

Visits of Sovereignty and the articulation of the national and the local in France and Germany on the eve of World War I

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the problems and potentialities of asymmetrical historical comparison by examining visits by heads of State to the provinces in Germany and France on the eve of WW I. This act of political legitimisation and representation is analysed through the lens of the practical organization of the event understood as an administrative routine, thereby bringing into question many of the categories routinely mobilised to describe and to oppose two models of national integration.

Keywords: Visits of sovereignty, political legitimacy, national integration, comparative theory.

Résumé :

Le présent article vise à approfondir les problèmes et les possibilités d'une comparaison historique asymétrique en se penchant sur les visites de chefs d'Etat dans les provinces allemandes et françaises dans la période précédant la première guerre mondiale. Cet acte de légitimation et de représentation politique est analysé à travers le prisme de l'organisation pratique de l'événement, vue comme une routine administrative, ce qui amène à se poser la question des catégories habituellement mobilisées pour décrire et opposer deux modèles d'intégration nationale.

Mots-clés : visites de souveraineté, légitimité politique, intégration nationale, théorie comparative.

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Introduction

On October 18, 1913, Kaiser Wilhelm II travelled to Leipzig to preside over the inauguration of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*,¹ a monument celebrating the centenary of the defeat of Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in the fields outside Leipzig. The event closed a year of public celebrations including Wilhelm II's silver jubilee, the wedding of Princess Viktoria Luise and the centenary of national liberation (Siemann 1988: 298-320). In Leipzig, the Kaiser was at the centre of the proceedings, but was accompanied by high-ranking military officials and members of the government, as well as the king of Saxony and representatives of the royal families of Russia, Sweden and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Some 60,000 spectators paid between 3 and 5 RM to witness the ceremony, and bleachers were put up to seat 4,800 people paying 100 RM each to get a good view of the event. In addition, tens of thousands of spectators thronged the avenues leading from the train station to the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* to catch a glimpse of the Kaiser and his suite.

That same year the French President, Raymond Poincaré, made multiple visits to French provinces. Poincaré laid the cornerstone for the new seaport at Le Havre and the tunnel of l'Estaque in Marseille and reviewed infantry and naval manoeuvres three

times. Finally, he visited a number of *petites patries*, paying tribute to the local costumes, scenic sights and gastronomic specialties of each area, as had his predecessors and successors. As was the case for the visit of Wilhelm II to Leipzig, these presidential visits mobilised a considerable number of people - between 10,000 and 20,000 in small cities and between 40,000 and 100,000 in larger prefect towns. In Germany, as in France, a series of festivities and attractions accompanied the official visits. Fireworks, urban decorations, nocturnal illuminations, concerts, 21 gun salutes, peeling church bells and street theatre transformed ordinary sensorial perceptions of the city and lent an extraordinary character to the visit (Corbin/Gérôme 1994). Local elites were responsible for mobilising the population, which often included leading them to the sites of the sovereign's visit. The role of schoolchildren in particular is a classic example. In Leipzig, 27,000 schoolchildren were posted along the 1.5 miles of the route from the train station to the memorial to acclaim the Kaiser and were expected to remain in place for two hours for his return after the ceremony. Similarly, during the visit of Poincaré to Le Havre in 1913, the municipal administration and regional school authority joined forces to organise the rational deployment of children along the path taken by the President.

In both cases, the explicit objective of the official visit was to reinforce the popular legitimacy of the head of State and to demonstrate the strong ties between the territory being visited and the nation as a

¹ This massive memorial of the "battle of the people" (*Völkerschlacht*) is 91 meters high and was designed by Bruno Schmitz. Its construction, which lasted from 1900 to 1913 at a total cost of 6 million RM, was exclusively financed by private donations.

whole. In Germany, the organizers of the imperial visit felt challenged to “create a ceremony which needs to be pious in nature, yet at the same time expresses loyalty and love for the king [of Saxony] and the *Land*, as well as enthusiasm and devotion to the *Reich* and its Kaiser.”² In France, the visits of heads of State in the provinces were considered by their promoters and the presidents themselves as an effective institution for integrating subnational territories into the nation-state through direct contact with the population. These visits were thus integral parts of the process of national legitimisation³ and served to reinforce the institution of the presidency, as is well demonstrated in the following passage from a 1913 essay by a journalist and supporter of French presidential visits: “The President travels because he needs to maintain a direct line of communication between himself and the country in order to create a current of sympathy between those who govern and those who are governed, to maintain the affection of the masses, their confidence. This depends on the powers of seduction of the supreme chief of the nation, and is a duty and a vitally important task which the President must fulfil.” (Leyret 1913: 100)

In both contexts, visits by heads of State became increasingly important if measured by the number of visits, the size of the public mobilised, and the amount of press coverage. The similarities between the objectives and outcomes of provincial visits by the heads of State make a comparative framework of analysis appear both natural and evident, following the classical method of establishing a “catalogue” of similarities and differences, convergences and divergences.

This perspective would imply that the evolution of the institution responded to similar challenges confronting each polity and would be part of a policy of national

integration allowing both societies to confront “radical changes without falling into a situation of anomie” (Thiesse 1999: 16). In this regard, the German Kaiser began regular public and highly publicised trips to the Prussian provinces to direct military manoeuvres in the 1860s, before venturing further throughout the Reich after 1876 where he could see and be seen by increasingly large crowds turning out to see the two to four military manoeuvres which the German Kaiser directed each year in the regional military districts (Vogel 1997: 42-91). With Wilhelm II, the number of voyages and public appearances on the international stage (Paulmann 2000) as well as on the national stage grew to such an extent, that John Röhl speaks of the “desire by a charismatic monarchy [...] to transform the monarchy into the institution monopolising the idea of the empire through its public omnipresence, the multiplication of speeches, parades, inaugurations and commemorative ceremonies” (Röhl 1988: 112). In France, the number of presidential visits to the provinces rose dramatically at the end of the 1880s, during the consolidation of the young Third Republic challenged by the Boulangiste movement. Over more than two years, President Sadi Carnot and General Boulanger “duelled” at a distance, each crisscrossing the national territory, emulating mobilisation techniques and rallying personal and institutional support. Following the “victory” of the Republic, the presidents never ceased their frequent travels through the national territory and were explicit about the objective of “conquering hearts and minds to the form of government which our nation has freely given itself.”⁴

If both nations faced similar challenges in confronting the centrifugal effects of the tremendous economic, social and political upheavals, an enormous body of research on both countries which could be mobilised to explain differences observed in

² Minutes of a preparatory meeting held on March 14, 1913 in Dresden. Municipal archives of Leipzig, hereafter MA Leipzig, Kap 71/63/1.

³ We will not touch the question of the evaluation of the effects of the visits here. On this point, see Mariot 2001: 707-738.

⁴ Quotation from the *Petit Dauphinois*, August 16, 1914 referring to the cancelled visit of Poincaré to Haute-Savoie.

the institutional and practical responses to these challenges —with respect to either each case, or a common norm— including institutional differences (e.g., monarchy vs. republic, strong Jacobin centralisation vs. weak central State), differences in the history of the construction of each nation-state, and differing conceptions of the nation. These oppositions constructed around the comparison of France and Germany as opposing and emblematic models of nation and State building structure many of the theories and cognitive frameworks used to study the nation (Didry/Wagner/Zimmermann 1999).

