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Jacobinism from Outside

In 1796, as a war-weary British government sought peace talks with the French Republic, Edmund Burke railed against treating with the ‘regicides’. The European conflict, he argued, was in fact a civil war, ‘between the partizans of the antient, civil, moral, and political order of Europe against a sect of ambitious and fanatical atheists which means to change them all.’ The Jacobinism, he insisted, was a ‘sect aiming at universal empire’.¹ Burke was not alone: John Robison, a Scottish natural philosopher, and the former Jesuit, Augustin de Barruel, both published works in 1797 arguing that the revolution was an international conspiracy of freemasons and freethinkers. For Barruel, Jacobinism was nothing less than Freemasonry finally revealing its ultimate, dark purpose. Cranky though such claims now appear, in the late 1790s for Europeans bending before the roar of revolution and war, they offered an all-embracing explanation for the crisis.² Yet Barruel, Burke and Robison used the term ‘Jacobin’ very loosely, reinforcing a conservative tendency to define any dissent as dangerous. Almost always inaccurate, such a use of the label probably seemed more plausible because ‘Jacobinism’ rapidly changed in France itself, as the Revolution rattled forward on its breakneck course. Yet local radical movements were rooted in national or even regional contexts. Those who conformed closely to the shifting shapes of the French model were few: the Italian *Giacobini* could probably come closest to sharing the political egalitarianism and social reformism of the French Jacobins in their heyday of 1793-4. The radical response to the French Revolution varied from one context to another, including differences in political and cultural inheritance, diversities in social interests, the obstacles and scale of resistance to radical demands and the extent and nature of political violence. Complex though these

¹ E. Burke, *Two Letters Addressed to a Member of the present Parliament, on the proposals for peace with the Regicide Directory of France* (London, 1796), 144.

² W. Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), 218-19.

varieties were, they permit a nuanced understanding of the international impact of the French Revolution.

For many years, the international varieties of ‘Jacobinism’ were debated within national contexts. In some interpretations, it was a foreign import, dangerous and traitorous at worse, or irrelevant to the nation’s past at best. For liberals, the ‘Jacobins’ may have been on right the side of the struggle for progress, but their legacy was negligible because they were (variously) misguided, prone to social levelling, too closely-linked to France or out of touch with the real needs and customs of the people. In Italy, this tendency dates to the very aftermath of the upheaval itself. In 1801 the disenchanted Jacobin Vincenzo Cuoco published his *Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799*. In explaining its failure, Cuoco coined the term ‘passive revolution’, a phrase later adopted by the Marxist Antonio Gramsci, to mean one imposed ‘from above’ by an élite on an apathetic or hostile population:

Our revolution being a passive revolution, the only means of bringing it to a successful conclusion was by winning popular opinion. But the views of the patriots and those of the people were not the same; they had different ideas, different customs, and even different languages.³

This was central problem faced by radicalism across Europe: it was primarily the preserve of a literate, usually urbanised, minority. Even where it had the makings of a nationwide network, it usually attracted only a small section of the middle-class professionals, artisans and craft workers and so it struggled to impose itself on society at large. The essence of Cuoco’s charge was taken up by the twentieth-century liberal-nationalist historian, Benedetto Croce. Croce declared that ‘modern Italy, the new Italy, our Italy’ was born in 1799 because of the patriotic awakening during the Neapolitan revolution. Otherwise, the Neapolitan

³ Quoted in D. Beales (ed.), *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (London, 1971), 113-14.

Jacobins had little real understanding of their own country, so the democracy and egalitarianism that they represented could never be relevant to modern Italy.⁴ The *destra storica*, conservative Italian historiography, saw Jacobinism as so utterly foreign to the Italian nation-state that it was both irrelevant and insidious.⁵

Such judgments stuck because ‘Jacobinism’ frequently depended upon French military intervention for any chance of success, throwing the poisonous problem of collaboration and resistance into the controversial stew. Nineteenth-century German assessments painted the Rhineland Jacobins as ‘black-hearted traitors’⁶ because they worked with the French and in the early twentieth century Herman Theodoor Colenbrander accepted the good intentions of the Dutch Patriots, but argued that, once crushed by Prussian intervention in 1787, they had to learn from the real masters of revolution, the French. When they returned to power in 1795, they were merely ‘marionetten’, puppets on French strings. The trauma of the two World Wars intensified such views. One post-war Dutch periodical condemned the Patriots as the ‘NSBers’, or Dutch Fascists, of the eighteenth century.⁷

Yet there were more positive views of ‘Jacobinism’. Left-wing historiography saw it as the forerunner of twentieth-century communism or social democracy. The British post-war labour history tradition placed the British radicalism of the 1790s within the longer-term movement for democracy and social justice.⁸ E. P. Thompson’s subtle analysis of working-class radicalism argued that the political agitation of the 1790s ‘altered the sub-political

⁴ J. A. Davis, ‘The Neapolitan Revolution, 1799-1999: Between History and Myth’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, iv (1999), 350-1 [350-79]; D. Mack Smith, ‘Benedetto Croce: History and Politics’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, viii (1973), 42 [41-61].

