voted to give him part of the site in recognition of his endeavors. Clearly, Palloy's work, though begun on his own initiative and (for a while at least) at his own expense, had become crucial in the revolutionary attitude towards the Bastille and the memory of 14 July 1789.

Several weeks later, the *fête* of 14 July 1792 bore a marked difference from either of the previous anniversary celebrations. While the 1790 Festival of the Federation and the official 1791 celebration had been primarily oriented towards projecting and showcasing an image of a France unified under a constitutional monarchy, in spite of the discontent beneath the surface, the third anniversary celebration in 1792 bore witness to the underlying tensions, both between the Revolution and the king, and between revolutionary factions themselves. While the records of the National Assembly as printed in *Le Moniteur universel* include plans such as laying the first stone of the commemorative column on the Bastille site and the swearing of the civic oath at the

¹⁰ "[I]l a purifié, d'ailleurs, tous les éléments qui la composaient, en faisant de ses chaînes des médailles civiques, en gravant sur ses pierres l'image des bienfaiteurs de la patrie." *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 12, 686. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=eD4MV42b1kwC>.

¹¹ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 12, no. 170, 18 June 1792, 686.

¹² *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 12, no. 170, 18 June 1792, 686.

Champ de Mars, there is, unusually, no detailed account of the festival itself. It did, however, provide a belated account of the ceremony establishing the foundation of the column on the Bastille site; on 26 July, the paper reported that “the ceremony came about with pomp and solemnity” and that a time capsule had been included in the foundation, containing a copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, portraits of the first president of the National Assembly, the first president of the Legislative Assembly, and Louis XVI, along with money. Afterwards, observers of the ceremony celebrated the 14 July anniversary on the Bastille’s ruins and around the new column’s foundation.¹³

The newspaper *Révolutions de Paris* provides a fuller—though distinctly antiroyalist—account of the official festival. Based on this account, religious ceremonies of any kind were remarkably absent in the 1792 *fête*, although the customary oath-taking was included. Instead, this celebration had more militaristic and radical undercurrents: a triple line of soldiers (specifically *not* volunteer forces, presumably to forestall any potential attack by the crowd) guarded the king’s path to the *autel de la patrie*, and a main feature of the celebration was the burning of a large tree, hung with coats of arms and other emblems of feudalism.¹⁴ As the *Révolutions de Paris* reported,

Everyone saw to it that it was a festival in the manner of one given by a happy and grateful people to the court. [The court] had the place of honor, as formerly, and appeared to dominate over all others. The only things concealed from it were those that could cause it some displeasure. This was at the other end of the field, by the river, where a large tree was erected and covered with coats of arms, and to its branches were attached the crowns of counts and barons (but not of kings) and *cordons bleus* [Knights of the Order of the Holy Spirit], golden chains, ermine mantles, titles in parchment, all the trifles of...the nobility. At the top of the poplar, to satisfy the people, were placed the

¹³ “[M. Tenon] annonce que la cérémonie s’est faite avec pompe et solennité....”
Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur, vol. 13, no. 208, 26 July 1789, 236.

<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=TpoFAAAAQAAJ>.

¹⁴ *Révolutions de Paris, dédiées à la Nation*, no. 158, 14-21 July 1792 (Paris: Prudhomme, 1789-1794), 98-102.
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k10513249/f3.item>.

arms of the Marquis de Lafayette, who is no longer the saint of the day, and those of the Duke la Rochefoucault, president of the *département*.

The base of this monument of stupidity and vanity was a pyre which was set on fire during the ceremony; the president of the National Assembly and the king had to light it; but [only] if a way was found to bring Louis XVI through the innumerable crowd from the École Militaire to the federative altar: obstacles were found to penetrate to the steps of the altar to reach the bottom of this species of festival tree, which, as for the rest, amused the people very much.¹⁵

The royalist newspaper *L'Ami du Roi, des Français, de l'ordre et sur-tout de la vérité* (in English, *The Friend of the King, of the French, of Order and Above All, of the Truth*) also published an account of the festival, dwelling significantly on perceived insults to the royal family and reporting that “[some] cruelly offensive words, some menacing gestures of pikes were addressed to the royal family; but from so far away, that perhaps they neither saw nor heard them. The cries of ‘vive la nation,’ ‘vive Pétion,’ were very frequent, and those of ‘vive le roi’ very rare....”¹⁶ These details, and the fact that the festival featured a public burning of the trappings of feudalism, show that despite an attempt to keep the image of “a happy and grateful people” paying homage to its king, the 1792 anniversary was a clear departure from the

¹⁵ “Tous s’arrangea de manière qu’on eût dit que c’était une fête que le peuple heureux & reconnaissant donnait à la cour. Celle-ci avait la place d’honneur, tout comme autrefois, & paraissait dominer sur tous les assistans [*sic*]. On ne déroba à ses regards que les seuls objets qui pouvaient lui causer quelque déplaisir. Ce fut à l’autre extrémité du champ, du côté de la rivière, qu’on dressa ce grand arbre couvert d’écussons d’armoiries, & aux branches duquel étaient attachés des couronnes de comtes, de barons, mais non de rois, des cordons bleus, des chaînes d’or, des manteaux d’hermine, des titres en parchemin, tous les hochets de feu la noblesse. A la cime du peuplier, pour satisfaire le peuple, on avait placé en évidence les armes du marquis de Lafayette, qui n’est plus le saint du jour, & celles du duc la Rochefoucault, président du département.

