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Historiographical Approaches to Sub-national Identities in Europe: A Reappraisal and Some Suggestions

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The general shift in the historical analysis of territorial identities, nationalism and ethnicity that has taken place in the European social sciences over the past 20 years has led historians from structuralism to postmodernism, and from privileging the study of the 'social preconditions' of nationalism to researching the cultural processes that gave rise to modern identities. This development has also affected the study of regionalism and localism. A parallel phenomenon that helped focus research on these sub-national identities was the need to study the dynamics of nation-building from below, by lowering the level of analysis and adopting a micro-historical outlook. This approach uncovered multiple hybrid identities and national imaginaries perceived through the mirror of local realities. Contrary to the assertions of the classic approaches to nation-building (beginning with Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen)*, it revealed that becoming national did not necessarily mean ceasing to be local or giving up one's hometown pride.[1]

The basic questions in current research on nationalism may also be applied to regions, regional identities and regionalism. What came first: the regions or the regional identity? Are regions given, pre-existing entities, or are they rather a construct of regionalist doctrines and movements? Why are some regions successfully constructed or even invented while others are not? Are regional identities complementary to or opposed to national identities? The questions could be broadened by relativising the term 'regionalism' and including other territorial variables in it. Is localism a complementary phenomenon to regionalism, or is it more compatible with state nationalism, which tends to enhance local (and urban) identities, seeing them as less threatening to the monopoly of sovereignty?

It is not the purpose of this chapter to offer a historiographic overview of recent literature on regionalism in Europe. Any attempt at an exhaustive compilation is doomed to failure given the huge amount of literature dealing with particular territories across the Continent. Rather, I will first point out

some specific problems concerning the definition of regionalism as an object of study. Second, I will propose some patterns for establishing what regions and regionalism are and how to distinguish them from nations, nationalism and 'separatism'. And, third, linked to these suggestions, I will point out some problem areas and suggest some themes for further research.

Definition

Regionalism was an extremely diffuse concept before 1914. The term was coined at the end of the nineteenth century and applied principally to the French situation (although in the 1880s the term was also being used in public debates in Spain).[2] In 1911 the founder of the *Fédération Régionalist Française*, Jean Charles-Brun, stated that the term 'regionalism' was successful precisely because of its lack of precision. There was the specific regionalism 'of the regionalists themselves', but also that of 'everybody' else. By that time, 'regionalism' meant everything that questioned the 'excesses' of state centralism, and included everything from the revival of sub-state folk cultures, local and provincial architecture and arts, the organisation of local fairs and the demand for administrative decentralisation, up to the more ambitious political goals of the early Breton nationalist groups.[3] This broad category, although centred more on the demands of stateless nationalist movements of East, Central and Western Europe, was taken up again by the French historian Charles Seignobos, who used the label 'autonomism' to differentiate political demands for self-government from cultural claims, while still including Lithuanian supporters of independence and Catalan moderate nationalists and regionalists in the same group.[4]

Regionalism and, to some extent, localism have played a highly ambiguous role in European history. Regional identities helped fashion the national states that arose in the nineteenth century.[5] Yet the resilience of some territorial identities forged during the pre-modern period also contributed to the later emergence of several sub-state nationalisms opposed to the existence of a single nation, identified with the territory of the state, and advocating self-determination for their specific territories. In fact, regionalist forerunners generally precede or even accompany sub-state nationalisms. The many examples of this, from Catalonia to Brittany and Flanders, make good case-studies in the ambiguous processes of region-building and nation-building.