To get around the pitfalls of a functionalist reading which would tend to transform official visits to the provinces as a necessary condition to the stability of the political order and the integration of peripheral territories and populations into the nation, while at the same time avoiding the risks of reproducing crystallized oppositions of the two nations by projecting nationally anchored categories of interpretation from one context to another (see Tacke 1995: 14), our research was built around two methodological principles: 1) continuous control of categories and scales of analysis exercised by shuttling findings and queries from one context to the other.⁵ 2) first consider the object “visits of heads of State” in and of itself, by understanding the internal mechanisms of its existence, its organisation, the terms of the negotiation between central and local actors before bringing in more interpretative questions.

The combination of an inductive approach and the interweaving of the two contexts appeared necessary to respond to an epistemological problem inherent to the cognitive operation of comparing: the problem of asymmetry. During the construction of the comparison, as in the interpretative phase, there is a fundamental asymmetry between the degree of knowledge

and the analytical categories that the historian can mobilise for each context or object studied. As a consequence, comparison implies a controlled (or in most cases uncontrolled) transposition of analytical or conceptual categories from one context to another as a way of constructing a common scale of comparison and ordering empirical observations are “similar” or “different”. As Jocelyne Dakhlia notes,

“A comparative perspective is in reality always asymmetric, founded on a pre-existing object, solidly constructed and ready for use, which is subsequently brought into contact with a new and, at face value, similar object. The intuition of an analogy, the idea that a phenomenon of the same order can be observed on two sides of a political, cultural or religious border, is nothing other than a form of annexation. Whether one sides in the end of the enquiry with the interpretation of similarity or difference, the fact remains that at the start, one always compares an object which one knows less, little, or even nothing about when compared with an object which is already known.” (Dakhlia 1995:44)

If asymmetry and the logic of transposition are integral to the operation of comparison, how can their effects be controlled so as to avoid the pitfalls of a functionalist reading of the visits of sovereignty (that is, as fulfilling the same necessary social and political functions) on one hand, or essentialist pitfalls consisting in attributing differences to irreconcilable and unchanging national cultures or trajectories on the other?

Concretely, the first stage of the analysis consisted in studying the organization and the structure of visits of sovereignty in Germany, following a set of criteria developed in the French context (exploring, for example: What happened? Who organized the event? How many people turned out? What did the head of State see and do?).⁶ After presenting the results of our

⁵ On this interweaving of scales, questions and categories as a method of historical comparison, see Werner/Zimmermann 2006: 30-50.

⁶ The general idea was to reintroduce a logic of “thick description” into the social and institutional aspects of ceremonial techniques which are all too often reduced to the analysis of their function (e.g., What is their role in society?), their signification (e.g., Which cultural or

initial “checklist”, we will show how the realization that certain “items” were simply not found in the German context enabled us to reconsider what we had initially taken as a given, question our initial categories of analysis, and hence adjust the initial “Franco-centric” framework via the German comparison. In this way our approach neither seeks to neutralize national bias by fixing an independent yardstick of measurement, no in transposing one set of analytical categories from one context to the other. Rather, we suggest that a continual process of readjustment of analytical categories through a confrontation of empirical findings is the soundest way to address the problem of asymmetry in national comparisons.

I - Visits of sovereignty as a way to articulate the national and the local

The visit of Wilhelm II to Leipzig on October 18, 1913 was planned as early as January 1912. In the first months of 1913, the mayor of Leipzig proposed a program to the imperial court in Berlin. The program detailed an extremely dense plan of activities associating the Kaiser with events which promoted the image of the city: following the inauguration of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* in the morning, Leipzig’s proposal included the festive opening the construction industry’s international exposition, inaugurating the Russian memorial church (commemorating the alliance of Russia with Prussia during the Napoleonic wars), and posing the cornerstone of the German national library. These events were to be followed by a reception, a banquet, a visit of the new and imposing town hall, and finally a festive closing of the day through the Kaiser’s presence at the theatre in the evening and an ensuing fireworks display.⁷ This

symbolic system do they reflect or set into action?) without first understanding the social logics contributing to their realization. For a similar approach, see Tacke, *op. cit.*

⁷ Proposition of the mayor of Leipzig, dated February 22, 1913, MA Leipzig, Stal, Kap 71/63/1.

program associated Wilhelm II with symbols of Leipzig’s national and international reputation as a centre for trade shows and the German book industry, as well as music and culture and demonstrates that visits of sovereignty were also occasions for the self-representation of local elites and the symbols of their contribution to the national edifice.⁸ In the end, however, officials in charge of Wilhelm’s court protocol unilaterally imposed a much lighter program. The inauguration of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* was to be the highpoint of the day, with the inauguration of the Russian memorial church lasting only 10 minutes and “symbolically separate and of secondary importance”; the rest of Leipzig’s proposed program was eliminated, with the exception of the reception and the banquet at the new town hall.⁹ Court authorities focused their energies on the minute organization of the inauguration ceremony, including the choice of prayers, hymns and three speakers and the timing of the cannon salutes and peeling church bells. Crowd control on the grounds of the monument and ticket sales were largely delegated to the “German Patriotic Union for the edification of a memorial of the *Völkerschlacht*”, which had financed the monument.¹⁰

In addition to imposing a reduced program, strictly limiting the amount of time William II was to appear in public, the court also imposed the shortest possible route from the train station to the site of the ceremony, the rationalization of the security arrangements being evoked as the official reason.¹¹ No effort was made to pass before

⁸ For a similar perspective in Tsarist Russia, see Worton 1990: 745-771.

⁹ Definitive program dated March 10, 1913, signed von Burgsdorff, MA Leipzig, StaL, Kap 71/63/1.

¹⁰ With its 45,000 members, the Union commissioned and financed the monument under the patronage of Wilhelm II.

¹¹ Besides the more than 1.000 policemen and 516 voluntary security forces recruited from gymnastic associations on the grounds of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*, 975 policemen on foot, 240 equestrian policemen and two companies of the army ensured for security along the route from the train station to the memorial. In addition, 600 municipal

important public buildings or businesses, and the itinerary did not involve a visit of different neighbourhoods of the city, as was systematically the case in France. The Kaiser was not to visit the city, but rather simply to cross it; his *Phaeton à la Daumont* was even exchanged for an automobile after the ceremony, in order to accelerate the trip to the Russian memorial church and meal at the town hall.¹²

Although one can also note an asymmetry in the power relations between central authorities and local representatives in France, this asymmetry is of another order. The Parisian promoters and organizers of the visits (the *Maison militaire* of the Elysée palace in charge of organization, Parisian journalists accompanying the President in an accredited press pool, etc.) recognized the French President's visits to the provinces as routine activities. Nevertheless, each visit to the provinces required that it be perceived as "extraordinary," and much of the preparation was left to local authorities under the supervision of the Prefect.¹³ This structure of negotiation, which left a large margin for local initiatives, was based on a shared understanding of what constituted a "successful" presidential visit, for both the presidency and local elites, as Elysée directives concerning the organization of presidential visits through "local committees" demonstrate:

"The local committees are headed by the Prefect and are comprised of an officer of the Maison militaire of the Elysée, representatives of the military and the gendarmerie, and the mayor. The officer makes known the amendments to the program proposed by the representative of the inviting territory, following

employees were paid 5 RM each to line the entire parade route, one posted every 10 meters. STal Kap II, 71/63/1. and STal Kap II, 71/63 annexe 2 "Plan for the distribution of municipal volunteers along the parade route" July 12, 1913.