“Ce monument de la sottise & de la vanité avait pour base un bûcher auquel on mit le feu pendant la cérémonie; le président de l’assemblée nationale & le roi devaient l’allumer; mais si l’on trouva moyen de faire jour à Louis XVI à travers la foule innombrable depuis la maison de l’école militaire jusqu’à l’autel fédératif: on fut trouver [*sic*] des obstacles pour pénétrer des marches de l’autel jusqu’au pied de cette espèce d’arbre de Cocagne, qui, au reste, amusa beaucoup le peuple.”

Révolutions de Paris, no. 158, 14 July 1792, 98.

¹⁶ “Quelques propos cruellement outrageans [*sic*], quelques gestes de piques menaçantes ont été adressés à la famille royale; mais de si loin, que peut-être elle ne les a ni vus ni entendus. Les cris de vive la nation, vive Pétion, ont été très-fréquens [*sic*]; et ceux de vive le roi très-rares....”

M. Montjoye, ed., *L'Ami du Roi, des Français, de l'ordre et sur-tout de la vérité*, no. CXC VII (172), 15 July 1792, 786. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1059584r/f2.item>.

conciliatory tone of the 1790 Festival of the Federation and the official narrative of 1791. In effect, the original official interpretation of the storming of the Bastille (which had cast it as a one-time event that ended, rather than started, the Revolution, and paved the way for a unified France) had now joined the list of myths surrounding 14 July 1789, and even though it might still be invoked, the evidence belied its accuracy.

The unrest in the Revolution became more and more clear following the 14 July celebration. *Le Moniteur universel* reported “fermentation” in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine on 26 July, following a “civic repast” on the ruins of the Bastille. The participants, apparently, proposed a trip to the Tuileries palace, “to get the arms that were said to be held there in great number.” At three o’clock in the morning, the mayor of Paris went to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to pacify the citizens, who finally retired to their homes quietly.¹⁷ The echoes of 14 July 1789 in this incident are startling; clearly, even as the Bastille had become the traditional starting place for ceremonial processions ranging from official 14 July celebrations to other festivals and even acts of popular engagement like the petition on 17 July 1791, it was also held in memory by the radical population, as the starting point of a tried-and-tested means of influencing the sociopolitical situation through popular violence.

Shortly afterward, the gradual break between the king and the Revolution, foreshadowed in June and July 1791 and the source of the tensions in the 1792 festival, became final on August 10, 1792. In a drastically radical implementation of the ideal of popular sovereignty that hearkened back to the storming of the Bastille, the *sans-culottes* (radical Parisian street militants) attacked the Tuileries Palace, forced the king to seek refuge in the Assembly, and killed

¹⁷ “Quelques mouvements de fermentation ont eu lieu hier soir dans le faubourg Saint-Antoine, à la suite d’un repas civique, donné sur les ruines de la Bastille. Déjà on annonçait le dessein de se porter aux Tuileries, pour enlever les armes que l’on disait y être renfermées en très-grand nombre.” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 13, no. 210, 28 July 1792, 246.

hundreds of the Swiss Guards at the palace.¹⁸ Their violent acts were the result of a panic caused by a declaration issued by the Duke of Brunswick, head of the Prussian army, threatening total destruction of Paris if the royal family was injured. Combined with the fears of Louis XVI's duplicity that had been rampant for the past year, the Brunswick Manifesto convinced the *sans-culottes* that the king was in league with foreign powers against the Revolution and partially responsible for France's military failures. The monarchy now officially fell, and its demise was the first of a rapid series of radical developments in Paris. On 23 August, the Assembly gave non-juring clergymen a week to leave France, and on 25 August, it voted to abolish seigneurialism.¹⁹ These developments were quickly followed by one of the greatest outbreaks of popular violence of the Revolution so far: on 2 September, the receipt of news that Verdun was on the point of falling to the Prussian army prompted sudden paranoia and alarm in Paris. Fearing that a counter-revolutionary aristocratic plot, that specter always lurking in revolutionary thought, was poised to strike from within the city, Parisian street militants entered the prisons holding aristocrats and clergymen, held summary "trials" and executed approximately 1,200 prisoners (out of the 2,700 they examined) over a period of days.²⁰ The ironic similarities to 14 July 1789, when Parisian crowds also entered government buildings to execute their own form of justice, are clear; this time, however, the atmosphere of fear and retaliation spread and the Paris massacres were echoed in towns and cities around France.²¹

Following the fall of the monarchy, the Revolution faced a three-pronged set of serious crises in the spring of 1793: the demands of an international war (now become even more ideology-based), the financial strain caused by war and mismanagement, and a civil war waged

¹⁸ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 158-159.