What is a region? No definitive answer can be given to this question. A clear definition of what a region is seems as complex and elusive as defining what a nation is. Geographers, economists and social scientists all indicate that no single definition of region can be agreed upon: they are economic entities, historical territories, frontier areas and geographical units bounded by natural features. But they are also a form of collective

identity. A region can be described as an imagined or established smaller territorial part of a bigger whole, either with administratively defined borders (*département*, *Land*, county, *rayon*, *oblast*, *eparphia* and so on), or linked to emotionally defined spatial categories that become the object of nostalgia and may act as links between the individual and collective sentiments of belonging,[6] such as *Heimat*, *paese*, *terruño* or *kraj*. These may be considered an extension of the landscape and characteristics of the space that defines everyday experiences.[7]

What is regionalism? To what extent is it possible to differentiate regionalism from nationalism analytically? Most authors rarely identify any differences between them, basically because regionalism has been given little attention in the 'classic' nationalism studies.[8] John Breuilly referred to nationalism and regionalism as 'a form of politics' in his *Nationalism and the State*.[9] The term 'regional nationalism' refers to sub-state nationalist movements, going all the way from the Irish and Czech movements in the nineteenth century to the Flemish, Macedonian or Sardinian movements in the twentieth century. It is a commonly used term among historians and political scientists, and even specialists such as Michael Keating use regionalism and minority nationalism quite interchangeably.[10] 'Regionalist' is used by most Francophone authors – except for the Québecois – to refer to ethno-nationalist movements in Europe, particularly in Western Europe. Some scholars, primarily political scientists, have argued that regionalism has three characteristics in common with minority nationalisms:

(1) the shaping of a territorially bound collective identity;
(2) the development of a cultural, economic or political centre/periphery conflict with the state; and
(3) the existence of social mobilisation and/or political organisations of a territorial (i.e. regional) character.

Thus, regionalism and minority nationalism could be considered as two parallel products resulting from the existence of both an ethno-territorial conflict and social mobilisation, with diffuse lines of demarcation.[11] These lines tend to be flexible and they evolve. Yet two common underlying elements are ethnic mobilisation – understanding ethnicity broadly as a social construction of differences based on some extremely malleable combination of primordial elements, from language to material culture – and a demand for the territory of interest to be considered a political unit.

What then is left for the term 'nationalism'? Is one to assume that regionalism always serves as the first expression of an ideology that may develop further, into a minority or sub-state nationalism? Or is it doomed to be a different phenomenon, intrinsically linked to state nationalism?

Under the influence of modernisation theory, classical definitions of nationalism presupposed that an increase in social communication and a weakening of local and regional identities were necessary preconditions for nation-building. Regional identities (or any defence of them) were therefore implicitly perceived as pre-modern vestiges of the *ancien régime* and opposed to national identities.[12] The modern form of collective identity, which was also linked to the legitimacy of power, was to be the nation, which was to become the basis of sovereignty. The regions would remain only as areas of traditional culture, folklore, rural mores and so on. In fact, the French Jacobin version of nation-building supposedly attempted to erode any form of pre-national territorial identity, as the whole country was to assimilate into a unified and codified culture. This perspective permeated historical research on the topic until the early 1990s, holding that the survival and maintenance of mesoterritorial or medium-range identities and of any form of regional claims during the modern period should be seen as a symptom of weak nation-building and a possible forerunner of minority nationalism. Similar positions resulted from some of the debates during the 1980s and early 1990s regarding Italian and Belgian historiographies of nation- and state-building in the modern period. All of them stressed the theory that their countries had experienced weak nationalisation, expressed in the survival of sub-national loyalties, the existence of 'centrifugal' tensions between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' and a relatively weak penetration of national symbols and cultures.

In historiographies of other countries the point of departure for analysing the relationship between regionalism and nationalism was not very different. Sub-national, and particularly regional, assertiveness was regarded as a symptom of weak nation-building and unfulfilled state modernisation. This assumption has decisively influenced French and Spanish academic research on the national question. In the Spanish case for instance, historical studies of Basque, Catalan or Galician nationalism led historians in other Spanish regions to highlight any form of territorial affirmation and/or local claim for autonomy by applying the same explanatory scheme to all cases. Something relatively similar happened to France in the 1970s: the model applied to Brittany seemed to be valid for many other territories. Regionalism was seen as a forerunner of minority nationalism and, regardless of ideology, all possible predecessors (including federal republicans, monarchists, cultural folklorists and so on) were lumped into regionalism as a sort of catch-all movement that would surely result in the emergence of a new sub-state nationalism. Perhaps only the British historians, who were very aware of the different nature of the national question on their island(s) and were convinced that British historical development was exceptional in this, regarded the concept of unity in diversity as a natural outcome of the persistence of an imperial polity. The survival of an imperial identity, now reduced to its insular core, would still allow for the integration of different nations within

a common polity in much the same way as the Austro-Hungarian or the Ottoman empires had managed to maintain regional and territorial diversity within their borders before the First World War.[13]

