

The Language of Politics and Political Culture in France, England, the USA, and the Dutch Republic

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In a paper that has a title as hopelessly pretentious as mine, it is well to begin with a few disclaimers. I cannot possibly offer a detailed comparison of the political cultures or political languages of France, England, the British North American colonies, and the Dutch Republic at the end of the eighteenth century. Rather, I hope to bring out a few of the major themes that helped define the distinctive qualities of French revolutionary discourse by comparing it with the operation of political language in the other countries. I cannot hope, however, even to catalogue the different kinds of political language used in any one country. Isaac Kramnick, for example, has identified four 'distinguishable idioms' of 1787-1788 in America: republicanism, Lockean liberalism, work-ethic protestantism, and state-centered theories of power and sovereignty¹. And that is just America in 1787-1788. A discussion of such a typology for any one of these four countries would occupy much more of your time than I can possibly demand, though Kramnick's categories might serve as an interesting base for comparison. Nor am I trying to revive what Robert Palmer called the 'comparative constitutional history of Western Civilization', for I cannot hope to adequately address the workings of such major concepts as private rights, public authority, law, sovereignty, and political representation — much less liberty, equality, and fraternity or their attendant institutional incarnations².

All these disclaimers aside, there is some basis for comparison here. All of these countries experienced the 'Atlantic Revolution' of the eighteenth century in some decisive way. In England, where no revolution occurred, opposition politics took on new shapes and stridency in the Wilkes Affair. To some extent, all of these countries experienced a broadening of popular political participation and a nationalization of political discourse. But the differences between them are also instructive. My major focus will be on the different uses of the national past as a point of reference.

I should make clear from the start that I focus on the operation of political discourse not only because it distinguishes the French Revolution from the other Atlantic political movements but also and more importantly because political discourse was an essential feature in revolutionary political culture. It is my view that political culture was *the* arena of greatest innovation during the French Revolution. In this I follow the opinion of François Furet, but with many differences: though I agree that the establishment of a democratic political culture was much more important than innovations in the socio-economic realm and that political culture had its own inherent and often autonomous dynamic, I have a much more positive view than he does of that

1 'The 'Great National Discussion'. The Discourse of Politics in 1787', *William and Mary Quarterly*, XLV (1988) 3-32.

2 R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, I, *The Challenge* (Princeton, 1959) v.

democratic political culture. Moreover, in the end, I want to insist on the links between political culture and the social world, even though I will not have time today to develop this perspective.

What most separated the French Revolution from the others, in my view, was the French insistence on breaking absolutely with the national past and installing a completely new and self-consciously innovating regime. There was no successful equivalent in France to the Saxon, Puritan, and 1688 models in England ('the free-born Englishman'); to the Puritan and British models in the US colonies; or to the model of the free Bataves and the authentic early Republic in the Dutch Republic.

The difference in the use of the past as point of reference and legitimizing factor for revolutionary discourse was related to three other major considerations: the influence of the Enlightenment, the pervasiveness of religious discourse, and the differences in familial models of politics. Again, the American, English, and Dutch political cultures were on one side; the French on the other. In France the Enlightenment and natural rights theories had great influence on revolutionary politicians, who were quite reticent in the use of religious language. In France as well, the model of revolutionary politics was fraternity, which marked a dramatic, if ambiguous rupture with previous familial models of the political and social order. I will not have time today to discuss the variability in reception of Enlightenment ideas or the many important features of religious discourse in its intersections with political language, but I will return to the question of familial models in order to show how they are connected to the question of political time.

Central to the notion of political time was the idea of an ancient constitution, which had a vital and enduring place in the American, English, and Dutch political cultures. In the second half of the eighteenth century, English and American oppositional circles were closely linked, and it is now well-established that American radicals closely followed the arguments of their English counterparts (and that English oppositional circles were also quite influenced by American colonial arguments about taxation and representation)³. On both sides of the Atlantic, even radicals who opposed the English government agreed that the English constitution was 'the *best constitution* in the world'⁴. In 1763, John Adams captured the prevailing sentiment when he proclaimed the English constitution 'the most perfect combination of human powers in society which finite wisdom has yet contrived and reduced to practice for the preservation of liberty and the production of happiness'⁵.

