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## *Stunde Null*: Naming and Re-naming

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*Stunde Null* – this expression is used to indicate the end of the German Nazi regime in 1945 and the beginning of a new Germany. This historical turning point was marked by the re-naming of the former Germany in both East and West, and Nazi symbols, institutions, values and paraphernalia were taken to the tip. Naming and re-naming were part of this iconoclastic attempt to undo a recent past by turning the memory of it into a negative memory soon to disappear out of sight. However, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a cumbersome process in which iconoclasm acts both as a singular event and as a moment in an ongoing historical process. The iconoclastic destruction in 1562 of the cathedral in Lyon opens a discussion of the interdependence of event and process in iconoclasm as an intervention in collective memory. Using re-naming to exemplify this cultural dynamic, the motto of the French Revolution, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, serves as a brief illustration of how revolutionary iconoclasm was exploited later to redesign French history. To finish, post-colonial India sets the scene for a demonstration of the ambiguities embedded in iconoclastic processes in the short story ‘Lawley Road’ (1956) by R.K. Narayan, an ironic account of a back-and-forth process of re-naming of streets and places in the aftermath of Indian independence.

### **Spectacular Event or Ambiguous Process?**

The west façade of the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* cathedral in Lyon offers a peculiar sight to the visitor (Soubigou 2012). The many small enclosures, complete with pilasters, canopies, pointed arches, are ready for the placement of holy figures but are empty or contain only decapitated sculptures. With its low towers, the cathedral is dwarfed by the many spectacular French gothic cathedrals, such as those in Reims, Chartres, Paris, Saint-Denis or Rouen. Nonetheless, this church is not just any cathedral, but *la Primatiale des Gaules* which, since 1079, has been the seat of the Lyon archbishopric and, hence, a potential site of iconoclasm. During the French Wars

of Religion this possibility turned real. The cathedral was the centre of an iconoclastic act carried out in 1562 by the army of Calvinist protestants. Inside the building, the richly decorated rood screen was destroyed by rioters and, outside, the sculptures of the saints were destroyed or left headless, as is still visible today on the façade.

Another iconoclastic act carried out earlier in the same European context – the Reformation – may seem less violent but proved nonetheless to be more damaging to the Catholic Church than the attack on the *Saint-Jean-Baptiste* cathedral. In a major symbolic gesture, Martin Luther pinned in 1517 his iconoclastic theses to the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg. While Lutheranism successfully expanded across Northern Europe, the cathedral in Lyon went back to catholic normality even before the 1572 massacre, during the night of Saint Bartholomew, with only the façade bearing witness to the iconoclasm taking place a decade earlier. Whether material, symbolic or both, the iconoclastic act appeared as a public event, dismantling a proclaimed idolatry, which may be of a religious or secular nature. Thus, parallel to the Reformation, modern science developed through a number of iconoclastic acts, one of which, to take but one example, is the publication in 1620 of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*. In a series of aphorisms and programmatic analyses, Bacon dismantles the orthodoxy of the Aristotelean *Organon* and any non-empirical idolatry of which he pinpoints four: supporting, respectively, general misconceptions, individual bias, accepted common sense, and received ideas (Bacon 1994: 53–77).

Obviously, as a public *event*, iconoclasm must have a clear material visibility, ranging from destruction of images, sculptures or monuments, as happened in Lyon, to a spectacular public announcement such as Luther's or the publication of a controversial book such as Bacon's. In other words, iconoclasm and idolatry are opposite sides of the same coin. When it comes to the iconoclastic *effects*, they are broader than the immediate consequences of the event and form a *double intervention in collective memory*. On the one hand, collective memory is turned on its head, the *damnatio memoriae* – what so far has been admired or just tacitly accepted as idols and traditional habits and ideas by some, is now torn apart by others as fake and false. On the other hand, iconoclasm leaves space for the construction of new images, objects or texts which reach into the future and generate new shared memories, a process that has been called 'the invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Granger 1996).