Specialists in the field are well aware of the implications of recent historical research which has undermined the classical assertion of region-building as being in opposition to nation-building, and some have even theorised that nation-building may also imply building regional or local identities, to the point that the former may depend heavily on the latter, or vice-versa. Collective identities may be regarded as a series of overlapping and complementary concentric spheres that result from dynamic historical processes,[14] as do all forms of collective identity. In many cases, nationalist movements, nationalising states (as Rogers Brubaker puts it[15]) and long-established nation-states that carried out nation-building policies also reaffirmed local and regional identities in order to strengthen the roots of national identity among the population. Moreover, this phenomenon occurred in diverse currents and varieties of nationalism, as can be seen, for example, in nineteenth century Germany and, to some extent, France. Promoting regional symbols and patterns of identity was regarded as a way of promoting national identities at the grass roots level. The case of Wilhelmine Germany demonstrated this: love for the *Heimat* implied love for the *Vaterland*, as the *Heimat* – a concept also invented at the end of the nineteenth century – could be extended to a local, classless national community.[16] This was far from being strictly a 'bourgeois' phenomenon. From the Social Democrats to the Nazis, many social and political actors played the regionalism and *Heimat* card, and continued to use similar packaging of local identity images to give support to divergent worldviews.[17] Lest the *Heimat* model be taken as generalised throughout Western and Central Europe, it is important to note that this was not always the case with other European nation-states. Stéphane Gerson has pointed out that in the French case the increasing concern with the cult of 'local memories' expressed by local elites, librarians, antiquarians, obscure historians and 'middling provincials', was not able to supersede the big debates – Monarchy versus Republic, for instance – that affected French political life during the nineteenth century. Still, nostalgia and archaeological curiosity were very often linked with a preference for the social models that were implicitly or explicitly identified with that past.[18]

Although under certain conditions some forms of regional identity can come into conflict with the national identity, this does not always happen. Regional identities can be sustained by a more or less invented historical tradition, or they may be founded on common cultural traits, fostered by the prior existence of collective political institutions and the production of symbolic frames of meaning that help members of the region to identify themselves as members of a community.[19] The relationships between empire-, nation- and region-building are not fixed, but are subject to constant change over time. In general, not all forms of collective identity have a

similar political dimension, and not all expressions of local and regional identity are infused with present-day political consequences, such as the claim for self-determination, which is exclusively in the realm of nationalism and national identities, and may turn into open separatism. The same could be said regarding the emotional aspects of territorial identity. Sentiments of belonging may be concentric and can be shared by individuals. But not all of them possess the same level of emotional appeal. To express it quite brutally, very few people in recent centuries have died for their city, for their *Heimat* or for their region, but millions have sacrificed their lives for their fatherland, for their nation. The nation is invested with sacredness and strong emotional ties, while this is not always the case with sub-national identities. Yet it could be argued that, in dying for the nation, many soldiers also died for the tangible and familiar meanings of the homeland, associated with the places they had experienced. This gave common people concrete reasons to fight: to defend their homes and families as an expression of their nation.[20]

Patterns and boundaries

Concerning definitions and concepts to be used in the study and classification of regionalisms and nationalisms (and their respective movements), I would suggest some further points for discussion.