¹⁹ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 159-160.

²⁰ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 160.

²¹ McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 162.

with counter-revolutionaries in the Vendée in the aftermath of the king's execution on 21 January 1793. The need to control the Revolution in the face of these pressures, coinciding with the growing domination of the radical faction, resulted in steps towards decentralization and putting power in the hands of individuals and small groups, such as the Assembly's representatives to the provinces ("representatives on mission") and the Committee of Public Safety in Paris. While the radical republican faction was seen as the ally and collaborator of the *sans-culottes*, their severe methods of preventing dissent and "protecting" the Revolution from internal threats resulted in an ironic break with the ideals of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* that had been inaugurated in 1789. The Revolution had become, more and more, the protector of rights only for its proponents (increasingly, those with drastically radical views), and the scene was set for the "Reign of Terror," the bloody period between September 1793 and June 1794. However, even in a time of extreme changes in the revolutionary mindset and leadership, the *prise de la Bastille* continued to be invoked as a source of pride and authority. On 3 July 1793, *Le Moniteur universel* printed a speech made in the National Convention (the successor to the Legislative Assembly), in which Bertrand Barère proclaimed, "The Revolution again presents to you the two great époques, the fall of the Bastille of despotism, and the fall of the throne, which was the bastille of the constitution of 1789."²² Around the same time, the Convention released the text of a "Project for the Establishment of public Instruction, or Project for National Education," which included an entire calendar of national festivals, among which was the *fête de la révolution française* that would be celebrated on 14 July.²³ Interestingly, while the other national *fêtes*—all of them, it must be noted, were vehicles for cultural memory formation—had

²² "La révolution vous présente encore ces deux grandes époques, la chute de la Bastille du despotisme, et la chute du trône, qui était la bastille de la constitution de 1789." *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 17, no. 184, 3 July 1793, 20. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=e4pXAAAAYAAJ>.

²³ *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur*, vol. 17, no. 187, 6 July 1793, 43.

ideological or event-specific names, such as the Festival of Human Fraternity and the Festival of the Abolition of Royalty, the 14 July festival was attributed to the Revolution as a whole, recognizing its symbolic and seminal role.

The anniversary celebration of 14 July 1793 was shadowed by discussions of a large conspiracy against the Revolution, especially in light of the murder of Jean-Paul Marat (one of the leading radical voices of the Revolution) by Charlotte Corday the day before. Probably because of this, reports and images of the *fête* seem to be scarce. However, it is clear that its new name and inclusion in the radicals' pantheon of national dates would ensure its continuing presence in cultural memory, and therefore the continued adaptation of that memory, for the rest of the Revolution. Indeed, the position of the 14 July 1793 celebration can be analyzed very effectively solely in light of the Revolution's developments in the year since the previous anniversary. The entire face of the Revolution had changed in that year: the king was dead as a result of his people's demand for sovereignty; the use of popular violence had been used repeatedly as an effective tool by radical street militants and their allies in the Assembly; and the longtime rumors and paranoia about counter-revolutionary plots and a conspiracy against the "good" citizens had been both substantiated by the royalist revolt in the Vendée and worsened by the fears and repressive methods of the new radical government. In this context, it is possible (and logical) that the *fête* of 14 July 1793 was less focused on projecting an image of national unity than the previous anniversaries; in many ways, the execution of the king and the gaping divisions amongst revolutionary factions were the logical results of an extreme interpretation of the ideals that had been embraced in the storming of the Bastille. However, due to the date's significance in the revolutionary calendar and the pattern of interpretation and invocation of the

previous years, it seems certain that the *prise de la Bastille* had not lost prestige in revolutionary memory.