¹² The "speed" of this secondary visit was so great, that the Kaiser arrived at the town hall half an hour ahead of schedule, placing the Mayor in an embarrassing situation, as their welcome was not up to the dignity that such an important visit required.

¹³ On these questions, see Mariot 2002 : 79-96.

*the instructions of the general in charge of the Maison militaire. It is the duty of the officer to communicate these amendments with the greatest possible tact and courtesy, in order to avoid disappointment, as the local authorities and their populations are all the more sensitive because they have often made proposals with great enthusiasm and zeal. Should these authorities insist nonetheless on maintaining the propositions to be amended, it is the duty of the officer to understand all the implications of the suppression of given parts of the program before reporting back to his commanding officer for further instructions."*¹⁴

The notes of officers reporting on discussions in local committees testify to the margins of freedom conceded to local authorities. Edouard Herriot, mayor of Lyon, for example, succeeded in getting President Poincaré to "halt in front of a block of public housing and lay a bouquet of flowers [there]". The language used in some of the requests show how far locally proposed initiatives could go. For the same visit to Lyon, Herriot stated that, following the banquet at the town hall, "it will be asked of Monsieur le President to step out onto the balcony and greet the crowd."¹⁵

This relatively great capacity for negotiation was not limited to major cities, or to mayors with connections in Paris. It was often the case that mayors of small towns complained about the route taken by the President when it passed through areas where it would be difficult to mobilize the population, as they feared that people would lose interest in the event if the President seemed to be avoiding their neighbourhoods. For example, in 1913 a municipal councillor of Saint-Céré requested a change in the official itinerary, as it "follow[ed] a route which is hardly inhabited, which would be difficult to decorate properly and where the President would only receive a meager tribute and welcome. We would like, and the whole population of Saint-Céré would like, to give the President the spontaneous and

¹⁴ Dossier entitled "Préparation d'un voyage présidentiel", undated, but from 1914. French National Archives (hereafter NA) 1N 1AG71.

¹⁵ "Report on the subject of the reconnaissance voyage to Lyon", dossier "Voyage de Poincaré à Lyon", NA 1AG15.

warm welcome he so deserves, but for this the President must consent to follow a more densely inhabited route.”¹⁶

The general topography of the route chosen thus illustrates the essential role of local representatives in the organization of French presidential visits. These itineraries do not reflect a logic favouring the most “noble” or noteworthy parts of the city. There is no attempt to exclude poorer neighbourhoods from the gaze of the head of state¹⁷, nor do the itineraries seek to join two points in the most direct way. On the contrary, the French President’s route allowed him to “inspect” as much of the locality as possible, in such a way as to represent the imbrications of different territorial units, expressing the overlapping of the national with the local, and of the local with the national. During the visit of Sadi Carnot to Nancy in 1892, for example, the President and his entourage visited all eight administrative zones of the city and passed under its eight monumental arches, as well as eighteen arches made for the occasion by neighbourhood committees, associations and businesses. In theory, no monument, no neighbourhood, nor important business could be excluded, as the organizing principle of the visit was to reflect the equality and diversity of the territory.

The logistics of mobilizing local society

The encounter of the head of State with crowds in public spaces posed a series of practical and organizational problems: How can court or Presidential protocol which rigidly defined social hierarchies be reconciled with events drawing thousands of undifferentiated members of the public. If this first problem

¹⁶ Letter of a municipal councillor of Saint-Céré dated August 22, 1913 sent to the director of presidential protocol of the *Maison militaire*. Dossier “Voyage de tourisme en Limousin”, NA 1AG13.

¹⁷ The itinerary chosen by the imperial court in Germany in Leipzig passed through a densely populated working-class neighbourhood and care was taken “in the decoration for the Reitzenheiner Strasse to try to hide its less attractive portions from the sight of the important guests”. “Plan for the decoration of the parade route” July 21, 1913. STal Kap II, 71/63/2

could be solved by varying the physical and social distance of the encounter at different moments of the visit, a second, more difficult problem confronted organizers of the visits. How could it be ensured that crowds would turn out for the event and act on “cue” in the presence of the Head of State?

The differences in the itineraries and the way in which they were negotiated are an initial clue to differences in the logistics of mobilizing local society to acclaim the head of State, for much of the seemingly undifferentiated public was comprised of pre-formed collectives mobilized for the occasion. Several weeks after the stop in Saint-Céré, a letter from the Prefect of Lot-et-Garonne relayed a request formulated by the mayor of Agen, who sought to lengthen the route taken by the President to include a “neglected” neighbourhood: “the morale of the Pine neighbourhood, densely inhabited and full of shopkeepers, would be terribly affected if they were left out of the president’s itinerary.”¹⁸ Aside from such explicit arguments, extolling the supposed effects of the absence of the President on morale, the mayor had much more prosaic concerns: namely, for the presidential visit to be a success, he needed the local business community to pay for the decorations, as well as for the local population to turn out. Representatives of local economic interests were therefore highly implicated in the preparations for these visits. For example, the Rennes chamber of commerce asked its members to fly flags, decorate their shops and put flowers on their balconies, or to join together, street by street, to transform the city for the visit of Poincaré in 1914. For workday visits, it was regular practice for large-scale employers to give their workers a few hours off with pay—on condition that the workers were present when the President passed by the enterprise or the symbolic arch paid for by the entrepreneur. Sometimes the municipality accorded shopkeepers special opening times on a Sunday, in an effort to stimulate the

¹⁸ Letter of the prefecture of Lot-et-Garonne to the secretary general of the Presidency dated September 2, 1913. NA 1AG13.

decorative ardour of local businesses.¹⁹ While the participation of businesses in the festivities had clear economic motives, these motives were also perfectly compatible with the interests of local government and the Presidency. As a result, neither the town councils nor the presidency sought to rein in any local initiatives; on the contrary, the “spontaneous” participation of businesses, associations and neighbourhood committees generated a dynamic mobilization necessary to the transformation of the Presidential visit into an extraordinary event.