1. Some authors, particularly political scientists but also historians, have put forward the thesis that regions are solely political-administrative entities. Every territorial community that does not meet this definition would fall into the category of mere 'ethnies', as defined by Anthony Smith. However, defining a region as a territory embodied with political-administrative institutions can be excessively reductionist. The term 'region' existed before the vindication of decentralisation, and – although this is not an attempt to claim a new *Begriffsgeschichte* of the term – may be independent of the demand for political decentralisation and the claim of possessing representative or administrative institutions that span the region.[21] The region may be merely a cultural or ethnocultural concept, imbued with a religious character, possessing relatively shifting territorial limits. This concentric sphere of territorial identification does not necessarily have to be defined in ethnic terms. A broader definition of regionalism could include the culture that upholds and therefore shapes in the public sphere the existence of a region as an imagined community. This community may or may not make political claims, but is located somewhere between the nation (subject of sovereignty and territorially broader) and the local sphere (the space of human experience and daily interaction).

2. If a certain regionalism demands political-administrative decentralisation, we could classify it as a 'political regionalism' or even as a 'regionalist movement'. However, there are many regionalisms, or regional/mesoterritorial claims, sometimes labelled as 'cultural regionalisms', where political aims do not occupy the centre of their agenda, and the main channel of expression is cultural (be it historiographic, folklore-based and so forth).[22] In general, they do advocate the existence of an historical, ethnocultural or simply 'functional' territorial entity that is integrated within a national narrative (stateless or not). A better label to describe this cultural regionalism would be the term 'regionalised nationalism', which was coined by Anne-Marie Thiesse for the French case (*nationalisme régionalisé*).[23]

   The difference between the two categories involves more than just a mere nuance. In the first case, the claim of some form of self-government and/or decentralisation is central to the agenda, although the particular circumstances may also mean that regional vindication becomes an alternative way of claiming the existence of the nation. This would happen in a context marked by ethnoterritorial concurrence within the same territory of two different ethno-nationalisms seeking to monopolise the framing of territorial identity. Thus, Basque nationalism in France has tended to adopt a regionalist agenda in order to counteract French nationalism (whether regionalised or not), while Spanish nationalists in Navarre or Alava have tended to stress regionalism or provincialism as a strategy for competing with Basque nationalism, by proclaiming the peaceful coexistence of local and regional identities with the Spanish identity.[24] In the second case, that of 'regionalised nationalism', the political agenda emphasises the strength of the 'greater' nation by fostering local, provincial or regional layers of identification. Here, the nationalism of the *petite patrie* and the *pays*, of the *Heimat*, the *regio* and the *rodina* may be compared with the nationalism of the *terruño* or of the *povo mais português de Portugal*, to quote several European examples.[25]

   However, even in this last case, the images, discourses and distinctive arguments which were used to define the *Heimat*, *petite patrie* or *terruño*, and originally intended before 1880–1890 to emphasise their peculiar contribution to the national glory or how they represented the best qualities of the national body and the national spirit, may generate potential mid- and long-term territorial conflicts of loyalty with the nation over time. These discourses can be based on the territorial history, the culture, the language or dialects, the folklore, the domestication of nature, the creation of landscape images and so on. Though those narratives were initially conceived as parts of a broader narrative, their autonomous development may be subject to reinterpretation by new actors, by those who *imagined* the territory in each historical circumstance.[26] Everything depends on who takes up the task of reinterpreting

those cultural materials, with which ideological tenets they are combined and within which political cultures they are embedded. The critical issue then is *who* the regionalists are, and *why* they are waving the territorial flag? The particular interests of the actors can lead to very different consequences. The more such mobilisation succeeds in gaining adherents and social acceptance, the more regionalism will be re-fostered as a self-propelling, low-cost strategic argument for political mobilisation. Some recent twentieth century examples include the Northern League in Italy, whose invention of the 'Padanian nation' relies not on a 'strong' nationalist narrative but rather on 'light' secessionist rhetoric,[27] regionalism in the French Savoy and the short-lived resurgence of Moravian regionalism in Czech lands during the 1990s.[28]