American political discourse in the years after 1763 continued to be shaped in the most fundamental and pervasive ways by this conviction⁶. Although, as Bernard Bailyn has shown, the Americans eventually came to believe that the source of rights

3 John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976).

4 *Ibidem*, 241.

5 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967) quote pages 66-67, see also page 188.

6 Gordon Wood does not differ from Bailyn in this regard, as far as I can see. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969).

was ultimately to be found in the abstract and universal laws of nature, they never repudiated the heritage of English common law. American revolutionaries imagined themselves as defenders of an 'ancient constitution' against the insidious, conspiratorial and tyrannical innovations of the English monarchy of the 1760s and 1770s. They compared themselves to the purer and freer Saxons whose government 'was founded upon principles of the most perfect liberty'⁷. Given this identification, it is hardly surprising that American revolutionary pamphlets contained much discussion of English history and especially of the Saxon origins of the English constitution. Even though the American framers of the constitution of 1787 ultimately became convinced that they had superseded the English constitution with their new principle of representation, they continued to believe that their work rested on that previous example⁸.

The situation in the Dutch Republic was similar. Indeed, if we are to believe I. Leonard Leeb, whose work I have closely followed here, both Patriots and Orangists looked to the past to justify their arguments:

Among all of the sources for the political conflicts and the revolutions of 1787 and 1795 there is no more important component than the history, especially the political and constitutional history, of the Dutch Republic ... the use of history was by far the favorite and most substantial form of political justification and explanation⁹.

The Dutch Patriots, like their counterparts in England and America, urged a 'Constitutional Restoration' (*Grondwettige Herstelling*), the repair of the old constitution and the removal of usurpations. Attacks on the powers of the Stadhouder were almost always couched in these terms; his privileges were a usurpation of the rights of the people or of their duly constituted representatives.

In France, too, controversy about an ancient constitution had dominated much 18th century political writing. But in contrast to England, America, and the Dutch Republic, the notion quite quickly disappeared from constitutional debates after the beginning of the Revolution. By 1789, perhaps even by 1788, French writers were more preoccupied with the comparative virtues of the English and American constitutions as models for their own new one than they were with the supposed virtues of any ancient French one. The interest in America, especially, was a kind of escape from the French past; America was imagined as the antithesis to everything degenerate in French aristocratic civilization. It was not so much a model to be followed closely as it was a kind of Utopian thought-experiment¹⁰. Before long, moreover, the French gave

7 Baily, *The Ideological Origins*, 80.

8 Wood, *The Creation*, 593-615 ('The American Science of Politics').

9 *The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Revolution: History and Politics in the Dutch Republic 1747-1800* (The Hague, 1973) 4.

10 Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, 1957). This book is actually quite disappointingly uninformative about the most radical revolutionary views of America.

up trying to find precedents anywhere else for their creation of a new polity. Even the use of Roman examples had a largely Utopian meaning: the Roman Republic, for example, was a model of political purity that could be used to denounce the French feudal past; it was not a recipe for constitution-making¹¹.

The rejection of the ancient constitution in France was the most momentous intellectual revolution in French political thought in the eighteenth century. Although there were telltale signs along the way, the rejection of historical precedent occurred virtually all at once. In his 'Fragments and Unedited Notes on the Revolution', Tocqueville dated the moment of break quite precisely in the months between the decision to call the Estates General (August 1788) and the actual elections to the Estates (spring 1789):

During this space of time, there was almost no change in the facts, but the movement that drew the ideas and sentiments of the French towards the total subversion of society hastened and became finally furiously rapid ... In the beginning, one spoke only of better balancing powers, of better adjusting the relations between classes; soon one advanced, one ran, one rushed towards the idea of pure democracy. In the beginning, it was Montesquieu that one cited and commented upon; at the end, one spoke only of Rousseau¹².