Returning to the German example, the mobilization of Leipzig’s population in 1913 followed a quite different pattern. Although the Association of House and Property Owners gave instructions to its members to place flags on their buildings and to distribute candles to tenants to be placed in all windows to illuminate the city after nightfall, major business interests and shopkeepers associations were neither included in negotiating the route to be taken by the Kaiser, nor in the organization of the day. Nationalist and conservative associations of shopkeepers and small enterprises called on its members to refrain from working on the 18th of October and calls were made to boycott shops remaining open. However, none of these initiatives were officially supported by municipal authorities. In addition, contrary to French practice, Leipzig businesses did not participate in decorating the city nor did industrialists give their workers a day off to participate in the day’s activities. The few offers of participation emanating from businesses were in fact met with scepticism by city officials; when the owner of the large steel company *Kötting und Mathiesen* proposed to direct powerful spotlights from its main chimney onto the tower of the new town hall two kilometres away, city officials refused the proposal, arguing that the initiative would “dilute the effect of the illumination of the city

centre.”²⁰ In addition, a request sent to the city for help in the distribution and sale of a Jubilee book, presented as a “real commemorative *Volksbuch*” for the edification of the masses was refused on the basis that the city refused to associate itself with commercial interests surrounding the event.

In the end, the city alone carried the responsibility and costs for the festive transformation of the city. A substantial budget of 160,000 RM was voted to decorate the city with flowers and the flags of the city, the Land of Saxony and the German Reich²¹. The juxtaposition of flags and colours, specially-made plaster columns crowned by the Reich eagle and stylized, bronze-plated lions symbolizing the city were positioned in central squares and along the main route from the station to the of the *Völkerschlacht* memorial and sought to produce a visual illustration of the symbolic symbiosis between the three territorial units. A fireworks display was timed to coincide with the end of the theatre production, where many members of the royal courts of the Reich and Saxony—but not the Kaiser—were present. As in France, such spectacularly orchestrated sights (fireworks, illuminations, the imposing sight of the Kaiser surrounded by an Uhlan regiment, etc...) and sounds (fireworks, cheering crowds, hymns, music, gun salutes and peeling church bells) were an integral part of the pomp and extraordinary nature of the events which increased the chances of large crowd turnout.

Patriotic and nationalist associations, as well as veterans associations, student fraternities and gymnastics and other sports associations did participate in the day’s events by providing volunteers for crowd control, by mobilizing their members. Three thousand members of these associations grouped behind their standard bearers to form a parade

¹⁹ Brochure of the *Union of commerce and industry of Rennes*, May 1914, n°5, NA 1AG15.

²⁰ Only the association of “nationally minded” shopkeepers called for a voluntary closure of shops to maximise public turnout for the event. One does not perceive the same level of mutually reinforcing interests between municipal interests and economic interest as in the French case. MA Leipzig, STaL, Kap 71/63/3.

²¹ MA Leipzig, STaL, Kap 71/63/2.

(separate from the route taken by the Kaiser) to head for the commemorative ceremony on the morning of October 18, 1913. By entering the ceremony ground collectively with standard bearers, individuals were rewarded with a reduction on the price of entry (paying 3 RM instead of 5). If these collective means of mobilization were similar to the French example, it was the national chapters of these associations which paraded—without any prior agreement with city officials—and not the local chapters.

In France, the mobilization of crowds was also largely a collective affair, as the President was most often acclaimed by preformed “collectives” organized and positioned well in advance of the event. In contrast to the German example, it was rarely, if ever the national federations, but rather countless local associations which organized the acclamation, especially the omnipresent brass bands which were often perceived as true “emanations” of local society (Farcy 1995). In 1913, President Poincaré reviewed numerous parades which comprised of all that local society could present as typical or representative of itself.²² The only exception to this rule was the annual “federal celebration” of the Union of French Gymnastics Societies held on Easter weekend and visited regularly by heads of State. In this case, national federations and student fraternities were on display and organized the festivities. These events were characterized by parades with banners, flags and a general military allure, similar to the conservative and nationalist parade held in Leipzig on the morning of October 18, 1913, but not seen by Wilhelm II. Despite similarities, in the French case national associations maintained much closer ties with local authorities where the events were being held, giving even these “national” celebrations a distinct local or regional flavour largely absent from the German example.

²² “City of Bar-le-Duc, celebrations in honor of the visit of M. Poincaré, President of the Republic. Programme”, visit of August 17, 1913. NA 1AG12.

Making local hierarchies visible...and invisible

French presidential visits were not limited to a face-to-face encounter between the President and the crowds turning out to acclaim him. These visits were also characterized by multiple receptions, banquets and meals in the presence of local representatives whose place was strictly codified by protocol. Each visit to the capital of a *département*, for example, entailed an official reception in which the totality of the departmental civil service presented its homage to the head of state: the Prefect first and foremost, followed by elected officials (members of the national assembly, senators, department executives),²³ and then by military representatives, judicial officials, and so on. The mayor of the locality arrived in 11th place, after the representatives of larger territorial units; at the same time, the mayor was always present and considered the host of the visit. This explains why socialist mayors, such as those in the Limousine, were included in the official ceremonies in France,²⁴ contrary to social-democratic members of the Reichstag in Leipzig, as we shall see.

The order of the official parade gave another clear indication of the importance of municipal power in France. During Poincaré’s visit to Montpellier in March 1913, as for any other official visit, the host mayor was seated in the Daumont carriage with the President, the President of the *Département* and the Chief of the *maison militaire* of the Elysée. Other important figures, such as the Minister of Labour, the Prefect and members of the national assemblies followed in the other carriages, the six last carriages being reserved for the accredited press corps travelling with the President.

²³ The elected functions were introduced by the reform of the protocol of 1907.

²⁴ Although socialist elected officials generally turned up at the strictly codified receptions, they often manifested their hostility to the Republic and the President by boycotting the rest of the presidential visit or refusing to vote budgets to prepare for the festivities.

Finally, it is interesting to note that over and above the list of official representatives, nearly every reception included the possibility for “orders, corporations, associations or societies of different natures to welcome the head of state,” once authorized by the Prefect. These “social delegations” varied greatly, but were always inscribed in the locality. In contrast to the official representatives, however, these groups were not differentiated or hierarchized by order of importance, and were simply to “wait in a special room where the President would greet them after the official receptions.”

The invitations to the banquet in Leipzig following the official ceremony on October 18, 1913 can also be seen as a materialization of the social and political hierarchy imposed by the court protocol of Berlin. Once again in contrast to the French case, however, the identity and titles of the guests demonstrate the marginalization of local representatives and, more generally, of elected officials. Of the 281 places at the table, 72 were reserved for foreign dignitaries, members of the imperial court and representatives of the courts of the German states. A further twelve seats went to members of the court of Saxony, five to the *Bundesrat* and 33 to members of the municipal council. If the elected officials of the municipality and the Saxon *Bundesrat* were relatively numerous, the protocol imposed by Berlin totally excluded elected members of the *Reichstag*, who were nearly all members of the SPD.²⁵ Although the city disposed of 45 additional seats, to be distributed at its discretion, even here the accent was placed on seating representatives of national organizations, including: the *Patriotenbund* (7), the architects of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* and the Russian

memorial church (3), the Congress of German Cities (3), the Union of German Cities (2), and the German Gymnastics Society. Only the local representatives of the religious communities (Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish), two representatives of the chamber of commerce, and two representatives of local sports associations were allowed into this closed circle.²⁶