3. A crucial difference between nationalism and regionalism is the demand for political sovereignty. Regionalists do not claim their defined territory to be the subject of collective political rights. They may ask for decentralisation, self-government, political autonomy, even federalism, but they do not consider their territory to be sovereign and inherently deserving of the right to self-determination. However, historical reality contains several cases of greater complexity. Some examples of 'regionalised' state nationalism that developed as a reaction to a centrifugal sub-state ethnonationalism have evolved into their own separate sub-state nationalisms and maintain an ambiguous relationship to the nation they are actually representing, as illustrated by the Wallonian regionalist movement since its birth in the nineteenth century.[29] On several occasions, regionalist claims were cloaked with an 'ethno-nationalist' rhetoric and vice-versa. Catalan nationalists before 1918, and even Czech and Irish nationalists before 1914, did not always openly play the card of full-fledged ethnonationalism; they presented themselves in more ambiguous terms. This was more a question of strategy than of any long-term structural condition that would lead some movements to be 'association-seeking' rather than independence-seeking. In my view, 'separatism' is not necessarily a criterion for establishing a typological divide between regionalists and nationalists, since independence may move on or off the agenda of the political elites of a nationalist movement (particularly from 1880 to 1914, but also later on) depending on the international circumstances and the state's political opportunity structure. Within a nationalist movement, one tendency may be hegemonic over another, while pro-autonomy and pro-independence currents can vary over time within more or less diffuse lines of demarcation.[30] This divergence of political strategies concerning the level of self-government to be attained by a sub-state nation reflected the coexistence of different worldviews within nationalist movements, but it did not always imply a break with the existing empires or polities they belonged to.[31] Certainly, at different moments the short-term political strategies developed by regionalist and pro-autonomy nationalist

movements may seem similar. Catalan moderate nationalists in the 1910s and 1920s may be compared to the Sardinian regionalists of 1918–1922 as far as their home-rule claims within a composite state were concerned. Yet, there was little doubt that the theoretical basis of Catalan 'moderate' nationalism was different from the Sardinian one: they considered their territory to be a nation, which had then the right to decide over its incorporation in a greater unit. Sardinian regionalists never came to define Sardinia as a nation, but as a peripheral region that was a specific part of the Italian nation.[32]

4. Another fundamental difference relates to the degree of discursive articulation, the density of the frames of meaning and the cultural and historic narratives. The regionalists' discourses as well as their repertory of images concerning the mythical past, the specificity of their culture and the collective awareness of 'regionhood' were much weaker and less articulated than those of (sub-state) nationalists.[33] This is in part due to the contradiction involved in claiming that a territory represents a *specific difference* based on a mixture of organic, historic and cultural arguments, while maintaining its compatibility with and ultimate *subordination* to a wider concentric identity that is considered hierarchically superior. The territorial identity is supposed to be amicably integrated within the wider identity, which is imbued with its own self-affirmation discourse. Regionalist narratives are always expected to be implicitly or explicitly subordinate to a broader national narrative with which they are to merge in a harmonious way. Yet regionalists are constantly confronted with a long-term contradiction: how to combine an emphasis on the specific difference of a territory with the ultimate subordination to a wider sphere of identification. In contrast, national(ist) narratives are autonomous and mostly self-referential, though obviously not less invented or performative than regional(ist) narratives. Such were the theoretical complexities that confronted the intellectuals and political leaders of regionalism at the end of the nineteenth century concerning the precise limits of 'region' and 'nation'. There are cases throughout Western Europe that illustrate how one process of region-building turned into full-blown nation-building while another did not, how regional and national identities are shifting and are sometimes contradictory over time and also how different social actors constructed different concepts of the region that partially evolved into independent national narratives.[34]
5. An additional point is that the nation also created the region. With the advent and consolidation of the modern nation as the supreme principle upon which to base the territorial legitimacy of power, other territorial loyalties of different extent and nature, which had coexisted as political bodies within the organic order of the early modern composite monarchies, had to be re-structured and subjected to a new hierarchy. The emergence of the nation at the end of the eighteenth century

transformed those territories into subordinate entities.[35] According to several authors, it was at this moment when the term 'region' began to spread and steadily replace the more archaic term of 'province' (in France and Spain, for instance). It was also then that the concept became increasingly associated with the vindication of present-day political rights.[36] Hence, local and regional elites, particularly those who had enjoyed a certain degree of institutional power before 1800, resorted in their political and cultural discourse to the nostalgia of a better past, when the borders between territorial hierarchies were more diluted, and their influence as mediators conferred on them a major political and social role. This became more evident where the breakdown of the *ancien régime* had been radical and irreversible, like in France. The appeal to local identity necessarily included nostalgia for pre-liberal times.