⁵ M. Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism and the Savoyard Monarchy 1773-1821: State Building in Piedmont* (Lewiston, 1997), 3.

⁶ T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz 1743-1803* (Cambridge, 1974), 295.

⁷ Quoted in S. Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands 1780-1813* (London, 1992), 16, 19.

⁸ J. Saville (ed.), *Democracy and the Labour Movement: Essays in Honour of Dona Torr* (London, 1954); G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson (eds), *British Working Class Movements: select documents, 1789-1875* (London, 1951);

attitudes of the people, affected class alignments, and initiated traditions which stretch forward into the present [twentieth] century.’⁹ For more orthodox Marxists, Jacobinism represented the bourgeois phase of human history: the East German historian Heinrich Scheel, for example, argued that the Mainz republic of 1793 was ‘the first bourgeois-democratic republic on German soil’ and so was the forerunner of the ‘first German workers’ and peasants’ state’, the DDR.¹⁰

These interpretations were applied within national contexts, an approach challenged by the ‘Atlantic’ perspective proposed by Robert R. Palmer and Jacques Godechot, who suggested that the revolutionary upheavals across the eighteenth-century Atlantic world were part of a single movement, broadly similar in causes and aims, in an age of ‘democratic’ or ‘Atlantic’ revolution. Marxist historians like Marcel Reinhard and George Rudé responded that it was wrong to lump the French Revolution together with the more moderate American Revolution or the British radical movement.¹¹ The ‘Atlantic’ thesis took this battering from the left and then suffered death by a thousand cuts by revisionist research on the local experience of revolution, war, occupation and resistance. Such work emphasised pre-existing social developments and conflicts, political geography, earlier patterns of reform, customs and identities.¹² Much of this scholarship, focussing on resistance to French domination, tends to downplay the importance ‘Jacobinism’ outside France. Yet it has effectively built up a complex mosaic representing a stunning diversity of local contexts in which the French Revolution was received, ‘Jacobinism’ expressed and responses shaped. Moreover, new life

⁹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 111.

¹⁰ Quoted in T. C. W. Blanning, ‘The German Jacobins and the French Revolution’, *Historical Journal* xxiii (1980), 985.

¹¹ R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* 2 vols (Princeton, 1959-64); J. Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799* (New York, 1965). The debate can be followed in P. H. Amann (ed.), *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution: French or Western?* (Lexington, 1963).

¹² See, for example, Broers and Schama, already cited, and T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802* (Oxford, 1983); M. Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796-1814: Cultural Imperialism in a European Context?* (Basingstoke, 2005); M. Rowe, *From Reich to State: the Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 2003).

has been breathed into the Atlantic perspective. Research on cross-cultural encounters, the movement of people, goods and ideas, slavery, resistance to it and empire have all contributed to a revival of interest in the Atlantic as an historical space for human interaction.¹³ Some historians are bursting the bounds of this maritime framework in the ‘global turn’, which seeks to examine the French Revolution in imperial and worldwide context.¹⁴

The challenge, it now seems, is how to reconcile the local with such trans-national approaches. The latter have explanatory power for the varieties of ‘Jacobinism’, because they help to explain why they arose in so many different places. In the European world, radicals inhabited a shared cultural space that shaped their ideologies, rhetoric, symbols and practices, giving them broadly similar features, overlaid by differences in local detail, that included the classical culture of the elites, the ‘classical republicanism’ of the Renaissance, historical memories of such earlier conflicts as the Dutch War of Independence and the British Civil Wars, and the critical culture of the Enlightenment.

Such cultural currents did not amount to a coherent ideology in themselves – and indeed they fed both radical and conservative thinking, but for the former they had built such ideological pillars as popular sovereignty, the concept of civic virtue, an emphasis on political rights and representation and the nation as the source of sovereignty and identity. Reform movements across the west broadly sought to break open existing governments to wider (not necessarily democratic) political participation, but at their most radical they sought nothing less than ‘regeneration’, meaning the moral and cultural reshaping of an entire people. All such

¹³ See, for example, such comparative studies as A. Jourdan, *La Révolution, une exception française?* (Paris, 2004); W. Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York and London, 2009); for the movement of people and ideas, see, for instance, M. Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, 1997); M. Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: The Loss of America and the Remaking of the British Empire* (London, 2011): this last extends its scope further than the Atlantic littoral.