In the singular iconoclastic event, iconoclasm and idolatry are interconnected opposites; yet, more importantly, with regard to the dynamic effects that define the role of the event in a historical process, *damnatio memoriae* and the invention of tradition stand out as interdependent contrasts that may trigger a mushrooming network of historical processes. The spectacular public visibility of an iconoclastic act may attract immediate attention. It is, however, its symbolic and ideological implications that charge it with a potential historical significance that goes beyond the event itself. Iconoclasm marks the end of an unquestioned cohesive way of understanding the human-life world and open the door to a new view of the world, yet to be developed. Whatever its material manifestation, an iconoclastic act is less to be understood as a limited public *event*, but rather to be grasped as a *moment* in an

already evolving, but partly hidden, historical process. Iconoclasm transports this process out into the open as a potentially radical change of cultural values and ideological principles as they are built into collective memory, and by doing so bring about a collective historical awareness framed by uncertainties. Without this awareness, the event itself will fade into collective oblivion (Connerton 1989, 2009). Iconoclasm will often serve as a part of and as a tool in a broader social revolution. Within this larger revolutionary horizon, they may outline a particular historical trajectory, for example in religion and science. Thus, the three iconoclastic events in 1517, 1562 and 1620 are moments that make visible the early phases of the unfolding of European secularization.

When merely regarded as events, one may be tempted to label iconoclastic acts as instances of *Stunde Null*. Although rooted in age-old mythologies of new beginnings and already introduced before the Second World War, by Erika Mann and Richard Freund, among others (Brockmann 1996: 7), the expression is mostly used to indicate the end of the German Nazi regime in 1945 and the beginning of a new Germany with a spectacular iconoclastic opposition to objects, images and ideas from the immediate Nazi past, yet a Germany still divided into two Germanies disagreeing on the right future beyond Nazi idolatry. *The End of History* is a similar but contrasting expression suggested by Francis Fukuyama, influenced by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 (Fukuyama 1992), an expression which, from the alleged final position of history, marked the re-unification of Germany as a *Stunde Null*. Such slogans may be captivating in their grasp of the immediate iconoclastic visibility, but nevertheless remain misleading and naïve for a proper historical analysis of the open-ended process that they make visible and in which they partake. For Andreas Huyssen, one-liner slogans such as *Stunde Null* or *The End of History* form ‘an attack of the present on the rest of time’ (Huyssen 2003: 23).

Hence, beyond the event, an iconoclastic *strategy* with regard to symbols, ideologies and reorientation of memory will be needed to promote a collective human agency in the ongoing historical process exposed by iconoclasm. This is a strategy, though, that inevitably invents new kinds of idols and traditions, prefiguring, as it were, future iconoclasm. To exemplify the unavoidable ambiguities of the attempts of such a strategy, to the prevailing public visibility of the iconoclastic event as an indicative moment in a historical process, naming and re-naming will serve as a case in point.

### Iconoclastic Strategies

The strategy of re-naming was used in West Germany after *Stunde Null*: no longer *Deutsches Reich*, but *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*; no *Reichstag* but *Bundestag* located in the restored old *Reichstag*. A parallel re-naming, yet with a different orientation, happened in the East, now re-named *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* with a *Volkskammer* seated in the new *Palast der Republik*, not in the *Berliner Schloß* the ruins of which, iconoclastically, were entirely demolished to leave space

for the *Palast*. Equally iconoclastically, after the reunification in 1989, the *Palast* was dismantled and, in 2021, a copy of the old castle was inaugurated as a cultural centre, *Berliner Schloß Humboldt Forum*. The West introduced new names that echo the terminology of the new constitution for the country's future as a federal republic, while the East suggested regressive references to 'Palast' and with an appeal to the 'people', a notion that resounded during the French Revolution and was repeated in different ideological contexts, both romantic and socialist, during the nineteenth century and which, ironically, was also exploited by the Nazis. The recent reconstruction of *Berliner Schloß* has the same nostalgic ring to it. In such transitory situations and helped by naming and re-naming, the iconoclastic act for some people becomes part of a forward-looking struggle, while for others re-naming forms instead an attempt to respond to a cultural breakdown by turning the wheel of history backwards in a restorative movement nurtured by nostalgia (Boym 2001). The Nazis – the old enemy of both Germanies – did precisely that by using the term *Das Dritte Reich*, with its mythological, biblical and historical associations.