Problems and prospects

Much new material has been written since the early 1990s concerning the cultural dynamics of region-building, the invention of regions, the revolt of regions and the place of sub-national identities in Europe.[37] Although regionalism as a specific domain of political history has become less visible, there have been some brilliant contributions to the reassessment of the transverse influence of regionalist programmes within some national traditions of political thought.[38] Regionalism has become a field of study in itself, but the lines of demarcation with the study of nationalism, on the one hand, and of local identities, on the other, are not always clear. And they will remain so, given that identification processes and the forms of imagining territory vary throughout Europe and can change over time within a given nation-state and area. The very fact that all forms of sub-national identity are intertwined has paradoxically contributed to increasing confusion about how to establish differences, how to conceptualise them properly for analytical purposes and how to compare them.[39] In a way similar to the present shape and recent evolution of nationalism studies, state-of-the-art historical research on regionalism and sub-national identities in Europe could begin by highlighting the following main elements:

1. The lack of authentic cross-European or multiple case comparative studies. Comparisons between Eastern and Western Europe, or between Southern and Northern Europe, are quite unusual in the field of nationalism studies, with the exception of such huge endeavours as those performed by the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch. They are even scarcer in the field of sub-national identities. Some comparisons have been made between regions divided by a border in order to understand how sub-national identities have evolved differently over time in East and Central European 'frontier cities' or in regions belonging to different states, such

as Flanders or Catalonia, which has been divided between France and Spain since 1648.[40] Although few truly comparative studies exist, comparisons have been made between different forms of sub-national identity in two or more territories within one nation-state or polity. There are thus several studies dealing with regionalisms in France, Spain and Great Britain, mentioned throughout the footnotes.

Perhaps as a result of this, much of what was commonly stated about the 'differences' in the historical evolution of Eastern and Western European sub-national identities has reflected the prevailing paradigms of the aprioristic dichotomy that is still very present in academia between 'Eastern' and 'Western' types of nationalism.[41] It has occasionally given rise to an inverted typology. Thus, the very specific Eastern European concept of *Landespatriotismus*, initially translated as 'patriotism of the land' or 'love of the land' where one lives, has sometimes been defined as an implicitly good, supraethnic and territorial regionalism based on love of one's territory, and was considered to be opposed by the 'nationalising' tendencies in the territories of the Austro-Hungarian and Tsarist empires. Western 'regionalism' in contrast was overwhelmingly seen as an expression of resistance by anti-liberal local elites, provincial scholars, civil servants and intellectuals to the new legitimacy of the nation-state. According to Hroch, regionalism in the Central European context was thus devoid of ethnic content and could be shared by linguistically or ethnically diverse segments of the population.[42] However, this definition cannot be applied in Western Europe, since the social construction of regions has also implied the 'rediscovery' of their unique histories, traditions, languages and vanishing local ethnicities, making them the seat of national authenticity, of the *Volksgeist*, rooted in timeless space and nature.

2. Another important element is the shifting and sometimes divergent use of key concepts such as 'region' and 'regionalism', as well as 'local' and 'localism'. Is region-building similar to regionalism? Should we distinguish between different layers of identity-building, at least for analytical purposes? Or should we instead accept that the limits between those layers are extremely diffuse, and hence their forms of identification are also blurred? Region and regionalism, as well as localism (not to mention very specific concepts such as the German *Heimat* or the Russian *rodina*) have meant different things at different times in different countries. This is not new: Historians of nationalism are well aware of the fact that the term 'nation' did not have the same meaning for the various European actors throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
3. The emphasis on regions as a form of mesoterritorial identity, which has characterised much recent historical writing on sub-national identities, has tended to marginalise the emergence, consolidation and evolution of other forms of identification. Among them we may especially note two

cases. The first is the increasingly important role played by cities as places of memory, as objects of identification and as generators of very specific forms of intermediate identity that link the nation to buildings, architecture and urban planning as a specific form of conquering space and nature. Maiken Umbach highlighted this for the German case; in fact, the resilient localist traditions persisting in some German towns were reinforced by the specific character of the ancient Hanseatic cities.[43]