In the French case, on can speak of a voluntary, if indirect, inclusion of the working classes, contrary to the German example, where little is done to encourage participation, other than the attraction of the extraordinary sights and sounds of the event. In France workers were present as employees of companies who had financed symbolic arches and were paid for standing by the arch to acclaim the President. But the President also paid tribute to the lower classes by not excluding them from parade routes, and the fact that the celebrations were free of charge inserted the presidential visits into a larger festive context which built on the repertoires of public celebrations by including fire works, street theatre, music and balls. This model of integration created a “horizontal” rather than “vertical” perception of national unity which assimilated the local with the people. In the words of Anne-Marie Thiesse:

“The long history of French centralization created a geographic concentration of the summits of power (political, economic and cultural) and engendered a homology between the capital and positions of power in all domains on the one hand, and the local and the dominated positions on the other. Because of this, the people, in the social sense, became identified with the local. Celebrating the local and underscoring its position as the basic building block of the national, equated reaffirming the roots of the republican nation in its social substrate.” (Thiesse 1997: 5)

By making the local the emanation of the people, Presidential visits and other institutions masked social cleavages or antagonisms between nationals and non-

²⁵ The electoral system in place since 1818, based on property ownership, excluded the SPD from the city council, and the *Landtag*. The principle of “one man, one vote” held only for *Reichstag* elections, and the SPD totaled nearly 60% of the vote in this social-democratic bastion; due to the fragmentation of the liberal and conservative camps, nearly all *Reichstag* representatives from the city were members of the SPD.

²⁶ List of invitations dated September 15, 1913. AM Leipzig, STaL, Kap 71/ 63/3.

nationals. Workers or non-nationals were not included as such, but as members of a profession when their representatives were received at the prefecture, or as employees of a factory having financed a symbolic arch. In the German case, there was neither a day off for the working class, and businesses and their workers were next to invisible during the events. While representatives of associations and corporations were present at the ceremony and the banquet, there was no superposition between the local and the people as is evident in the logic of the French visits. The question of popular participation was only evoked during a recurrent debate on the price of entry to the grounds of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*. Contrary to the French case, where all events were free, entry to the ceremony grounds was allowed on payment of 5 RM, or 3 RM if the individual was part of an association arriving in closed ranks. After the announcement of the ticket prices, several critical articles and letters to the editor in the local press denounced the high price as a barrier to the participation of the working classes. Veterans associations in particular were highly critical of the measures, particularly as the trip to the fifty-year anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig in 1863 for destitute war veterans was paid by the organizers (Hoffmann 1995: 118). Criticisms were countered by developing moral arguments- that the working classes could restrict their intake of alcohol and tobacco to pay for the tickets, and above all that paid entry was democratic as “all Germans, whether wealthy or modest, can fulfil the conditions.... and all will pay their entry, as official invitations are not accepted”.²⁷ Participation therefore required a sacrifice, and this sacrifice was a public demonstration of patriotism.

Striking in the itemized comparison of the two contexts are the differences in the journalistic accounts of the visits, and in particular the place occupied by the crowds. In France, press accounts place great emphasis on the reaction of the crowds

turning out to greet and acclaim the President. Stories consistently evoked the throngs of spectators trying to catch a glimpse of the President, on the acclamations coming from the public, the songs and the music which demonstrated the spontaneity and enthusiasm of the population in the presence of the President. In the journalistic accounts of the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Leipzig in 1913, crowds or collective behaviour are hardly mentioned. For example, in the many pages devoted to the event in the two days following the event the only one line was devoted to describing crowd reaction: “Many thousands greeted the Kaiser with cries, applause and patriotic songs”.²⁸ The account focuses on the gestures and expressions of the head of State, and no attempt was made to count or estimate the numbers of spectators, despite the fact that the numbers of tickets sold for the inauguration ceremony could have been easily found. The only exception to this rule was the social-democratic press which denounced the “orchestrated” nature of popular mobilization and therefore sought to unmask the techniques used to produce the appearance of popular support for the Emperor. In the October 14 1913 edition of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* for example, one journalist covering the preparations of the event indicated that instructions had been given to members of patriotic, *Heimat* and musical associations to intermingle with the crowd on the parade route and initiate “spontaneous” songs, “hurrahs” and “long live the Emperor”. An article in the evening edition of October 18, 1913 noted that the “hurrahs” were generally weak, that most members of the public didn’t recognize most of the people in the 122 horse-drawn carriages which paraded and the author regretted that he should have to “to write about the fools who are taken in by this national-patriotic circus”. If it was perfectly logical for the social-democratic press organs to argue that the support for the event was neither massive nor spontaneous, it

²⁷ *Leipziger Tagesblatt*, 26.3.1913. 2.

²⁸ The same phrase is used by the *Leipziger Abendzeitung* and the *Leipziger Tagesblatt* in their October 20, 1913 editions.

is surprising that none of the other newspapers produced detailed accounts of the massive popular support, thereby accrediting the popularity of the Kaiser and the patriotic fervour of the population.

Two explanations are possible: that the crowds were in effect relatively limited; that crowd turnout and reaction were not considered to form essential criteria to measure the success of the event. From archival sources, we know that a substantial public was present, if only the 60.000 spectators who paid to enter the memorial grounds or the 27.000 school children lining the parade route to and from the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*. Photos taken during the day attest to the presence of throngs of spectators.²⁹ As in France, festive programs, street theatre, music and fireworks were organized to draw a large public and fill time before and after the actual arrival of the head of State. The essential difference resides in the relationship between the three main protagonists who intervene in the production of a discourse on the public during such events: the head of State, the crowd and journalists covering the event.

In France, representatives of the national press were organized in a “pool” and followed the president on his trips though the country. During parades, they immediately followed the President’s carriage and shared the stage or tribune where the President greeted crowds, thereby sharing his point of view, thereby seeing and hearing a never ending series of acclamations and clamours as the President walked or drove through different streets and neighbourhoods. In Leipzig, the press was excluded from the banquet and, contrary to the French example, was not allowed to follow the Kaiser and his entourage on the official parade route or on the official tribune during the inauguration ceremony. For this reason, the point of

observation of the journalists is the same as of the ordinary spectator and attention is centred on the Kaiser. In France, the journalist “saw” the event through the eyes of the President and relate what the President was shown, what he heard, and therefore conveyed greater attention to the “flavour” of the locality.

The first rough conclusions obtained from this initial level of comparison- based on a classic comparative “checklist” approach- run against the grain of some of the common assumptions deeply entrenched in perceptions of German and French history. The different “items” covered so far tend to show that, contrary to what one commonly thinks about French Jacobin centralism and the strong autonomy of German cities and *Länder* (i.e., their *Selbstverwaltung*), the scope for negotiation by local representatives and the visibility of the locality in visits of sovereignty is much more restrained in Germany. In addition “civil society”, traditionally thought to be extremely weak in France, is much more evident there than in the visits in Germany, despite the density and activity of its social organizations. At the same time, it was shown that the practical organization of the events produced differing accounts of the visits and that care must be taken to reconstruct the mechanisms which create particular points of observation in order to correctly interpret the sources. These conclusions are the first step, however, and explaining the empirical observations now moves to the fore. What registers of explanation can be mobilized to understand these apparently paradoxical differences? How can the knowledge gained through the comparison feedback and provoke a modification of the initial “French” categories of analysis, which were used to “read” the event in Leipzig?