How was such a break possible in a country with such a long and glorious history? How, especially, was such a break possible even before the fall of the Bastille in July 1789? How was it possible, as Tocqueville observed, to begin by trying to accommodate all ideas of the moment to the Middle Ages and end so quickly by throwing precedent overboard in the search for abstract and general notions of what legislative power ought to be?

The problem — if we can call it that — began with the very defenders of the 'ancient constitution'. Although virtually all eighteenth-century commentators took the French past as their standard of measurement in political debate, they had different views of that past, and no one could agree on the fundamental laws that defined the nation¹³. Moreover, the monarchy itself sponsored propaganda designed to attack the historically-based arguments of the Parliamentary magistrates and so participated in the general undermining of historical appeals¹⁴. If the 'ancient constitution' seemed clouded in controversy for the greatest intellects of the time, and even for the monarchy, it was even less clear to the pamphleteers of 1788-1789. When the crown

11 Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, tr. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, 1988) 275-276. I have developed some of these points on the French view of their past in 'The 'National Assembly'', in Keith M. Baker, ed., *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, I, *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (New York, 1987) 403-415.

12 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Fragments et notes inédits sur la Révolution*, volume II of André Jardin, ed., *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution*, volume II in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1953) quote pages 106-107.

13 See François Furet and Mona Ozouf, 'Deux légitimations historiques de la société française au XVIIIe siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers', reprinted in Furet, *L'Atelier de l'histoire* (Paris, 1982) 165-183.

14 Keith Baker, 'Memory and Practice: Politics and the Representation of the Past in Eighteenth-Century France', *Representations*, XI (1985) 134-159.

solicited opinions on the form that should be proposed for the forthcoming meetings of the Estates General, hundreds of pamphlets appeared with historical arguments. Some found the ancient constitution in the earliest days of the monarchy; others in the Estates General of the fourteenth century. It was not long before other pamphleteers argued that precedent should be jettisoned altogether. As Rabaut de Saint-Etienne asked:

If the form of our government has been vicious since the beginning of the monarchy; if the composition, the holding and the deliberations of the Estates General have been irregular, does it follow that, in the most enlightened century that ever was, we should go back to the times when France and all Europe were covered in darkness, and adopt usages that are defective and contrary to reason¹⁵?

Sieyès's ironic mocking of historical argument in his famous pamphlet, *What is the Third Estate?*, only expressed the going sentiment in the strongest possible terms. As he bitingly queried, 'Why doesn't [the Third Estate] send back to the forest of Franconia all those families that maintain the crazy pretention of being born of a conquering race'¹⁶.

The English, Americans, and Dutch were hardly slavish in their admiration of their respective national pasts. Gordon Wood has argued, for instance, that the constitution of 1787 in America was profoundly shaped by an original, American conception of politics. But that conception rested on continuity with English practices and principles rather than on a radical departure from them¹⁷. Similarly, Dutch Patriots came to mix in more and more references to natural rights philosophy in their pamphlets. The anonymous pamphlet, *Constitutional Restoration of Netherlands Political Form of 1784*, for instance, claimed that

In differences of this sort [conflicts between Sovereigns and peoples] one must not call upon history, usage, example or even on the granting of charters; but only on the origins of sovereign authority, on the inalienable rights of nations, on Reason, on Justice, on the interest of the Fatherland whose happiness always forms the highest Law¹⁸.

And yet the authors of this pamphlet insisted that they merely wished to get back to the fundamental laws of the Netherlands' Constitution: 'Thus our goal is by no means the alteration of the form of government'¹⁹. Only with the defeat of the Patriot revolution and the success of the French would the historical argument itself come under attack in the Dutch Republic. In 1793 Rousseau's *Social Contract* was translated into Dutch,

15 As quoted by Mitchell B. Garrett, *The Estates General of 1789: the Problems of Composition and Organization* (New York, 1935) 134.