The second is the more ambiguous place occupied by supralocal entities that vary in importance throughout Europe, but which mediate between the mesoterritorial sphere (the imagined community that is not inherently sovereign) and the local sphere (the living spaces of daily life where physical interaction and shared knowledge is possible). These are the *contrée* in France, the *paese* or *paesino* in Italy and the *comarca* (district), especially in the more or less putative sub-state nations of Spain, such as Catalonia.[44] Regions were often given priority because they were 'big' enough to generate a culture, a network of institutions involved in their maintenance and/or defence, a political claim, a historical discourse and so forth. Cities, and particularly big cities, may also generate a narrative of their own. However, the local emerges as the place where the narratives of the nation receive concrete names and faces, shapes and figures, where a particular hero incarnates the virtues of the nation. The 'intermediate' spheres between the living space of experience and the first imagined sphere of the region have barely been researched.

The region – or any form of local demarcation – is not a pre-existing entity, or a 'natural' alternative to the nation-state, as is sometimes argued by economists.[45] The contents of a region, its territorial limits and its inclusive or exclusive character cannot be defined objectively unless the objects of study are 'physical' regions defined by landscape, nature or economic areas. In fact, the region is a constructed identity, dependent on social agency. Its members never come into personal contact with each other, and as such the region is a putative group, constructed upon the performative utterance of those who claim its existence or believe in it. Likewise, the region can be both a cultural construct and the result of public policy or of a region-building effort carried out by institutions and intellectuals. There are region-builders much in the same way as there are nation-builders. The question is to what extent can the former be identified with the latter? To focus a research agenda on the local sphere and/or the region does not imply embracing a new kind of primordialism, in this case a '*regio*-primordialism'; it instead involves determining whether that sphere of identification has been more or less successful in relation to others over time. A comparative framework must be established, and an answer sought as to why regions succeeded in some cases and not in others.

The region does not constitute the sole alternative to the nation-state. Different concepts and images about what a region is, and how it is defined, may coexist, vary, compete or even conflict within a given mesoterritorial entity. The introduction of new departments, provinces and districts have also generated mechanisms of social identification and managed to win the support of local elites, who benefited from their new place in the national hierarchy as 'capitals' of newly shaped territorial demarcations. Although many provincial or local intellectuals and civil servants, from the Spanish *Comisiones Provinciales de Monumentos Históricos* to the French *Sociétés Savantes*, looked to past territorial demarcations as their sphere of reference and imagination, many others did not. Instead, they played the card of province-making, or of promoting 'pride in the place', and emphasised the local glories of the past as a means of reinforcing their place in the national hierarchy. These actors often mixed and merged the regional imagery with the particular local one. The 'invention' of a *bilbaíno* tradition in the Basque town of Bilbao in the mid-nineteenth century illustrates all these ambiguities: local identity emphasised the Spanishness and liberal character of the town as opposed to the Basque-speaking, reactionary and Catholic countryside; and at the same time elaborated a peculiar Basqueness (or a provincial identity, from Biscay) exclusive to the town.[46]

4. Study of the region is marked by an insistence upon ideological genealogy: the forms of mesoterritorial identification are interesting to historians so long as they contain in a nutshell the elements that can later be codified into the cornerstones of a national narrative by historians, linguists or nationalist intellectuals. In other words, the region is sometimes seen as a miniature of the greater nation, as the most representative part of it. In the process, historians often become captives of the nationalist narrative trap: accepting in a more or less teleological way the hierarchy imposed by nationalism as the *logical* gradation of identities, without necessarily considering how contingent these hierarchies may have been on historical processes whose result is actually taken as a precondition. As already mentioned, the nation creates the region; it subordinates the latter and imposes a hierarchy of values, sentiments and political meanings. However, the few attempts at a comparative view of the role of region-building in two or more nation-states arrive at a relevant conclusion: it is problematic to maintain that a pattern of *normality* has ever existed in the relationships between the nation, the state and the region (and/or other sub-national identities). There are as many 'special paths' (*Sonderwege*) as nations or states, and almost as many as regions.[47]