In the years between 14 July 1791 and 14 July 1793, the perennial adaptation and contestation of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille are made evident. Both in the material commemoration of the event through Palloy's cult of relics and in the ongoing invocation (through festivals and verbal references) of the Bastille as a source of revolutionary legitimacy, we see the continual process of cultural memory formation that allowed each successive phase of the Revolution to adapt that memory to its own needs and purposes. Central to this flexibility of memory was the mythical nature of the Bastille as a revolutionary icon, and the legendary status it already held in collective memory before 14 July 1789. Even though by 1793 the guiding ideologies of the Revolution were significantly different from those of 1789 or 1790, the continual mental re-erection and re-demolishing of the prison that was carried out through the festivals, and the transformative nature of the cultural memory as represented by Palloy's relics, enabled the *prise de la Bastille* to remain an ideological beacon beyond the reach of factional discord or social upheaval, so that each revolutionary group could claim its authority. It is increasingly clear that by the summer of 1793, despite the Revolution's immense internal fracturing, the storming of the Bastille was seen as an event that belonged to the Revolution rather than to any of its component parts, and was untouched by factional parameters in the fierce struggle over the direction of the Revolution. On one hand, this characteristic made the cultural memory of the event a solidly *revolutionary* phenomenon; on the other, it made it a myth whose agency in the ideological development of the Revolution was dependent on the goals of an ever-changing procession of dominant factions and their guiding motives.

Chapter 5

The Apotheosis of the Cultural Memory of the *Prise de la Bastille*, 1793–1794

In the final year of the radical phase of the French Revolution, the storming of the Bastille continued to be seen through cultural memory as one of the fountainheads of revolutionary spirit and a source of legitimacy for whatever faction was guiding the Revolution at the time. Between July 1793 and July 1794, the flexibility of that cultural memory was clearer than ever before. Through the revealing symbolism and imagery of the Bastille in the Festival of Reunion on 10 August 1793 and the 14 July 1794 festival, we see that the ideological legacy of the Bastille, and its interpretation as the baptism of popular sovereignty in the Revolution, was taken to its radical extreme in the Reign of Terror (September 1793–July 1794). In many ways, this year was the ultimate ironic expression of the revolutionary ideals that had been demonstrated at the Bastille in 1789. The support of the *sans-culottes*, the radical Parisian street militants, was now often crucial in successfully leading the government and the Revolution, while the rhetoric surrounding the 14 July anniversary in 1794 was deeply anti-monarchist and portrayed the celebration as one specifically for the people, and even as the first correctly oriented anniversary celebration of them all. When the radical Revolution developed a Jekyll-and-Hyde character and turned on its own proponents, the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille was once again near the heart of the issue: now invoked as a source of popular power, regeneration, and republican fraternity, the *prise de la Bastille* again proved to be an adaptable collective memory and a continually evolving mythical icon in the Revolution's pantheon.

Following the 14 July 1793 anniversary, which had been shadowed by the murder of Jean-Paul Marat the day before and the resulting rumors of a counter-revolutionary plot, the major festival of 10 August 1793 is highly relevant to the discussion of cultural memory

formation surrounding the storming of the Bastille. As had become common with official festivals and popular demonstrations alike, the Fête de la Réunion (the Festival of Reunion, also sometimes called the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility¹) featured a procession led by members of the National Convention, beginning at the site of the Bastille and visiting other prominent sites in a sort of revolutionary pilgrimage before ending at the *autel de la patrie* on the Champ de Mars. Most intriguing is the description of the Bastille site, where the enormous Fountain of Regeneration depicted Nature in the form of an enthroned Egyptian goddess, whose hands pressed streams of water from her breasts.¹ This fountain, though temporary in the long-term scheme of Bastille monuments, is remarkable in its unmissable linkage of the storming of the Bastille with national rejuvenation, as in the official revolutionary narrative that we have already discussed. It presented an interpretation of the storming of the Bastille as the turning point between death and life, between a structure that enchained the French people and a new era that revitalized their collective spirit. First and foremost, it worshipped Nature as the source of this rejuvenation, and cast it as a benevolent mother figure actively nourishing the Revolution on the site that represented *ancien régime* tyranny.

In the festival of 10 August, delegates from the National Convention, the National Guard, district and department representatives gathered at the Fountain of Regeneration in a symbolic ceremony remarkably pagan in its aspect. The President of the National Convention took his place at the fountain, and filled a goblet from the stream of water flowing from the statue; he then symbolically sprinkled the ground with the water of regeneration before drinking from the goblet.² The goblet was then passed to each delegate and representative successively,

¹ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 83-84.