16 Emmanuel Sieyès, *Qu'est ce que le Tiers état?*, ed. Roberto Zapperi (Geneva, 1970) quote page 128.

17 Wood, *The Creation*, 593-615.

18 Leeb, *The Ideological Origins*, 187.

19 *Ibidem*, 193.

and arguments based on reason and equality began to supersede those based on history and liberty. Yet these general trends never went as far or as fast as they did in France.

The American Whig conception of history — if I may term it that — was essential to the success of the constitution of 1787. By 1791, Lance Banning argues, the constitution was accepted on all sides as the starting point for debate. Why would the Anti-Federalists give in on this major point so readily? According to Banning, the American Whig tradition predisposed Anti-Federalists, like the Federalists, to a posture defensive of constitutional settlements: 'almost by definition a constitution was something to protect, a fragile structure raised from chaos in liberty's defense'. Change could only be for the worse; the friends of liberty had to guard against social and political degeneration, against the corruption inherent in the passage of time. The only guarantee against corruption was a frequent return to the original principles of the constitution. This worry about constitutional decay could only operate effectively if the constitution itself was accepted. Thus, Banning concludes, since the Republican successors to the Anti-Federalists had no ancient constitution to defend, they had to make the constitution of 1787 ancient, or in other words, sacred²⁰. Thus, even after a new departure with the constitution of 1787, Americans reinstated a sense of history and used it to bolster up the legitimacy of the new document.

The belief that history meant corruption and degeneration was a commonplace in the eighteenth century, and the French certainly used those terms when referring to history. But when the French rejected their ancient constitution — or rather rejected even the intellectual activity of looking for an ancient constitution — they introduced a new temporal dimension into revolutionary discourse. In my book, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, I have called this the 'mythic present', by which I mean the effort to live in a kind of timeless present defined by the moment of new social consensus — or in others words, the constant attempt to re-enact and thus mythologize the social contract²¹. Once the Revolution was underway, the French never referred much to past models (or did so only in the utopianizing sense mentioned earlier); they constantly referred instead to the new moment, to the new national character, to newness in general.

The sense of newness was to be created instantaneously, by a kind of Rousseauian appeal directly to the political heart. As one radical document proclaimed in 1793,

to be truly Republican, each citizen must experience and bring about in himself a revolution equal to the one which has changed France. There is nothing, absolutely nothing in common

20 Lance Banning, 'Republican Ideology and the Triumph of the Constitution, 1789-1793', *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXI (1974) 167-188, quote page 178. Banning concludes with these words: '[The world of classical constitutionalism] forced the Republican party to defend a sacred constitution against an executive threat. This world of classical politics assured the quick apotheosis of the Constitution of the United States' (188).

21 (Berkeley, 1984)27-31.

between the slave of a tyrant and the inhabitant of a free state; the customs of the latter, his principles, his sentiments, his action, all must be new²².

The festivals of the revolutionary decade, for instance, were meant to instill this sense of newness, and the mass swearing of oaths was used to internalize the revolutionary *present* in the hearts of all participants. The festivals with their mass oathtaking ceremonies were a herculean effort to essentially freeze the present, and failing that, which of course they must, to continually recreate, through commemoration, the original sensation of belonging to a radically new community²³. The French answer to corruption, then, was not vigilance against the degeneration of a textual document or of a living tradition; their answer to corruption was an unceasing reproduction of a present sense of revolutionary commitment to renovation of heart, soul, and political process. Nothing better expresses this new sense of time than the literal effort to redo the calendar; the Republic was so new that it required a new system of dating in which the old months gave way to new names based on nature and the old days gave way to new ones based on reason. It was now year II of the Republic rather than 1794.