¹⁴ L. Hunt, ‘The French Revolution in Global Context’, D. Armitage and S. Subrahmanyam, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840* (Basingstoke, 2010), 36; C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004), 86-120 (Chapter 3 on ‘Converging Revolutions’); J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London, 2008), 157-218 (Chapter 4 on ‘The Eurasian Revolution’).

movements emphasised the importance of political organisations which would press for change and they employed systems of civic education, festivals, ceremonies and symbols to transmit their message to as wide an audience as possible. Thus forms of sociability, association and education were central to radicalism, as they had been to the Enlightenment and ‘public opinion’ more generally. So the forms and expressions of ‘Jacobinism’ in the 1790s sprang from the forms of sociability and communication that characterised eighteenth-century cultural life. The global or Atlantic context therefore explains the cultural and social environment in which the varieties of ‘Jacobinism’ developed, but it cannot explain the variety itself.

One way of doing so is to explore the forms of political conflict that pre-existed the French Revolution. A radical movement aiming at a reform of Parliament had been at work in Britain throughout the 1780s and this, in turn, had roots in earlier agitation. In Ireland an energetic political campaign had secured legislative independence for the Parliament in Dublin in 1782, but left open the question of extending the franchise to all Protestants and to Catholics. The Dutch ‘Patriot’ Revolution of the 1780s saw the expulsion of the ruling Stadhouder until he was restored by Prussian troops in 1787. To the south, in 1789 there was a Belgian war of independence from Habsburg rule and a democratic uprising in the neighbouring Pays de Liège, both of which were crushed by 1790. In Switzerland, there were power struggles between the patricians, burghers and ‘natives’ of Geneva (1768-82), in which the patricians came out on top, while in Fribourg the patricians defeated a similar challenge to their authority in 1781. In Italy, the ‘Jacobinism’ of the 1790s was connected to longstanding conflicts and vendettas – over seigneurial rights, landholding and patronage - whose roots probed deep into the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Across the Atlantic, the American Revolution left

¹⁵ Broers, *Napoleonic Empire in Italy*, 18; M. Broers, ‘Revolution as Vendetta: Patriotism in Piedmont, 1794-1821’, *Historical Journal* xxxiii (1990), 573-97; J. A. Davis, ‘1799: Santafede and the Crisis of the Ancien

a divisive legacy which was crystallising into the bitter partisanship between conservative Federalists and radical Democratic-Republicans. These conflicts provided the foundation from which the local varieties of ‘Jacobinism’ emerged under the influence of the French Revolution.

Besides revolutionary pressure for change, enlightened government officials in Europe had sought to strengthen the state through reform ‘from above’. In doing so, they invariably challenged vested interests, such as the nobility, the clergy, corporations, guilds, municipalities and provinces, as well as striking at old habits, customs and usages that ordinary people held dear. In Poland, King Stanisław August Poniatowski had since 1764 sought to bolster the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was effectively being sucked into the orbit of Catherine the Great’s Russia, by a series of reforms that culminated in the Constitution of 3 May 1791. A minority of disenchanted nobles solicited Russian intervention, which came in May 1792. Although there was a democratic (‘Vonckist’) wing to the Belgian revolution of 1789, its protagonists were expelled by the conservative Statists, for the uprising was a conservative backlash against Joseph II’s reforms – and such changes were also resisted in Hungary and the Tyrol. Grand-Duke Leopold of Tuscany saw privileged groups delay, block or dilute the impact of reform, which also provoked popular hostility because of their assault on religious tradition. ‘Jacobins’ could therefore be reformers disillusioned with the failure or limits of change, the more so when their initiatives were blunted still further in 1789, as rulers reeled in horror at the news from France. In Piedmont, a brief period of open public debate permitted by Victor Amadeus III was abruptly replaced by censorship and repression.¹⁶ In Germany, enlightened reforms in states such as Mainz and

Regime in Southern Italy’, J. A. Davis and P. Ginsborg (eds), *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith* (Cambridge, 1991), 1-25.