² Société des amis de la constitution, *Journal de la Montagne*, no. 70, 10 August 1793, 459. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1060144b.item>.

accompanied by the sound of trumpets, an artillery salvo and the announcement of “the consummation of the act of fraternity.”³ As *Le Moniteur universel* reported, the President of the National Convention also made a speech at each stop along the parade route; at the Fountain of Regeneration, he addressed Nature as one would a god:

Sovereign of savage and enlightened nations! O nature! This immense people, assembled at the first beams of daylight before your image, is worthy of you. It is free. It is in your breast, it is in your sacred springs that it recovered its rights, that it regenerated. After having gone through so many centuries of errors and servitudes, it had to return to the simplicity of your ways to rediscover liberty and equality. O nature! Receive the expression of the eternal affection of the French for your laws, and that these fertile waters which spring from your breasts, that this pure beverage that watered the first humans, consecrate in this goblet of fraternity and equality the oaths that France makes to you in this day, the most beautiful to illuminate the sun since it was suspended in the immensity of space.⁴

The festival continued with the singing of hymns to nature and other symbolic acts, along with a procession that included a group demonstrating unity and fraternity, in which people of different walks of life, social positions and ethnicities walked side by side.⁵ Once again, and more overtly than before, the *prise de la Bastille* had been consecrated as a sacred event in revolutionary memory, and this time it was cast as the defining moment when Nature’s laws were reasserted. It seems that the official narrative of the Revolution had shifted towards the Enlightenment portrayal of Nature as the source of human rights, and therefore of the Revolution itself. In the process of that shift, the acts of Bastille commemoration were—ironically—partaking more and

³ “[À] chaque fois qu’un commissaire aura bu, annoncera la consommation de l’acte de fraternité.” Jacques-Louis David, *Rapport et décret sur la fête de la Réunion républicaine du 10 août 1793*, (Paris: L’imprimerie nationale, 1793), 3. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10538230q/fl.item.r=10%20août%201793>.

⁴ “Souveraine du sauvage et des nations éclairées! ô nature! ce peuple immense, assemblé aux premiers rayons du jour devant ton image, est digne de toi. Il est libre. C’est dans ton sein, c’est dans tes sources sacrées qu’il a recouvré ses droits, qu’il s’est régénéré. Après avoir traversé tant de siècles d’erreurs et de servitudes, il fallait rentrer dans la simplicité de tes voies pour retrouver la liberté et l’égalité. O nature! reçois l’expression de l’attachement éternel des Français pour tes lois et que ces eaux fécondes qui jaillissent de tes mamelles, que cette boisson pure qui abreuva les premiers humains, consacrent dans cette coupe de la fraternité et de l’égalité les serments que te fait la France en ce jour, le plus beau qu’ait éclairé le soleil depuis qu’il a été suspendu dans l’immensité de l’espace.” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 17, no. 224, 12 August 1793, 367.

⁵ David, *Rapport et décret sur la fête de la Réunion*, 4.

more of the mythical, even as the radical Revolution sought to replace traditional religion with the Enlightenment values of reason and logic.

Historian Mona Ozouf has suggested that the Festival of Reunion on 10 August 1793 was in large part intended to be a new Festival of Federation, showcasing an “imaginary unanimity” and “linked to the feeling, or illusion, that everything was starting afresh,” though the reality was that “much of the old Federation was conspicuous by its absence from the new festival.”⁶ As she also points out, “[t]he festival of August 10, 1793, celebrated a triumph. It had nothing to say about dangers, ignored outcasts and victims, was silent on violence.”⁷ What Ozouf does not discuss are the subtle ways in which that celebration of triumph implied a shifting attitude toward the cast of characters and violence in the revolutionary story. While the keywords of the story had not changed significantly (the victims, “the people,” had overcome *ancien régime* tyranny in a glorious seizure of their rightful sovereignty), the perspective had distinctly changed. In the narrative of the 1790 Festival of the Federation, the triumph was the union of *all* French, including the revolutionaries and the monarchy. In August 1793, the triumph being celebrated was that of the fraternity of revolutionaries (specifically the dominating radical population) only, and it was celebrated on the anniversary of 10 August 1792, when the abolition of the monarchy had irrevocably fractured the unity (real or imagined) of 1790. In this way, the Festival of Reunion did indeed address outcasts, victims, and violence. It celebrated the ascension of a radical population that remembered its past as outcasts and victims, “the people” that had found regeneration in the storming of the Bastille and overthrown the tyrannical system of which they had been victims. At the most basic (and subtle) level, the festival also commemorated violence; the date of 10 August marked the dissolution of the monarchy, which

⁶ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 83-84.

⁷ Ozouf, *Festivals*, 84.

led to the eventual execution of the king. Essentially, that date was part of the Revolution's most violent rupture with the past—in deposing and beheading a man who had previously been the embodiment of the nation, the Revolution had violently redefined “the nation” as the people that had stormed the Bastille in 1789. Most importantly, the commemoration was staged on the site of the Bastille. This subtle equation of the *prise de la Bastille* with two key revolutionary turning points (the moment of regeneration in 1789 and the moment of revolutionary rupture in 1792) in cultural memory is crucial to the evolution of that cultural memory in the following year.