The revolutionaries could not live without a sense of time; the calendar shows that they wanted to redo the conception of time rather than eliminate it altogether. Moreover, the revolutionaries did not ignore history; they immediately began constructing a history of their revolution, but it was always, in a sense, a history of the present. History in the usual sense was 'the registers of the unhappiness of humanity', where one encountered 'kings, great nobles, and everywhere the oppressed, on each page the people counted like a herd of animals'²⁴. The history of the present was supposed to be the story of regeneration, a perpetual romance, but it was also always in flux; commemorative dates had to shift with every political shift in the revolution. This was a strange history indeed, one that was entirely open-ended towards the future, one in which the past was simply something to be gotten past. It was a history that was obviously productive of an enormous sense of anxiety. The past had been presumably abolished, the future was in the process of enactment; there was no closure that seemed possible. This sense of history, this suspicion of history and tradition, opened much fertile terrain for the abstract, universalizing conception of human rights.

The constitutional document reflected the revolutionary sense of time by its insistence on the continual reappraisal of the fit between laws and the general will. The rejection of any ancient constitution had opened the way to a particularly unitary, abstract, and rationalizing conception of the nation. The constitution and all law

22 'Instruction adressée aux autorités constituées des départements de Rhône et de Loire, par la Commission temporaire' of Lyon (16 November 1793), reprinted in Walter Markov and Albert Soboul, ed., *Die Sansculotten von Paris: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Volksbewegung, 1793-1794* (Berlin, 1957) 224.

23 On the sense of time created by the revolutionary festivals, see Ozouf, *Festivals*, 158-196 ('The Festival and Time').

24 As quoted in Louis Trenard, 'Manuels scolaires au XVIIIe siècle et sous la Révolution', *Revue du Nord* (1973) 107.

became the expression of the national will, which no longer had any connection to tradition. If the constitution ceased to conform to the national will, which could only be determined by the deputies meeting in assembly, then it had to be replaced by one more suitable. The rejection of precedent, then, contributed mightily to the difficulties of sacralizing the new French constitution of 1791 as a founding document.

The sense of presentness can be seen very clearly in the opening lines of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen that stands as a preamble to the Constitution of 1791. The 'natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man' had to be declared so that they could be 'constantly present to all the members of the social body'. They would serve as reminders of the citizens' rights and duties but also, and most significantly, as standards for judging government and law: 'so that the acts of legislative power and those of executive power can be at every instant compared with the goal of all political institutions'. Thus, the ratification of the French constitution simply put into operation the principles by which legitimacy had constantly to be judged.

The rhetoric of the American constitution, in contrast, seemed to assume that the new social contract was being signed and in some sense fixed with the process of ratification. Thus, the preamble to the American constitution reads, 'We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, etc... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America'. It is assumed here that the constitution will thenceforth stand in for the social contract, whereas in France it must apparently continue to be renegotiated through the application of the general principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

The control provided by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was of a very different temporal nature; it was, in a sense, always operating in the present, whereas the American Constitution provided implicitly for a constant comparison between past and present. The French constitution itself admitted of no such fixity; in such circumstances, it could hardly become ancient. The French constitution writers likewise could not style themselves as 'framers' (unlike their American counterparts who used this metaphor frequently) because they were not in a position to embrace the idea of enclosure (especially temporal boundaries) that is imbedded in framing²⁵.

I want to move now to a much more speculative set of remarks about the familial models underlying political language in the eighteenth century. Here I will rely entirely on the comparison between the USA and France. Briefly, my argument is that the French break with the past was in part made possible by and certainly facilitated by the model of fraternity that lay behind revolutionary language. To put it most schematically, the Americans imagined themselves first as Sons of Liberty and later as Founding Fathers. The French broke altogether with the paternal model and imagined themselves as brothers. This difference had great consequences for the

25 On framing, see Robert A. Ferguson, 'Ideology and the Framing of the Constitution', *Early American Literature*, XXII (1987) 157-165.

conceptualization of women's roles as well (an issue which I must leave largely aside for lack of space).

Sons of Liberty and Founding Fathers are striking labels — especially in comparison to the French case — but they should not blind us to the complicated process of development that lay behind them. The notion of Founding Fathers was not invented all at once in the 1790s; it may not have been current until the 20th century. But the rhetoric of the 'parent-child analogy' has been shown to be widely diffused in the political literature on both sides of the quarrel over American independence²⁶. Both the English and the Americans viewed the Americans as children.