¹⁶ M. Broers, ‘The end of a golden age or the implosion of a false absolutism? The Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia from absolutism to revolution, 1685-1814’, J. Swann and J. Félix (eds), *The Crisis of the Absolute*

Bavaria shuddered to a halt. In Austria and Hungary the ‘Jacobins’ are perhaps more accurately described as ‘Josephists’ – officials schooled in the radical reformism of Joseph II and radicalized when the tide was turned back from 1790.¹⁷

The French Revolution acted as a seismic shock on these pre-existing conflicts and frictions, prompting a wide range of responses. Reformers already proud of their enlightened credentials gave a verbal pat on Gallic backs. German intellectuals hailed the Revolution as a good thing for the degenerate French, while arguing that the traditions of enlightened reform in Germany made revolution unnecessary there.¹⁸ British radicals saluted ‘1789’ as the equivalent of their own ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688. When Lafayette presented President George Washington with the key to the Bastille, Thomas Paine approved: ‘that the principles of America opened the Bastille is not to be doubted’.¹⁹ For some, the Revolution was a warning of what might happen if flagging reform programmes were not reinvigorated. Pietro Verri in Milan and Francesco Gianni in Florence urged their rulers to enact constitutional concessions in order to pre-empt any spread of the revolutionary contagion. In April 1792, the Society of the Friends of the People in London cited the French Revolution as a fatal example should moderate parliamentary reform fail.²⁰ Yet for others, the French experience demonstrated precisely the dangers of making overhasty changes, since it could unleash uncontrollable, revolutionary forces. Edmund Burke’s *Reflections of the Revolution in France* (1790) criticised the French for their inexperience, their destruction of the old order and their determination to found new institutions on abstract principles rather than on custom and tradition. In Italy, the moderate Lombard reformer Gian Carli recoiled in horror as he

Monarchy: France from Old Regime to Revolution: Proceedings of the British Academy 184 (Oxford, 2013), 58-9.

¹⁷ E. Wangermann, *From Joseph II to the Jacobin Trials: Government Policy and Public Opinion in the Habsburg Dominions in the Period of the French Revolution* (London, 1959), 13.

¹⁸ T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803* (Cambridge, 1974), 329.

¹⁹ Quoted in G. S. Wood, *The Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford, 2009), 174.

²⁰ H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1979), 237.

denounced the ‘excesses of Jacobinism’ in France, as did the Neapolitan intellectual, Giuseppe Maria Galanti.²¹

The international response was therefore shaped by the lessons that could be drawn from the Revolution and applied in local contexts. Yet there were direct relationships between the French Revolution and the varieties of ‘Jacobinism’ abroad. Some foreign radicals had their eye on the prize of French diplomatic or even military support and tailored their rhetoric accordingly. Dutch Patriot leader Johan Valckenaer, who moved to Paris in April 1791, broke with his own national traditions and proposed a Dutch constitution modelled on the French version, including a centralised constitutional monarchy. These proposals were alien to Dutch Patriot ideology, prompting, Pierre Dumont-Pigalle, another Patriot leader, to remark that the Dutch should only borrow from French and American examples in so far as it was ‘compatible with the physical and political characters of the seven [Dutch] provinces and with the character and customs of their respective peoples.’²² After the Russian occupation of Poland in May 1792, Tadeusz Kościuszko, seeking French support for an insurrection, promised the Convention in 1793 that a free Poland would abolish serfdom and grant equal rights to all Poles, measures which the 3 May constitution had not delivered.

Pragmatic as some of these schemes may have been, France was a source of genuine inspiration for those seeking to reinvigorate their flagging campaigns for reform. Political associations and clubs, pamphlets, processions and celebrations were nothing new, but the French Revolution injected them with new forms and symbols: trees and statues of liberty (topped with red Phrygian bonnets) were raised, tricolour cockades sported and flags held aloft, civic oaths taken, and songs such as the *Marseillaise* and *Ça Ira* bellowed. The special appeal of the French Revolution was that rested on the universalist language of the natural

²¹ J. Robertson, ‘Enlightenment and Revolution: Naples 1799’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th. Series, x (2000), 40.

²² Quoted in A. Jourdan, *La Révolution batave entre la France et l’Amérique (1795-1806)* (Rennes, 2008), 67.