During the months between the Festival of Reunion and the 14 July 1794 festival, the Revolution took a startlingly different path as its ultimate radicalization resulted in what is now known as the “Reign of Terror.” In ironic ways, the Terror was the predictable result of the ideological legacy of the *prise de la Bastille* being carried to an extreme implementation. The *sans-culottes*, radical Parisian street militants associated with the demographic that had stormed the Bastille, had come to wield more and more influence over the Convention (particularly through the Jacobin Club), until their support was basically essential to the guidance of the Revolution. Unfortunately, the extreme implementation of the ideal of popular sovereignty and the continual paranoia about internal sabotage led to unprecedented violence, even targeting the Revolution's own supporters in the name of protecting the Revolution. In October 1793, the members of the more moderate Girondin faction, who had been arrested in the spring after coming into conflict with the radical Montagnards and Jacobins, were guillotined in the same month as Marie Antoinette, the former queen. Over time, revolutionary authority was consolidated in groups like the Committee of Public Safety (which had huge amounts of authority and jurisdiction) and its representatives. Simultaneously, the cultural changes instituted in 1793-1794 (Year II of the Republic) revolutionized everything from the calendar to public

education to religion, with a heavy emphasis on Enlightenment values. This cultural revolution included a de-Christianization campaign and the establishment of a sort of civic religion, which featured the worshipful celebration of abstract ideals (such as Reason and the Supreme Being) like the ceremony at the Fountain of Regeneration on 10 August 1793. Thus, by the time the 14 July 1794 festival rolled around, the Revolution was nearly unrecognizable in comparison with 1790 or even 1792.

The festival of 14 July 1794 (or, in the revolutionary calendar, 26 Messidor of Year II) was planned and executed within the context of the radical revolution and the Terror. Overseen by the Committee of Public Instruction, which had previously proposed the list of permanent revolutionary festivals, it was essentially a celebration grounded in the radical revolutionary narrative. The Committee of Public Instruction had called on the theaters of the city to propose poems to be read to the people, and for *directeurs des spectacles* and architects to suggest displays for the occasion. As reported by the *Journal de Paris National*, the festival was celebrated in the *Jardin national*, the Tuileries Gardens, which were illuminated for the festivities. A concert was held with performances of music fitting to the occasion, which were “heard and applauded with transport,” and the excitement reached its height when “the sound of the instruments imitating the noise of drums and canon, rang out the first signal of insurrection and liberty, the tocsin of 14 July.”⁸ In many ways, the records of the *fête* of 14 July 1794 provide the most straightforward, undisguised expression of the radical interpretation of the storming of the Bastille, in a clear snapshot of the dominating cultural memory of the event in 1794.

Overwhelmingly, the rhetoric of this festival centered on *le peuple* (as defined by the radical

⁸ “[L]’ivresse a été porté à son comble, lorsqu’au son des instrumens [*sic*] imitant le bruit des tambours & celui du canon, a retenti le premier signal de l’insurrection & de la liberté, le tocsin du 14 Juillet.” *Journal de Paris national*, no. 563, 17 July 1794, (Paris: Imprimerie du Journal de Paris, 1794), 2274. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hxk2m8;view=1up;seq=7>.

Revolution), celebrating its victory at the Bastille and casting the events of 14 July 1789 as a battle between good and evil, with no trace of the earlier quest for a federation inclusive of the monarchy. The words of the Committee of Public Instruction, in its proposal to the National Convention, are incredibly revealing:

The festival of 14 July is the festival of the people. It is then that it [the people] rose, it is then that it broke the insolent pact of servitude and oppression, the provisions of which were, on one side, usurpation and crimes, and on the other long patience and misery. On the ruins of the Bastille, a struggle took place between the oppressed and the oppressor, between vice and virtue, between the tyrant and the people. It is good, it is necessary to consecrate the memory of this event with an annual festival. On these bloody fragments hatred and vengeance sowed eternal discord between the French and tyranny, and if by any chance it [tyranny] could insinuate between its enemies some appearance of agreement, the spirit of this day rises and cries: *Français, remember the 14th of July.*⁹

In these words we see the heart of what the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille had become. Forgetting the spontaneous nature of its occurrence, and the conflicting interpretations that had immediately followed, the revolutionary leadership and population now regarded it as, incontrovertibly, the seminal event of the Revolution and the baptism of popular sovereignty. The celebration of the violence of the radical Revolution and the fall of the monarchy, which had been present in the festival of 10 August 1793, was now even more directly stated. As the president of the National Convention expressed it, “Since this glorious day [14 July 1789],

⁹ “La fête du 14 juillet est la fête du peuple. C’est alors qu’il s’est levé, c’est alors qu’il brisa le pacte insolent de servitude et d’oppression dont les clauses furent, d’un côté, l’usurpation et les crimes, de l’autre une longue patience et la misère. Sur les ruines de la Bastille s’engagea une lutte à mort entre l’opprimé et l’opprimeur, entre le vice et la vertu, entre le tyran et le peuple. Il est beau, il est utile de consacrer par une fête annuelle (*sic*) la mémoire de cet événement. C’est sur ces débris sanglants que la haine et la vengeance ont semé une discorde éternelle entre les Français et la tyrannie, et si jamais il pouvait se glisser entre ces ennemis quelque apparence d’accord, que le génie de cette journée se lève et crie: *Français, souvenez-vous du 14 juillet.*” James Guillaume, ed., *Procès-verbaux du Comité d’instruction publique de la Convention nationale*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1891), 807. <https://archive.org/details/procsverbauxdu04fran>.