The French Revolution also walked down that path: on the one hand by developing symbols referring to Roman antiquity; on the other by producing new names and terms. One such name was a re-naming of Lyon cathedral, the city being a site of trouble in the Revolution as it was in the Reformation. During the siege of Lyon in 1793, the building was damaged again, as in 1562, and, to epitomize its secularization, was now re-named *Le Temple du Culte de la Raison et de l'Être suprême* – then left to dilapidation for decades.

This iconoclastic thrill of the new also saw other repercussions. The new post-monarchic French Republic introduced a new calendar with 1792 as year I and also new names for months, new names for streets and regions, a nationwide post-feudal decimal system, a new way of addressing all people as '*citoyen/citoyenne*', a new anthem (the *Marseillaise*), a new flag (*le Tricolore*) and, finally, a new national motto: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Also, to further intervene in collective memory, the first systematic production of commodified souvenirs – as far as I know – was launched by Pierre-François Palloy (1755–1835), often called '*le patriote Palloy*'. He received the license to demolish the *Bastille* prison – yet another iconoclasm – and sell its stones for profit. Some were used for various new building projects in Paris, while others, like the stones from the Berlin Wall after 1989, were turned into memorabilia and mini-models of the old prison, to be acquired by the new administrative units or sold as stones with commemorative inscriptions (Babelon, 1965). Taken together, these symbolic initiatives aimed at shaping the new shared memory of a new historical origin for France. But it took time for the strategy to transcend the 1789 moment of *damnatio memoriae*. The motto *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* appeared during the revolution, but was later repeated with a varying choice of terms, such as *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la mort*, which met Mr Jarvis Lorry in Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) when he entered Paris in 1792 (Dickens 1985: 275). The motto was interpreted, questioned and reformulated throughout the nineteenth century, reflecting the mood of new revolutions and new political formations, socialism first of all (Ozouf, 1992).

The first of the motto's three components expresses the utopian vision of a society based on free individuals. 'Liberty' means the possibility for everyone to pursue his (rarely her) own ambitions, limited only by due regard for everybody else's attempt to do the same. 'Equality' means equality under law and the dissolution of inherited social distinctions and privileges. 'Fraternity', finally, is the tricky term: for some people in the 1790s, it meant a revival of the Christian brotherhood of the ancient church before its later institutionalization and power-play; for others, it indicated an implementation of the innate human capacity for compassion as promoted by eighteenth-century moral philosophy, in particular by David Hume and Adam Smith who both attempted to define social cohesion based on sympathy (Hume 1978; Smith 2002). Taking into account the massive reference to European antiquity in the discourses and symbols of the new republic, fraternity may also recall the Greek notion of *philia*, the brotherly love or friendship through which a person in trust and affection bonds with others as his equals. Yet, other French revolutionaries, less confident as to the socializing effect of individual affections and sympathy, preferred, according to the historian Mona Ozouf, to replace the motto's 'fraternity' with 'country', 'public order' or 'solidarity', placing collective local duty above universal sympathy. If the first two components of the motto refer to social rights that can be enshrined in new laws and institutions, the term 'fraternity' entails an attempt to encapsulate a less stable condition for social cohesion based on emotional relations between free and equal individuals (Ozouf, 1992). Obviously, the last part of one of the early versions of the republican motto, 'or death', adds a pernicious dimension to the mutual compassion of freedom and friendship.