rights of man, rhetoric that allowed foreign radicals symbolically to connect their cause with that of the French and to outflank conservative arguments that rested, like Burke's, on appeals to tradition. While Anacharsis Cloots, a radical from Cleves in Germany, took the logical, if utopian, step of envisaging a universal republic, few others went that far. Radicals were galvanised by the French Revolution because it seemed to construct everything anew and to show that national regeneration was possible. Rather than adopting French models lock, stock and barrel, they cherry-picked what they thought most useful to their own cause. Encouraged by the publication of Thomas Paine's incisive response to Burke, *Rights of Man, Part One* (1791), British radicals combined appeals to natural rights with customary British symbols and texts, such as Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights of 1689 and the 'Anglo-Saxon' constitution. Progressive Italian intellectuals looked back to ancient Rome, to classical republicanism and to *campanilismo* – the civic virtue of the Renaissance city states - for inspiration. Yet this was merely the first phase of *Giacobinismo* in the early 1790s. The experience of exile in revolutionary France and the shock of the French invasion of 1796 encouraged some *Giacobini* to break more decisively with the past: during the French conquest of 1796-99 (the *trienio*), the radicals saw their chance to liberate and regenerate Italy: in other words, to go far beyond the reformism of earlier years. Figures such as Giovanni Ranza, Filippo Buonarroti and Carlo Botta embraced republicanism, national independence and unity, although they disagreed over whether an Italian republic would be a federal or a unitary state. In Ireland, Nancy Curtin has argued, radical currents had already been at work before the French Revolution influenced the emergence of nationalism and republicanism in the 1790s.²³ Still, Protestant Irish radicals adopted natural rights theory and national sovereignty, refracted from France through the prism of Paine's *Rights of Man*, when they aimed to bridge religious divisions by establishing the Society of United Irishmen in

²³ N. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (Oxford, 1994), 5.

October 1791. Its goal was the enfranchisement of all Irishmen, regardless of creed, which by the mid-1790s developed into a non-sectarian Irish republicanism exemplified by Theobald Wolfe Tone, leader of the insurrection of 1798.²⁴

So if they did not abandon their appeals to the national past and custom altogether, radicals none the less demanded political rights *both* as human beings *and* as citizens in their own country: they sought to naturalise French revolutionary forms, symbols and rhetoric within their local contexts.²⁵ They saw no contradiction in symbolically harnessing their cause to the French Revolution while calling themselves ‘patriots’: natural rights theory rested on a distinction between ‘man’, the human being in a state of nature, and the ‘citizen’, the human being within the nation-state.²⁶ For eighteenth-century radicals, the latter took priority over the former, but while ‘patriotism’ certainly meant love of country, it also meant a willingness to put the nation above personal and sectional interests. It thus demanded virtuous self-abnegation and an end to social privilege and political exclusion. It also entailed forms of ‘regeneration’ in a national context, although the extent and intensity envisaged contrasted sharply from one country (and from one movement) to the next. Dutch Patriots argued that regeneration required political change, new laws, the embedding of democratic values in Dutch political culture and their inculcation through a renewed national system of education and a re-interpretation of the past. In other words, it was necessary to ‘nationalize’ the entire people.²⁷ Most British radicals, on the other hand, insisted that a reform of the House of Commons would be enough, perhaps accompanied by programmes of education and social reform. Only a minority sought to abolish the monarchy and the aristocracy: the majority insisted that they were loyal to the ‘balanced’ constitution of King, Lords and Commons.

²⁴ M. Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven and London, 1989).

²⁵ Jourdan, *La Revolution, une exception française?*, 271-2.

²⁶ D. A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass, 2001), 154-6.

²⁷ Jourdan, *Révolution batave*, 436.

The French Revolution influenced the structures, symbols and rhetoric of radical movements, but again local factors weighed heavily. The London Corresponding Society, founded in January 1792, was partially modelled on the French Jacobins: its members addressed each other as ‘citizen’, branches were formed across the British capital, and it aimed to create a nationwide network with other reform societies across the country. A significant difference, however, was its low membership dues: its founder, the master-shoemaker Thomas Hardy, declared its members were to be ‘unlimited’ in order to create peaceful, law-abiding but irresistible groundswell of pressure for ‘a fair, equal and impartial Representation of the People in Parliament’.²⁸ In Scotland, some eighty Societies of the Friends of the People sent delegates to a Scottish Convention in Edinburgh to press for parliamentary reform in December 1792. Whenever it adjourned, the delegates rose and, in explicit imitation of the French Jacobins, swore to ‘live free or die’.²⁹ Yet the term ‘Convention’ shows how ambiguous political vocabulary could be: while it of course evoked the republican assembly in Paris, it tapped directly into the Scottish past, most recently 1784-5, when two burgh conventions had met to campaign for electoral reform.³⁰

The Polish insurrection of 1794 adopted the slogan ‘Liberty, Integrity, Independence’, echoing the French ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’.³¹ The Poles also invoked the *levée en masse* (raising an army of 72,000 men) and established a self-proclaimed Jacobin club in Warsaw. The radical wing of the uprising adopted other French – and explicitly Jacobin – tropes: one song called for the planting of the ‘tree of liberty, sign of eternal equality’, while the *Marseillaise of the Poles* evoked the executioner for those traitorous nobles (the ‘confederates of Targowica’) who had called in the Russians – and four of them were

²⁸ A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979), 191-3.