Yet by the time they came to write the constitution of 1787, the American revolutionaries had developed a rather different image of themselves, or at least of their leader, George Washington. In the most comprehensive account to date on this issue, Jay Fliegelman argues that the Americans were revolting for filial autonomy from tyrannical patriarchal authority. They were not revolting against all notions of paternal authority, however, simply against the 'bad' despotic father. By mythologizing Washington, Americans glorified the new, more understanding father of eighteenth-century educational tracts and set a moral example for themselves²⁷. As John Adams remarked, 'I glory in the character of a Washington because I know him to be only an exemplification of the American character'²⁸. By the 1790s, then, American male revolutionaries had transformed themselves collectively from political children into political fathers; they were in a position, consequently, to imagine passing on their political patrimony through a contractual document. It may be that this transformation outweighs in importance the specific details of disagreement between Isaac Kramnick's four 'distinguishable idioms' of 1787-1788, which I mentioned at the beginning of my paper.

No one has undertaken a comparable study of French sources on paternal imagery. But as far as I can determine, the French never called themselves either sons or fathers; they insisted instead on the third segment of their famous triad, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The notion of fraternity was not simply a pleasant icon for universal equality and liberty, a kind of good neighborly feeling about one's fellow 'man'. It was rather a heavily-freighted psycho-symbolic story that was critical to the fortunes of the Revolution itself and intimately connected to the French revolutionary notion of time.

I do not have the time here to develop a documentary case for the band of brothers as the family romance embedded in the revolutionary experience. Moreover, it would be very difficult to marshal much explicit evidence to this effect. French revolutionaries did not stand at the tribune and lay out their psycho-sexual fantasies about the political

26 The phrase 'parent-child analogy' comes from Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, 'The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation', *Perspectives in American History*, VI (1972) 167-306. Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1982).

27 By 1778, George Washington was already being referred to as 'Father of his country'. Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 200.

28 Quoted by Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 223.

order. But there are all sorts of clues about fraternity in revolutionary symbolics — in, for instance, the ordering of festivals and the choice of icons and emblems — and, on occasion, in revolutionary discourse itself—in, for example, the debates on women's clubs or in the newspaper accounts of the killing of the king. Consequently, the psycho-symbolics of the revolutionary political imagination can be sketched out in a preliminary fashion through a reading of political symbols and a few more conventional political sources. There were indications that a crisis of paternal authority was brewing in France in the decades before 1789. In a suggestive article on 'Fallen Fathers', the art historian Carol Duncan has argued that Salon paintings in the second half of the eighteenth century were increasingly preoccupied with figures of old men who had trouble holding onto their powers. Rebellious sons were appearing with great frequency along with paintings that were devoted explicitly to Oedipus as an old and blind patriarch²⁹.

We can trace the changes in familial models during the Revolution itself by following the changing narrative structures of revolutionary rhetoric³⁰. In the early years of the Revolution, between 1789 and 1791, revolutionary rhetoric was driven by the generic plot of comedy. The revolutionaries thought of themselves as brothers trying to convince a good-hearted but obtuse father to agree to the reforms that they had proposed. The debate about the constitution showed that the revolutionaries hoped Louis would become an understanding father who would give the sons more independence.

By 1792, comedy had failed and tragedy increasingly became the dominant narrative structure of revolutionary language. The king had tried to run away, thereby refusing his role as conciliatory father. In January 1793, the Convention ordered the killing of the king, and the band of brothers now took complete charge, after what some radical newspapers self-consciously described as a ritual sacrifice. The *Révolutions de Paris* described the scene at the scaffold, in which people ran up to dip their pikes and handkerchiefs in the blood of the king. One zealot sprinkled blood on the crowd and shouted, 'Brothers, they tell us that the blood of Louis Capet will fall again on our heads; well, so be it, let it fall... Republicans, the blood of a king brings happiness'³¹.