Eventually, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* came out on top and became institutionalized as the national motto of France in 1870, allowing the new Third Republic to claim a history and a collective memory originating in 1789, which was then placed ideologically as the French *Stunde Null*. During the following century, the slogan continued to be discussed and was integrated in international political movements and constitutions and, not least, it was paraphrased in the United Nations' Human Rights Declaration from 1948. In other words, it took close to a hundred years to complete the iconoclastic gesture of anti- and post-monarchism. And the process continues: the navy blue colour of one third of the *Tricolore* flag was lightened in 1976 by President Valéry Giscard-d'Estaing to better match the new blue flag of the European Union and hence the new historical context. However, during 2020, President Emanuel Macron discreetly changed the colour back to the original navy blue of *Stunde Null* in 1789, in 'a nod to the original colours used after the revolution' (Rosman 2021). The historical awareness triggered by an iconoclastic event is thus often loaded with ambiguities and new conflicts.

In addition, the re-naming of streets, city names, statues and other public memorabilia plays an important part in the aftermath of social uprisings, in order to redirect collective memory (on revolutionary speech acts, see Petrey 1988). The French Revolution is not the only example; the Russian Revolution is another, and other revolutions or national independence movements followed suit, for example, during the decolonization of European nations' former colonies. In his short story

'Lawley Road' (1956), later included in *Malgudi Days* (1982), the twentieth-century Indian anglophone writer R.K. Narayan punctures, tongue in cheek, the bubble of the new nationalist euphoria after the Indian independence in 1948. Narayan's narrative suggests that, in this situation, the ideal balance of memory and oblivion of past facts blends indistinguishably with present emotions and symbolic posturing more flavoured by individual ambition than by social engagement, almost as a delayed repetition of national awakening in Europe 100 years earlier.

The municipality in the small imaginary town of Malgudi has decided to rename streets and places to celebrate the birth of the Indian nation and forget about colonization. Gripped by an iconoclastic fervour, people's eyes fall on a colonial statue of Sir Frederick Lawley, placed on Lawley Road, now turned into *Gandhi Nagar*. Hardly anyone paid attention to it anymore, but now the colonizer was seen as:

a combination of Attila, the Scourge of Europe, and Nadir Shah, with the craftiness of a Machiavelli. He subjugated Indians with the sword and razed to the ground the villages from which he heard the slightest murmur of protest. He never countenanced Indians except when they approached him on their knees. (Narayan, 1972: 113)

The narrator then exploits the opportunity to turn a good profit by removing the monument to his own home to be sold as scrap raw material, somewhat like the recycling of the stones of the *Bastille*, or like today's toppling of colonial statues of slave owners in the UK and the US. Shortly after, it turns out that this Lawley has been mistaken for another one, a generous person who, although a British colonizer, had actually been a local benefactor worth a monument. People who previously demonstrated for the demolition of the statue, now demonstrated for the opposite. Cunningly, the narrator lures the chairman of some municipal committee to instead buy his house with public money and keep the statue there. He gets his profit, the chairman keeps his job, and the community gets a new park with the old statue where the house once was, on a road now re-re-named Lawley Road.

The double iconoclastic intervention in colonial memory and the formation of new symbols and names to memorize the new independent India thus run the risk of becoming a commodity that stirs up rapidly changing and volatile emotions. Ironically, Narayan portrays the inhabitants' naïve focus on iconoclasm as an event, making them ignore the ambiguous process of which they become part themselves, both as actors and victims, simply because the complex history of colonialism and post-colonialism, which is made visible by the destruction and the subsequent reinstallation of the statue, remains invisible for them. As a result, all characters are turned from potential historical agents to stereotypical and almost caricatured characters – the oppressive colonizer, the opportunistic Indian politician or Narayan's selfishly profiteering narrator. The story shows the full ambiguous complexity of iconoclasm as a moment in a historical process in which the characters, as well as the author, are themselves living, without any panoramic overview. This insight is only made visible through a historical self-reflection on symbols, ideologies and memories, as the short story itself does, in ironical garments. To generate an effect

as a moment within a historical process, iconoclasm requires strategies to fence in the ambiguities they may have generated – yet at the risk that these strategies themselves may be caught by the ambiguities they were intended to control. If the French post-iconoclastic invention of tradition cherishes the idea of a *Stunde Null*, the ironic tale by Narayan makes it clear that this project is nothing more than an illusion. History is never a one-off and, indeed, never ends.

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