²⁹ H. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (Glasgow, 1912), 110.

³⁰ J. Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973), 112.

³¹ N. Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland* 2 vols (Oxford, 1981-2), i, 539.

condemned to death by a special ‘criminal tribunal’.³² In the United States, Democratic-Republicans sang songs such as *Ça Ira* and the *Marseillaise*, drank toasts to the French Revolution and planted trees of liberty. One of the largest such demonstrations, replete with French symbols, arose in Boston in January 1793, when the Democratic-Republicans celebrated the first French victory at Valmy.³³ Republicans also fêted Edmond Genêt, the French ambassador, and in 1796, Pierre Adet, the Directory’s representative in the United States, evoked an enthusiastic response to his ‘Cockade Proclamation’, which calling on American supporters of the French Revolution to wear *tricolore* cockades. Such celebrations energised the Republican base, choreographed their protests against their Federalist opponents and expressed their support France. ‘Jacobin’ symbols were therefore adapted for local political purposes – a point illustrated in truly global terms by Tipu, ruler of the Indian kingdom of Mysore, who, preparing for a mortal struggle with the British East India Company, allowed a small body of French volunteers to form a political club at Srirangapatam in May 1797. The French saluted Tipu (rather awkwardly) as ‘Citizen Prince’, planted a tree of liberty topped with a Phrygian bonnet and swore ‘hatred to all Kings, except Tipoo Sultan, the Victorious’.³⁴ Tipu was no republican, but he pragmatically accepted such tributes in the (vain) hope that more French support would materialise.

The war in Europe gave international ‘Jacobinism’ its greatest opportunity and its greatest nightmare. Whenever and wherever the French army conquered during its great, if vacillating, surges between 1792 and 1802, there were local patriots willing to work with the French military and civilian commissioners, hoping to enact their visions for change. Yet it became terrifyingly clear that French strategic and logistical needs would always take

³² B. Leśnodorski, *Les Jacobins Polonais* (Paris, 1965), 265-6, 269.

³³ S. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997), 122-5.

³⁴ M. Hasan, *History of Tipu Sultan* 2nd edn (Delhi, 1971), 289; S. P. Sen, *The French in India, 1763-1816* (New Delhi, 1971), 550.

precedence over the ‘liberation’ of the territories that they occupied. The ‘Edict of Fraternity’ of 19 November 1792 may have offered ‘liberty and help’ to ‘all peoples who wish to recover their liberty’, but the teeth came in the law of 15 December 1792, which decreed how the ‘liberated’ peoples would defray the costs of French military occupation. The territories within France’s ‘natural frontiers’ (the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Rhine) – Nice, Savoy, Belgium and the Rhineland – were annexed, while the conquests beyond were converted into ‘Sister Republics’. The first was the Batavian (Dutch) Republic in May 1795, followed in Italy between 1796 and 1799 by the Cispadane, Cisalpine, Ligurian, Roman and Neapolitan Republics, as well as the Helvetic (Swiss) Republic in 1798. They were expected to raise armies and taxes to support the French war effort, as well as to pay directly for French armies of occupation. The ‘Jacobins’ in all these areas were therefore confronted with a dilemma. They might collaborate by serving as officials, judges, gendarmes and army officers, incurring the wrath of their own people, or they might stand aloof, or even resist French demands, which would deny them the chance of at last realising their goals, or of mediating between the French occupiers and their own people.

Recent research has in fact suggested that in these circumstances European radicals proved to be more than French ‘marionettes’. In September 1795, the officials in the arrondissement of Spa in Belgium vehemently protested against French requisitions, while the Central Administration in Brussels prosecuted attacks against religious ceremonies, ordered surveillance committees to respect the right to privacy and quietly shelved denunciations rather than act on them.³⁵ In Piedmont, the patriots of Alba and Bra protested against some of the worst abuses by the French military.³⁶ In the Rhineland, patriots such as Joseph Görres and A. G. F. Rebmann suffered fines, imprisonment and the closure of their newspapers by

³⁵ M. Rapport, ‘Belgium under French Occupation: Between Collaboration and Resistance, July 1794 to October 1795’, *French History* xvi (2002), 65, 70-1.