A Freudian analysis of this re-enactment of the primal scene of the murder of the father might be convincing, but I want to concentrate on the iconographie results and what they tell us about the familial models of revolutionary politics. The Revolution marks a moment of separation from the older patriarchal model of politics with the king as father, but it is a moment in which the alternatives are not clearly graspable. The French radicals hoped to remain perpetually youthful; they were to be permanently brothers and not founding fathers. This was part of their desire to break totally with the French past.

29 Carol Duncan, 'Fallen Fathers: Images of Authority in Pre-Revolutionary French Art', *Art History*, IV (1981) 186-202.

30 On the narrative structures of revolutionary rhetoric, see Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 34-38.

31 *Révolutions de Paris*, number 185, 19-26 janvier 1793, 'Mort de Louis XVI, dernier roi de France'.

In the iconography of the French Revolution, as a consequence, there were virtually no emblems of fatherhood. Most representations of the Republic were feminine and they almost always showed young women, often virginal, and sometimes with very young children. But there is never a father present. The male representation of the people in the form of Hercules was almost always shown as a virile brother; we know that he is a brother because he is shown with his sisters, liberty and equality, who cannot be imagined as wives, if only because there are always two of them³². Indeed, one might argue that the incest taboo is not being very well enforced iconographically. This is a political family without parentage, without a lineage. It is a family, consequently, that has trouble passing on its political patrimony in a constitutional document (it has trouble constituting itself in a patriarchal sense). And it is also, at least for a time, a political family whose vagueness of boundaries—in the absence of the father—opens up a space for uncertainty about women's roles.

Much of the difference between the American and French Revolutions can be attributed, I think, to this fundamental difference in unconscious familial analogies: the radical nature of the French Revolution, the inability of the French to sacralize a constitutional document, the permanence and continuing urgency of the revolutionary moment, the fundamental break with the national past — all were linked to the image of the band of brothers as the makers of the new order. I do not conclude from this that the French were somehow less mature than the Americans, more regressive in their fantasies of political power and social order. They were participating in practice in the great adventure undertaken by political theorists since Machiavelli, i. e., they were trying to enact a social contract based on grounds other than naturalized patriarchal authority³³.

There can be no political order without an imaginative construction of basic kinship elements or what I have called here familial models. The French Revolution destabilized the going images of social and political order; unconsciously, the revolutionaries ended up undermining patriarchal images of authority. They also made an effort to reconstruct the basis for authority along masculine, fraternal, and less patriarchal lines. By destabilizing patriarchal images of authority, the French revolutionaries revealed just how much depended upon a stabilizable political imagination.

They also revealed that the political imagination, the psycho-familial model of politics, was necessarily gendered, because it was about family and kinship. The destabilization of patriarchal images of authority opened the public sphere to women. Women's clubs proliferated after the killing of the king, and women began to take more

32 See figures 12 and 16 in Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*.

33 I hope that it is clear that I am not using gender differentiation in the sense of a self-conscious and explicit ideology of sexual difference but rather in the sense of an unconscious pre- and refiguration of the social order. For a different kind of approach, much better developed on the American side, see Ruth H. Bloch, 'The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, XIII (1987) 37-58 and Linda K. Kerber, 'The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation', *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (1985) 474-495.

prominent public roles, including writing and speaking in favor of women's rights. The family itself was also affected. Revolutionary legislatures enacted the most liberal legislation on divorce and the rights of illegitimate children of any western nation.

The revolutionaries did not subsequently rush headlong toward women's liberation; far from it. Rather they began to elaborate a vision of republicanism that was based on the bonds between men which specifically excluded women, just as the French artist David's pictures of the 1780s had excluded them, by relegating them to the separate sphere of domesticity, which now required its own new justification. Yet by rejecting the past and overthrowing the patriarchal image of kingly authority, the revolutionaries had opened the Pandora's box of family relationships and of women's relationship to the public sphere. By challenging the naturalized presuppositions of patriarchal rule, they showed that constituting a new nation meant reshaping the political imagination in its most fundamental aspects, aspects that were usually left unspoken and unjustified and hence largely unproblematic. Although the revolutionaries themselves tried to repress the consequences of their actions, the experience of the French Revolution had demonstrated that there could be no constituting without families, without genders, without women and men as well as universal man. Power went far beyond constitutional documents because power could arise only out of the most fundamental relationships and so could only be imagined in terms of them. As a consequence, the fate of constitutional documents was tied up in the end with images of fathers, brothers, and female goddesses.