II - The limits of an interpretation based on German “absences”

In the first phase, the collection of information, the description and the

²⁹ Even the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* had to admit that large numbers of people had turned out, but insisted on the manipulation of the public and on the fact that judging by the accents of the members of the public, few were “authentic” inhabitants of the city, considered a bastion of the SPD.

interpretation of the German case were carried out using a yardstick initially developed for the French case. The itemized comparison provided for a number of surprises, less in terms of the findings, than in terms of what was not found in the German case- that is, “absences”- which did not appear to be attributable to gaps in the sources. Two interpretative models seemed to lend themselves well to explaining what was not taking place in Germany, but “should have” been, according to the initial framework: first, the “late” democratization of German society; and second, the particular position and strategy of the imperial court. These interpretations seemed plausible, as they corresponded to cognitive frameworks routinely mobilized to compare the two nations. As we will show, however, these rather convenient frameworks do not stand up to a closer examination, especially when the transposability of categories of analysis is brought under closer scrutiny.

Germany as a latecomer to political modernity?

One can begin by exploring the weak involvement of local organizations in the planning of the Leipzig visit, which seems quite surprising given the strength and vivacity of German social organizations at the time (Nipperdey 1986: 172-185). In addition, there is the question of why so little was done by the organizers to celebrate the territory and its population on the occasion of the Kaiser’s visit, and thereby recognize its unique contributions to the nation. If one compares the time of exposure to the public and the journalistic accounts of gestures by the head of State, again the German case presents a series of absences. The appearance in public is kept to a strict minimum and contrary to French journalistic accounts where the President acknowledges the warm welcome (by greeting at the balcony, waving to crowds, etc...) there are no such accounts on the

German side on October 19, 1913.³⁰ The temptation is to see these “absences” in evolutionary terms, as a partial- yet incomplete- opening of hereditary legitimacy to the need to build and measure popular legitimacy in an age of numbers-based politics (Desrosières 1993). The increasingly public nature of visits between royal families documented by Johannes Paulmann and the transformations of the regular visits of the Kaiser to preside over military manoeuvres between 1876 and 1914 demonstrate the ever-greater attention paid to the transformation of court ritual into public events. Both in Berlin and in his regular visits to military districts, Wilhelm II transformed military manoeuvres into highly public affairs, innovating in 1888 by crossing the centre of Berlin at the head of his regiments on the way to the exercise grounds and creating the imposing sight of the Kaiser on horseback at the head of well-drilled regiments which attracted thousands. In this framework, the absences on the German side made visible by comparison with the French case (the “distance” from the public and the military rigidity of the Kaiser, etc) would suggest that the importance of numbers was still incompletely understood or hampered by court ritual or rigid social hierarchies imposed by hereditary legitimisation, therefore “lagging” a few decades behind France where the head of State was first and foremost elected (if indirectly), derived his mandate from citizens and the presidential institution had several decades of accumulated know-how in the regulation of the symbolic distance between ruler and ruled. In keeping with this line of argumentation, one can note that presidential visits by Paul von Hindenburg in the 1920s appear to comply with a much greater extent to the French “model.” During his official visits, von Hindenburg visited the main attractions and sites of each city, increased the number of forays into different

³⁰ Thomas Lindenberger found only one documented case in Berlin where the Kaiser greeted a crowd and gave a short speech following the electoral victory of the Bülow block in 1907 (Lindenberger 1995: 365).

neighbourhoods, visited important economic and historical sites and places of interest, increased direct physical contact with selected members of local society or children, and “spontaneously” greeted crowds.³¹ In contrast, few of these features, which we find systematically in French presidential visits as of the late 1880s, formed a regular part of the repertoire of Wilhelm II’s public appearances in journeys to regions outside Berlin.³²

This interpretation, which mirrors ordinary representations of the “lateness” of democratic culture in Germany, is not without foundation, but appears in this case to be largely due to an illusion produced by the asymmetry of the comparison, as we will demonstrate below.³³ Moreover, the interpretation linking the transformation of the German visits over time and their apparent stylistic convergence with French presidential visits after 1919 relies on the relatively unsound functionalist assumption of a homology between the form of legitimisation of political authority, and how the local/regional articulates with the national. Even if the comparison has shown differences in the mechanics of the visits of sovereignty prior to World War I, the fact remains that both heads of State, whether elected or hereditary, pursue an identical objective: the creation and reinforcement of an emotional link between the national and the local through the mediation of the peripatetic head of State.

³¹ *Reichspräsident von Hindenburg auf der Leipziger Frühjahrsmesse* (Leipzig 1926); *Reichspräsident von Hindenburg: Besuch in Hamburg am 4.5.1926*. (Hamburg 1926).

³² The Kaiser did frequently inaugurate monuments, visited public buildings of note or launch ships during his visits throughout the Reich but these trips were much less a celebration of local or regional contributions to the nation and interactions between the Kaiser and the public seemed to be much more distanced than in the French case.

³³ Suffice it to note for now that if we had focused on criticism of presidential visits in France, the “advance” of France would not be so apparent, as articles in socialist newspapers stigmatized the “princes of the Third Republic who increasingly play at being kings and emperors.” The *Droit du Peuple* commenting on the visit of Poincaré in the Somme on July 29, 1913.

A “strategic” interpretation?

One can just as well make a case for another radically different interpretation, more intentionalist in nature, by drawing on the historical rivalry between Prussia and Saxony as an explanation for the failure of the imperial court to encourage and recognize local initiatives, evident in the Leipzig visit of 1913. Several elements would support such an interpretation. Wilhelm II came to Leipzig to commemorate the centenary of the battle that had liberated the German states from Napoleonic rule. The ceremony was designed by the imperial court to demonstrate the attachment of Saxony to the Reich and to celebrate the centrality of the Hohenzollern dynasty in the construction of the German nation. With the exception of the social-democratic press, however, the numerous brochures, articles and other accounts of the 1913 event, as well as texts analyzing the “lessons of the battle” which were published in supplements, omit the essential facts that a number of Saxon generals had fought alongside the French in 1813, and that it was the defeat of Napoleon in Leipzig that definitively placed Saxony under Prussian hegemony.³⁴ This taboo subject, if rarely mentioned by the organizers of the imperial visit explicitly, was nonetheless in the back of everybody’s mind. The representative of the imperial court addressed this very question in an initial series of correspondence in December 1911, stating that the visit must be “a national moment which must not at the same time infringe upon the honour of Saxony.”³⁵ But the imperial court made no particular effort to honour or emphasize the contributions of Leipzig or Saxony to the edification of the German nation. The king of Saxony, Friedrich-August, is hardly

³⁴ The *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, in particular published a series of articles poking fun at the “historical falsifications,” and published a long article to “reestablish historical truth” on the front page of its edition of October 16, 1913, recalling in great detail how Saxony rallied behind Napoleon.