³⁶ Broers, *Napoleonic Imperialism*, 256-9.

protesting against the excesses of the occupation: in January 1798, Johann Haan rose in the patriotic society in Koblenz and bitterly denounced the ‘French leeches’.³⁷ While it is true that the French crushed opposition in the Batavian, Cisalpine and Helvetic Republics, there was still some scope for local aspirations. Analysis of the Batavian Constitution of 1798 has shown that some of the aspirations of the Dutch Patriots helped to shape it: it was no mere French imposition. It recognised the social rights of Dutch citizens, including the right to work and to social welfare and declared that the supreme authority in the land was the legislature, not the executive (this stemming from a long history of conflict with the Stadhouder). The administrative system of departments was adopted, but in a concession to Dutch federalist scruples, they were guaranteed the freedom to run their own affairs.³⁸ The Helvetic Republic has also been shown to have at least some roots in Swiss traditions. It was the creation of Swiss radicals, among them Frédéric-César de La Harpe and Heinrich Zschokke, who ruptured with the past in creating a unitary state and abolishing seigneurialism, but in so doing they adopted a mixed language of the old and the new, seeing themselves as ‘regenerating’ existing Swiss virtues and liberties rather than creating new ones.³⁹ The law code envisaged for the Roman Republic in 1798 sought to protect the Catholic sensibilities of the population by not legalising divorce and ensuring that the clergy held onto the registration of births, marriages and deaths. Indeed, the very fact that all but one of the ‘sister republics’ (the sole exception being the short-lived Neapolitan republic) experienced French-sponsored coups d’état shows that the leaders of the satellite states were not behaving as French puppets.⁴⁰ In fact, when the French did prop up more pliable regimes, they were sometimes challenged by local Jacobins, especially in Italy, where the *Giacobini*

³⁷ Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*, 267.

³⁸ Jourdan, *La Révolution: une exception française?*, 260-3.

³⁹ M. Lerner, *A Laboratory of Liberty: The Transformation of Political Culture in Republican Switzerland, 1750-1848* (Leiden and Boston, 2012), 130-3.

⁴⁰ J. Godechot, *La Grande Nation: L’expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde* (Paris, 1983), 357-75.

had espoused a social egalitarianism (inspired in part by the emergency measures in France during the Year 2) that was enough to make the property-respecting leaders of Directorial France blench. Worse, some Italian Jacobins forged contacts with their French counterparts: Buonarroti was amongst those arrested with Gracchus Babeuf and the ‘Conspiracy of the Equals’.⁴¹ *Giacobini* imitation of French Jacobinism was explicitly a means of opposing French exploitation of Italy, of realising their own visions of Italian independence and of challenging the limits of the reforms touted by the moderates in the Sister Republics. When Piedmontese Jacobins sought to oppose the annexation of their country by the French in 1799, they were supported by a peasant uprising in the Langhe region – and the insurgents bore as their symbols busts of the French Jacobin heroes Le Peletier and Marat.⁴²

To conservatives, such behaviour simply demonstrated how dangerous Jacobinism was. The backlash almost everywhere took the shape of both official repression and popular reaction. The official response included prophylactic legislation against French influences, which included laws against foreigners and French citizens in particular: Austria (in 1792), Britain, Russia and Spain (in 1793) and the United States (in 1798) all passed such measures.

Censorship was made stricter almost everywhere: in Britain, there were no fewer than 200 prosecutions for ‘seditious libel’ in the 1790s, meaning writings that incited disorder.⁴³

Newspapers in Austria were prohibited from commenting on politics from the spring of 1792 and in the United States there were fifteen prosecutions of radical journalists under the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Civil liberties were also curtailed: the British Parliament suspended habeas corpus twice, in 1794 and 1798, and governments prosecuted alleged ‘Jacobins’, with ‘treason trials’ taking place in Scotland (1793), England (1794), Austria and

⁴¹ S. J. Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700-1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change* (London, 1979), 161-2, 167-81.

⁴² Doyle, *Oxford History*, 367.

⁴³ C. Emsley, ‘An aspect of Pitt’s “Terror”: prosecutions for sedition during the 1790s’, *Social History* vi (1981), 174.

Hungary (1795). Driven underground, a small minority of British radicals formed the ‘United Britons’, ‘United Englishmen’ and ‘United Scotsmen’ to link up with the United Irish revolutionary movement and to lay the foundations for a French invasion. Ironically, then, the more hysterical claims that the British radical movement was subversive became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Governments also used the threat of ‘Jacobinism’ as a pretext to further their own strategic interests. In 1792, Catherine the Great claimed that she was ‘fighting Jacobinism in Poland’ as she crushed the emergent constitutional state. In India, Tipu’s French flirtation gave the British the excuse they needed to unleash the Fourth Anglo-Mysore war in 1799, destroying the power of the southern Indian kingdom. They also forced the surrender of the French military contingent in Hyderabad, citing its ‘most virulent principles of Jacobinism’.⁴⁴