Scenario's voor een onvoltooide revolutie, 1795-1798

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Het maken van een revolutie is vaak niet eens het grootste probleem. De echte moeilijkheden beginnen pas de volgende dag: als de vraag rijst wat er met het behaalde succes gedaan moet worden. De Bataafse revolutie was wat dat betreft geen uitzondering. De patriotten hadden al hun aandacht gericht op het omverwerpen van het stadhouderlijke regime zonder echter een behoorlijk 'Plan der Omwenteling', een blauwdruk voor de nieuwe orde, op te stellen¹. Nadat de Fransen de patriotten hun lang verbeide revolutie in de schoot hadden geworpen, had men nog ruim drie jaar nodig om uit te maken wat die omwenteling eigenlijk inhield. Pas daarna kon een proces van consolidatie en normalisering beginnen.

De politieke discussie van die drie jaar is notoir moeilijk in kaart te brengen². De vaak gemaakte indeling in unitarissen en federalisten kijkt alleen naar het probleem van de staatsvorm en dekt dus maar een deel van de politieke realiteit; die in democraten en moderaten is veel bruikbaar al is de scheidslijn tussen beide groepen vrij moeilijk te trekken. Termen als aristocraten, jacobijnen, anarchisten en terroristen kunnen als typische scheldnamen buiten beschouwing blijven. Het best hanteerbaar is misschien nog wel het onderscheid in revolutionairen en moderaten dat in de tijd zelf, naar mijn indruk, het meest gebruikt werd³ en waarbij het accent veel meer lag op tactiek en methode dan op politieke inhoud. Maar ik zal al deze benamingen zo min mogelijk gebruiken en proberen het politieke debat van die jaren in veel globalere zin te benaderen: vanuit de verschillende politieke scenario's die toen werden ontworpen voor het voltooien van de revolutie.

In al die scenario's speelden de ervaringen uit het recente verleden een belangrijke rol. Uiteraard probeerde men in de jaren 1795-1798 de lessen te trekken uit de eigen patriottentijd en uit de revolutie die zich inmiddels in Frankrijk had voltrokken. Maar misschien nog wel belangrijker was dat dit Bataaf se debat daarmee ook de voortzetting was van hervormingstendenties in de Nederlandse samenleving die al sinds de jaren zestig gaande waren en die allereerst zijn op te vatten als een proces van culturele natievorming. Steeds zien we daarbij dat universele waarden (of het nu het Verlichtingsideaal is van deugd, kennis en geluk, of het revolutionaire parool van vrijheid, gelijkheid en broederschap) pas goed aanslaan als en doordat ze worden genationaliseerd.

1 J. H. Appellius, *De staatsomwenteling van 1795, in haren aart, loop en gevolgen beschouwd* (Leiden, 1801)9, 14.

2 Vgl. P. Geyl, 'De Bataafse revolutie', in: P. Geyl, *Studies en strijdschriften* (Groningen, 1958) 235-256; H. de Lange, 'Revolutie en democratie', *De Gids*, CXXXIV (1971) 470-482.

3 Zie bijvoorbeeld Appellius, *De staatsomwenteling van 1795*, 45; P. Vreede, *Verandwoording van Pieter Vreede, lid van het voormalig uitvoerend bewind, aen de Bataafsche Natie en aen haere vertegenwoordigers; ingegeven by de Eerste Kamer der wetgevende vergadering; den 9 October 1798* (Leiden, 1798) 4; *De Democraten*, I (1796-1797) 222; 8 december 1796.