³⁵ MA Leipzig, STaL, Kap 71/ 63/1.

mentioned in journalistic accounts of the day, and the three speeches held during the inauguration remained exclusively national in scope.

The general impression conveyed was thus of a head of State visiting a conquered territory, an impression reinforced by a controversy surrounding the protocol of the official parade heading to the inauguration. In an initial proposal by the imperial court, an Uhlan company was to precede and follow a suite of carriages carrying the Emperor, the King of Saxony, representatives of foreign royal houses and the Mayor of Leipzig. Three weeks before the event, however, the court informed the Mayor that he was to follow behind the Uhlans. The mayor protested, without success, in the following terms:

“In your previous correspondence concerning the official parade, I noted some important changes [...] These changes are contrary to tradition in Leipzig and in Saxony [...] It would give the unfortunate impression to the population that representatives of the civil institutions will be less present for this important event, and this would be a serious blow to their prestige.”³⁶

Not only were no concessions made to recognize or honour local customs and traditions; none were made to the civil elites either. Unlike Dresden, the capital of Saxony and residence of the Saxon monarchy, Leipzig was politically and economically dominated by a liberal-national bourgeoisie. The symbolic marginalization of the Mayor paralleled the decision not to visit the sites symbolizing the power of this bourgeoisie, including the building exposition, the new town hall, the new national library, and the municipal theatre. These decisions represented a symbolic blow both to the city in its rivalry with Dresden and Berlin and, indirectly, to the contributions of the bourgeoisie to the construction of the German nation.

The organization of the Leipzig visit can therefore be interpreted as an operation by

³⁶ Letter from Dittrich to von Burgsdorff 9/23/1913. AM Leipzig, STaL, Kap 71/ 63/1.

means of which Kaiser and court sought to symbolically rewrite the past by downplaying interpretations of the battle of 1813 as a war of popular national liberation which the King of Prussia reluctantly followed by placing the Hohenzollern dynasty and Prussia at the heart of German unity. This interpretation holds up to a comparison with the very different celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in 1863, which placed war veterans and the national-liberal patriotic movements at the centre of the festivities. While in 1863 some 20.000 veterans and members of patriotic associations had marched in the streets of the city before a crowd of 100,000 spectators and propagated the slogan “*einig Volk von Brüdern*” (Hoffmann 1995: 118); in 1913, they were relegated to the role of spectators, excluded from the official parade route, now reserved for the Imperial court, its guests and a handful of national political and military figures. At most, the standard bearers of these organizations were “reviewed” by the Kaiser, placing them in an explicitly subservient position vis-à-vis Wilhelm II.

Another example of ceremonial symbolism which could have celebrated the city and region, but was subverted in the interests of Imperial centralization reinforces this interpretation. In October 1913, 17,000 bicyclists and runners relayed messages from all corners of the Reich and beyond (including from Memel, Stralsund, Flensburg, Waterloo, Strasbourg, Friedrichshafen) and converged on Leipzig on the 18th. Although the Kaiser was handed the messages at the end of the official ceremony, they went unread, and the athletic and organizational feat, drawing a symbolic border of the nation around and into Leipzig, national capital for a day, was barely mentioned in journalistic accounts of the day’s events. One can hypothesize that the messages remained underutilized because the exploit would diminish the place of the Kaiser, by emphasizing the role of the people in the construction of the nation, on a day which was intended to place the role of Prussia and its ruling family centre stage.

This brings us to consider the problems linked with the mechanical transposition of

the initial theoretical framework. Above all, the scale of analysis remains problematic, as the signifier “local” or “periphery” does not reflect the same reality in the two contexts. In the French case, the *petites patries* and the city are the essential frames of reference of the action and popular mobilization, while in the German case, the city is simply a backdrop to be crossed to get from point A to point B, and the pertinent territorial unit which structures the relationship between centre and periphery is not the city but, in fact, the *Land*. As a result, our attempts to map out the routes taken by heads of state on the scale of a city produces the appearance of a fixed frame of reference for comparison, but this comparison misses the essential realities of the German visit and produces an artefact which misses the historical specificity of the articulation between the centre and the periphery. We can illustrate this distortion by imagining for an instant a reversal of the asymmetry of our comparison, by viewing the French visits from a German perspective. In this case, using the region or even the *département* as the essential geographic and social frame of reference would obscure the essential point of the Presidential visits in France centred on the *petite patrie* and the municipalities visited.

III - France to Germany and back

The blending out of the regional scale produced by transposing analytical categories forged in France also carried with it a failure to integrate the military dimension of the visit and the role of Wilhelm II as head of the army. Indeed, when looking carefully at the events—and even if the army is not explicitly at the heart of the visit to Leipzig in 1913—the structure of the visit appears indexed to the trips the Kaiser made regularly to direct manoeuvres in Germany’s fifteen military districts. The court organizers of the Leipzig visit simply transposed this routine to the events of October 18th. This allows for a new understanding of why the court did not accommodate local wishes, without having to

resort to ad hoc theorizing about the intentions of the organizers of the visit such as the wish to somehow “punish” or assert hegemony over Saxony. For both in Berlin and in his regular visits to military districts, Wilhelm II transformed military manoeuvres into highly public affairs, innovating in 1888 by crossing the centre of the Berlin at the head of his regiments on the way to the exercise grounds. But while the imposing sight of the Kaiser at the head of well-drilled regiments attracted increasingly large crowds, the path taken was direct and in no way involved “visiting” the different parts of the city. In other words, it was not the city being celebrated, rather the wide boulevards were merely the backdrops where the soldier-Emperor could be seen and recognized as head of the army. Similarly to the inauguration of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal*, the military manoeuvres themselves took place in an enclosed space. In both cases, the Emperor reviewed his troops— although at the inauguration, the “troops” were of course the standard-bearers of the patriotic, student and veterans associations standing at attention. The ceremony and the manoeuvres were both viewed by three circles of the public, defined by the social and physical distance separating them from the Kaiser. The inner circle was comprised of the court and the military establishment; the second circle represented the civil elite, who paid up to 100 RM per person to obtain a clear view of the Kaiser from specially-constructed bleachers; and finally the third group, the general public, viewed the proceedings from afar, behind fences, barriers or police cordons (Vogel 1997: 70-79).

Taking into consideration the central importance of the military imprint on German official visits, and re-examining the French case through these lenses allows us to re-evaluate the initial analytical framework, where the role of the French President as nominal chief of the army was only marginally considered. The reintegration of the military dimension into the French case generates a new understanding of the subjacent logic of Presidential visits. By

examining the reasons for the initial marginalization of the military dimension of French visits in our “model”, we can demonstrate how the interweaving of perspectives and categories of analysis can produce new interpretations.