France saw the head of tyrants and of their satellites pass underneath the yoke [of the guillotine], and fall under the vengeful fire of their crimes.”¹⁰

In the perspective of 1794, even the previous anniversary celebrations were inadequate. Indeed, a member of the Committee of Public Instruction went so far as to say,

We have not yet celebrated the anniversary of this immortal day in a manner worthy of children of liberty: three times it was withered by the odious appearance of a king; and the day before the 14th of July 1793, a monster plunged a dagger in the breast of the friend and defender of the people, Marat...[b]ut this 14 July will recall glorious and dear memories; it will present the happy and brilliant epoch of the triumph of equality.¹¹

Clearly, the ambiguity and subtleties of the interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* in the earlier anniversary celebrations, and the restrictions imposed on the official interpretation by the needs of the liberal Revolution, had now been overcome by the narrative of the radical Revolution. Thus, we see the apotheosis of a radical cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille* in 1793–1794. What had previously been interpreted as an act of popular sovereignty legitimizing the revolutionary government was now reinterpreted as the glorious moment of “the people” (defined at this point in the Revolution as radical revolutionaries), thus switching the roles of the story and exalting *le peuple* of 14 July 1789 even above the revolutionary government. Not only were “the people” now seen as the absolute most important actors in the storming of the Bastille, and not just the indirect source of agency for the National Assembly, but the cultural memory of the *prise de la Bastille* had been firmly embedded in the pantheon of Revolutionary achievements as the memory of the day the French people rose against tyranny and seized their

¹⁰ “Depuis cette glorieuse journée la France a vu la tête des tyrans et de leurs satellites passer sous le joug, et tomber sous le fer vengeur de leurs forfaits.” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 21, no. 297, 15 July 1794, 213. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=pphXAAAAYAAJ>.

¹¹ “Nous n’avons pas encore célébré d’une manière digne des enfants de la liberté l’anniversaire de ce jour immortel: trois fois il a été flétri par l’aspect odieux d’un roi; et la veille du 14 juillet 1793 un monstre plongea un poignard dans le sein de l’ami, du défenseur du peuple, de Marat...[M]ais ce 14 juillet rappellera des souvenirs glorieux et chers; il offrira l’époque heureuse et brillante du triomphe de l’égalité.” *Réimpression de l’ancien Moniteur*, vol. 21, no. 298, 16 July 1794, 218.

freedom. Thus, this cultural memory—part myth, part experience—stood in July 1794, the memory of an “immortal day” that, through an intricate process of interpretation, dissemination, and contestation, had become central to the French Revolution itself.

Conclusion

The years between 1789 and 1794 comprised a lengthy and complex series of developments in the formation of cultural memory surrounding the *prise de la Bastille*. Indeed, in these years, the memory of the event had been influenced or challenged by an entire spectrum of factions and revolutionary ideologies. At the outset, it was a spontaneous explosion of popular violence in the context of heightened social tensions and the beginning of a political revolution. Within days, it was reinterpreted by the National Assembly as the manifestation of the people's righteous anger and as an expression of popular sovereignty, the legitimization of the Assembly's new authority. One year later, in 1790, the Festival of Federation projected an image of national unity while precluding further popular violence and casting the Revolution as an accomplished fact, rather than an ongoing process. The following year, in 1791, deep divisions over the king's flight and the place of the monarchy in the new regime began to fracture the unity of 1790, causing tensions both between the monarchy and the Revolution, and between internal factions of the Revolution itself. The second anniversary of the *prise de la Bastille* was immediately followed by the notoriously bloody Champ de Mars Massacre, when the official revolutionary leadership (the National Assembly) came into conflict with those asking for the deposition of the king, who identified themselves as *le peuple*. The 14 July 1792 celebration displayed the ascendance of increasingly radical revolutionary rhetoric, which characterized the entire year. In 1793, the 14 July anniversary was again overshadowed by another major revolutionary event, this time the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat, the "voice of the people," and the resulting rise in paranoia and continued ascendance of radicalism. By 1794, the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille existed within a very different revolutionary context than that of 1789 or 1790. While in the early years of the Revolution the focus remained on bolstering

a constitutional monarchy and promoting a moderate or liberal view of the Revolution, by 1794 intense radicalization had resulted in an interpretation of the *prise de la Bastille* devoted entirely to celebrating *le peuple* in its glorious rise against tyranny on 14 July 1789.