Even more overwhelming was the popular backlash against the radicals. There were insurrections against the French and their collaborators in Belgium and Luxemburg and widespread resistance in the Rhineland in 1798. The spark was the introduction of conscription, but the uprisings were also underpinned by outraged religious sensibilities. They targeted both the French and those locals who collaborated with them: those who bought church lands, who assumed public office, or Jews who enjoyed civil rights under the new order. In Britain, loyalist organisations, sponsored by the government and the local elites rallied (or cajoled) the wider population into the defence of the established order. Yet, while the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, created in November 1792, and the Volunteer militias, recruited from 1794, served such a purpose, probably just as weighty in the defeat of British radicalism were the unknown quantities of day-to-day intimidation and ostracism of individual radicals at a local level. Similar processes rapidly emerged in the United States, where it was easy for Federalists to

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hasan, *History of Tipu Sultan*, 291.

accuse Democratic-Republicans of subversive, treasonous intent, particularly in 1798, when the United States and France came close to war.⁴⁵ Popular conservatism, like the Jacobinism it opposed, was rooted as much in local as it was in national and international concerns. It was not necessarily ‘counter-revolutionary’ in the sense that it aimed to restore the old regime, but it was frequently ‘anti-revolutionary’, meaning that it protested against particular measures such as conscription, taxation, the assault on the church and on long-cherished customs. The rank-and-file insurgents who followed Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo in his 1799 Sanfedist uprising against the Neapolitan Republic were driven by deep social grievances. The Jacobins were mostly property-owning bourgeois and nobles and, while the republicans were slow in abolishing feudalism, Ruffo attracted recruits because he promised to do so immediately. In the Tuscan cities of Arezzo and Siena, anti-Jacobin resistance combined with social protest in 1799: the mobs assaulted both ‘Jacobins’ and anyone thought to be starving the people, including Jews, who in Siena were slaughtered.⁴⁶

Ultimately, ‘Jacobinism’ outside France suffered precisely because it existed in a state of near-permanent tension between three points: a broad sympathy for the French Revolution, a patriotic commitment to ‘regeneration’ or reform, and localised concerns and conflicts. Seen in this light, ‘Jacobinism’, in fact, was not only a response to the French Revolution, but also a symptom of the geographically more widespread and longer-term transition from the Ancien Régime to modern politics. When set in the wider context of the processes of reform, state-building and political transformation that began in decades before 1789, the varieties of ‘Jacobinism’ appear as one response to debates about freedom and political identity that were being hotly contested around the world. In Europe, the defeat of ‘Jacobinism’ ensured that beyond France ‘patriotism’ and ‘nation’ would be defined less in the terms of rights and

⁴⁵ Quoted in J. C. Miller, *The Federalist Era 1789-1801* (New York, 1963), 228.

⁴⁶ R. Mori, ‘Il popolo toscano durante la rivoluzione e l’occupazione francese’, *Archivio Storico Italiano* cv (1947), 147.

citizenship and more in those of church, king, province, hierarchy, custom and tradition. Meanwhile, ‘Jacobinism’ and democratic politics in general were tarnished by their associations with the Terror, but this is ironic given that outside France most so-called ‘Jacobins’ were dedicated to reform and the rule of law, particularly in Germany and Britain. The revolutionary or conspiratorial strains of ‘Jacobinism’ arose in countries where earlier political violence still festered, as in the Netherlands, or where the repressive response of the state drove a significant number of radicals underground, as in Italy and Ireland, or where ‘Jacobinism’ expressed deeper, longer-standing social conflicts, as again in Italy. Yet, in a world where hierarchies, loyalties and social deference had been strongly challenged by war, revolution and radicalism, ‘Jacobinism’ did leave a legacy – namely a stock of ideas and historical memories that suggested alternative paths to the nation-state in the nineteenth century and provided an arsenal of symbols and rhetoric for later democratic movements. Musings such as these can only be tentative: historians have begun to explore the varieties of the democratic political culture of the 1790s within a trans-national framework, but there is much work still to be done. There has been no recent attempt at a comprehensive, comparative analysis of the ‘sister republics’, although a start has been made.⁴⁷ The counter-revolutionary outbreaks in Europe in the late 1790s, or indeed of the broader conservative backlash in a European and Atlantic context have also yet to be studied in international perspective. Such studies would enable a more comprehensive history of the rise and fall of international ‘Jacobinism’ to be written.

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⁴⁷ Annie Jourdan’s *La Révolution: une exception française?* includes a trenchant chapter on the subject (212-76) and a collection edited by Pierre Serna has made a good start towards a reassessment: P. Serna (ed.), *Républiques Soeurs: Le Directoire et la Révolution atlantique* (Rennes, 2009).

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