The military dimension of visits to the French provinces was initially analyzed as an institution which, alongside others, was designed to improve crowd turnout. This interpretation was based on the fact that cities “hosting” military manoeuvres hoped for the presence of the most spectacular forms of military prowess, most likely to draw a crowd. The colonial regiments, and in particular the famous Senegalese skirmishers (*tirailleurs*) and air-shows were the most sought after. The presence of the President at military manoeuvres appeared to be a very distinct form of public appearance, precisely because it was *not* inscribed in local society and did *not* celebrate the contribution of the local to the national construct. French heads of state presided over at least one such manoeuvre per year, and Poincaré was present at three in 1913. The scenography was particularly “de-territorialized,” in that it most often took place on grounds closed to the general public, most often near or within a military base, where references to the specific nature of the region or locality were fully neutralized. In this sense, the imposing parades and troop reviews seemed to be ceremonially distinct from presidential visits which exalted local particularities. As a result, the military dimensions of presidential visits and, above all, their role in articulating the national and the local, went largely unseen.

By reconsidering the object after a “return” from the German case, however, it becomes possible to perceive the essential role played by the military in the grammar of Presidential visits to the provinces, precisely because the parades and troop reviews in no way depended upon their geographic localization. In this sense, these exercises underscore very different symbolic dimensions from the provincial visits, being used to designate the universalized conception of the nation, identically transposable from

one place or time to another.³⁷ Because these military parades and reviews could be held anywhere, they represent the unifying principal which tied the *petites patries* together, despite their diversity. The homogeneity of the national, expressed through routine military manoeuvres, thereby provided a symbolic counterweight to the singularity of each territory. The same uniforms, the same music and the same marches as all adult males had experienced, helped materialize the ties between the members of a same nation, regardless of specific local traditions and cultures.

Seen in this light, military parades and manoeuvres in France can be integrated into our analysis alongside other parts of the official visits, such as official receptions. Like the parades, the receptions were organized according to a codified national protocol, giving the same ordered and harmonious image of the authority of the State in each territory. If each town was different, official positions were everywhere the same, from the Prefect and nationally elected representatives, down to local civil servants, and these functions were independent of the identity of their holder and the territory in which they were deployed. Their function as “national unifiers” perhaps explains why official receptions and military activities were described by the national press in such minute detail, with descriptions of each regiment, and each guest at official receptions filling page upon page of press accounts, thereby underlining the national significance of the visits to the general public and contributing to a sense of national unity. If we now return once again to the German case, the role of the military in the organization of imperial visits now takes on a more nuanced character. For when he visited military districts for manoeuvres, Wilhelm II would always don

³⁷ The paradigmatic example would be the liturgical instruments of churches, whose institutional objective is to allow all believers, wherever they are from, to partake in institutionalised practices. In other words, symbols make it possible to allow beliefs and religious practice to be exercised regardless of the local conditions where they are exercised.

the medals and military insignia belonging to the particular military traditions of each *Land*.³⁸ But if the Kaiser recognized the regional traditions of the German army in such a way, it was because these identifying elements were inserted into a national institution that already existed. If, during his visit to Leipzig, the Kaiser refused to adopt any outward sign recognizing Saxony or the city, one can surmise that it was in part for the historical and strategic reasons previously discussed; doing so would imply recognizing the controversial role of Saxony and its people in the process of unification on a day which required, from the imperial court's point of view, that Prussia and the Hohenzollern dynasty be at the heart of the proceedings.

Conclusion

Through the repeated shuttling between our two research contexts, the inquiry was able to transform the biases of its asymmetric initial structure into an instrument for producing new knowledge and interpretations. Instead of rigidly adhering preordained categories of analysis, the reflexive use of the asymmetry facilitated the inflection and transformation of the initial framework of analysis. We first established that the organizers of the French and German visits of sovereignty had similar objectives and were confronted with similar practical problems of organization and mobilization. The visits were then analyzed as a form of articulation between the national and the local, and between the political and

³⁸ One of the traditional characteristics of the German military, through the Second World War was that it was organized along "regional lines" as a way to perpetuate military traditions, but most of all to reinforce the cohesion of the battalions. This regionalized organization became the heart of the famous theory of "primary groups" in the army, which was used to explain the resistance of the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front during the Second World War, despite staggering losses and the desperate situation in the last two years of hostilities. See Shils/Janowitz 1948: 280-315. For a critical discussion of this theory, see Bartov 1991 (chapter 2).

the social, and finally as an institution which contributed to the transformation of these relations. In both cases, the organizers sought to maximize the chances of success,³⁹ and used time-tested and routinized organizational schemes to do so.

In Germany, the regularly held military manoeuvres overseen by Wilhelm II constituted a matrix that was transposed onto other types of visits. Accordingly, organization centred on the military, which represented an essential bond between the different territories and populations making up the nation. The success of the visit depended little on the initiatives of local politicians, elites or associations, resulting in events in which the celebration of the unique nature of local society was kept to a minimum. In contrast, the visits of French Presidents followed a "horizontal" logic, in which each *petite patrie* was recognized in its singularity, but all were treated on an equal basis. For the head of state, the multiplication of such visits, always following a similar pattern despite regional differences, unified variety among the *petites patries* in an idealized representation of the nation.

Our "detour" back through the German case then allowed us to reconsider the importance of the military in the structure of French presidential visits. Similarly to official receptions, military parades and reviews functioned as unifying institutions. Although these were not considered in and of themselves at first, revisiting them added a new dimension to our analysis, namely, the "vertical" integration through the military institution which tangibly linked together the *petites patries* of the nation. Despite their concerned acceptance of local initiatives, therefore, French presidential visits participated directly in the inscription of the national within the local. For the visits of the head of state, local folklore organizations,

³⁹ For example, the construction of institutional charisma, crowd mobilization, ensuring a warm welcome for the head of state, but also avoid uncontrolled crowd movements or behaviour, socialize populations and in particular children to recognize the authority of the state...

history societies and gastronomic specialists of the region worked hand in hand with the municipality and were rarely reined in when taking initiatives of their own. Indeed, such organizations could even exert a certain pressure on political elites, as their participation was considered essential in giving the event a special touch, the “local colour” necessary to effect a sensorial transformation of the city and thereby underline the extraordinary nature of the day.

To return to the German example in conclusion, over the last decade or so historiography has shown how the idea of *Heimat*—as carried and disseminated by a large number of associations and movements—contributed to the inscription of the national within local and regional environments (Applegate 1990; 1999: 1157-1182). The 1913 visit of Wilhelm II to Leipzig does not resonate with movements promoting the idea of *Heimat* that emphatically contributed to articulating local,

with regional and national memories after German unification, however (Confino 1997: 114). While in France municipalities helped finance theatre productions, concerts and local folklore demonstrations before and after the official visit, in 1913 Leipzig refused to financially support popular theatre representations of the battle of 1813 or brochures written by local historians or authors. In addition, the imperial court made no concessions to particular characteristics of the city and Saxony, as we have amply demonstrated. The relatively weak territorial articulation this demonstrates can, of course, be interpreted as the result of a problematic historical relationship between Saxony and Prussia, or as a sign of an incomplete national integration. But these hypotheses are difficult to verify, and it appears more fruitful to analyze these differences in terms of the practical expectations and organizational know-how of the main actors.

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