Thus, at the time the 14 July 1794 anniversary was celebrated, the *prise de la Bastille* had essentially left the realm of concrete memory or experience. Through a practice of communal symbolic participation in the event, attained through such media as Palloy's cult of relics, the interpretation of 14 July 1789 was consistently perpetuated to a degree that overcame the facts of the original event and allowed its memory to be adapted to the needs of every faction or political ideology by which it was invoked. Even while we have discussed that it was necessary to continually mentally re-erect the Bastille and revisit the pre-Revolutionary memory of the building in order to overcome the potential for collective amnesia in its absence, that process did, ironically, result in a level of collective amnesia. This was an amnesia, not regarding the significance of the event in Revolutionary ideology—that significance was continually emphasized and restated—but regarding the truth of the event. Each faction or interpretive viewpoint imposed its own “truth” on its memory of the storming of the Bastille. However, the neglect or glossing over of basic (and perhaps less glorious) facts of the event's circumstances, such as the improved conditions in the Bastille in 1789, the spontaneous nature of the *prise de la Bastille*, and the Assembly's initial horrified response to the news, led to a partial forgetting of the original nature of 14 July 1789. Thus, even as a gradually shifting memory of the storming of the Bastille was spread through vehicles including commemorative festivals, relics, and records, that memory took on more and more mythical qualities until, enshrined in the Revolution's ideological pantheon, it consisted of a complex mixture of legend and reality. The legend lay in its glory: while the event was indeed highly significant, many of the more glorious aspects of the

story were incorporated after it had occurred. The reality lay in its impact; regardless of the accuracy of the collective memory of the event, it had great power in revolutionary rhetoric, and its invocation could be used to claim authority and connect with *le peuple* in a time when their support was increasingly crucial.

Throughout these five years of the Revolution, the cultural memory of the event had been guided and contested by conflicting revolutionary factions, but it had never ceased to be important as an icon of the Revolution and, indeed, had gained in its mythical and sacred stature. Throughout these years, the memory of the storming of the Bastille had proved to be adaptable to each shift and political change of the Revolution, making it a memory that was uniquely common to the entire Revolution. Even though each faction and viewpoint might have had its own slightly different version of that memory, there was no revolutionary group that did not regard the *prise de la Bastille* as a source of revolutionary fervor and political legitimacy. While the unity that had been proclaimed in the official interpretation of the event in 1790 had been shattered by the subsequent eruption of factional discord and the ultimate radicalization of the Revolution, the importance of the *prise de la Bastille* in revolutionary consciousness did not wane. On the contrary, it continued to gain significance, until it was imbued with a mythical and legendary luster as an ideological cornerstone of the Revolution. We see that the specifics of the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille, changing constantly over the course of the Revolution, were dependent on the group which was interpreting them; the foundational importance of the memory itself, however, was not. Thus, this cultural memory was one of few pieces of the French Revolution that achieved, through its mythical nature, the ideal of collective identity which the Revolution so persistently sought in its rallying cry of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité.*”

Now at last we see how the qualities of a *lieu de mémoire*, as put forth by Pierre Nora, characterize the *prise de la Bastille*, even though it is examined in a much closer time frame than the one utilized by Nora and is not precisely a tangible site or physical location (the site of the demolished Bastille or the relics disseminated by Palloy are its tangible aspects). The storming of the Bastille was indeed an event in which “memory crystallize[d] and secrete[d] itself,” it was perpetuated by the “will to remember,” and it was characterized by its “capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of [its] meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of [its] ramifications.”¹ Indeed, the *prise de la Bastille* fits perfectly with the statement that what makes a *lieu de mémoire* “is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations.”² What we see, then, is that the *prise de la Bastille* embodied a violent rupture with the past which resembled the type that Nora discusses as engendering the need for *lieux de mémoire* in the modern day, but which, instead of resulting in a lack of memory, was centered around the violent and voluntary erasure of memory. In this way, the storming of the Bastille is not a *lieu de mémoire* as conceived by Nora. Instead, it is a composite, incorporating the tenets of Nora’s concept into its crucial role as a hinge in cultural memory. Ultimately, then, the cultural memory of the storming of the Bastille, as it existed between 1789 and 1794, possessed a dual identity that operated on multiple levels. It was at once the result of a determined attack on memory and the spontaneous act of a Revolution dedicated to creating a new collective identity, a catalyst of the Revolution and a symbol whose agency lay completely in the minds of those who invoked it—a mental, spiritual and purely revolutionary phenomenon whose creation, guidance and evolution were at the very heart of the Revolution itself.

¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” 632, 639.

² Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” 641.

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