Focusing on the dynamics of region-building and local identity has also meant studying state and/or sub-state nationalism from below. National consciousness was not only created and expanded through the agency of the state, but should be considered a multidirectional process.

It can flow from the bottom up, through the dynamics generated by civil society and various socio-political actors who are able to produce their own political cultures, identities and memories. This helps to create spheres of everyday experience that contribute to the shaping of a national culture in a broader, socio-anthropological sense. From this angle, regionalists (and localists) were not only region-builders, they were often actually nation-builders: they linked the abstract narrative of the nation (from above) to more concrete forms of everyday experience (from below).[48]

5. Related to this, we may advance the hypothesis that the diverse processes of territorial identity-building were not necessarily mutually exclusive or mutually complementary. The challenge for historians is to find out the precise form of interaction that these identifications of 'changing geometry at different scales' may have had in each particular case and time. This leads us to question some broadly accepted (or at least commonly assumed) generalisations, such as the implicit association between democracy and federalism/regionalism on the one hand, and between dictatorship and localism on the other. Even more generally held is the debatable idea that a strong authoritarian power usually gives priority to local identities as a sphere for transmission and social impregnation of national values, since local authorities cannot reasonably challenge state nationalism. Any form of 'regional devolution' or federalism was considered incompatible with authoritarian regimes. Yet there have been diverse conservative, and even traditionalist, *ancien régime*-type federalist proposals such as the 'organic federalism' put forth by French and Spanish conservative intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, related to the emergence of regional claims as a form of reaction against liberal jacobinism/centralism. In fact, even Fascist or fascistoid dictatorships occasionally incorporated some form of regional demand or decentralisation within their cultural and political practices. Of course, the limits of this were far more evident in cases where the 'danger' of separatism was perceived as a threat resulting from the feeding of mesoterritorial identities from above.[49] Localism was also instilled in people by radical Republicans, who made communes and municipalities their preferred sphere of political agitation and imagined it as the privileged place where authentic grass roots democracy could be built.
6. How do different layers of territorial identification interact at the micro level, or even the personal level? There is some agreement on the need to distinguish multiple (or 'nested') identities from hybrid identities. While double, multiple and shared identities can be understood as layers around a core, hybrid identities are harder to grasp, their lines of demarcation are diffuse and their hierarchy is unclear. They are more of a collage, an eclectic combining or even a fusion of traits. The buffer zones of shared identities can also relate to other types of non-territorial identification,

such as religion or gender.[50] Individuals may identify with, say, the city of Ourense, the Autonomous Community of Galicia, Spain and Europe, in a more or less consecutive and hierarchical way. However, the hierarchies between those identities may vary; the 'layers' do not always exist in a pure, 'ideal-typical' shape. Nationhood may be confused with sentiments of local identity; provincial identification may overlap with regional/mesoterritorial identity and so on. The transition moves us from the concept of national identities as a crucible or melting pot (to use a classic definition from immigration studies), where all elements combine into a new, singular identity with a precise shape, to a more flexible 'salad bowl' concept: the components remain identifiable but are in contact with each other, can flavour each other and combine to make the distinct flavour of the salad as a whole.

Following the suggestions made by some proponents of an alternative and transnational cultural approach to modern identities,[51] Alon Confino has pointed out that most local and regional identity studies tend to consider themselves as parts of a metanarrative of the nation or nation-state that established the frame of meaning within which they had to be understood. However, a further step should be taken: we should leave behind the separation between 'local' and 'national', acknowledging that social actors take part in several historical processes simultaneously, and that localism and nationality mutually interact. Individuals see the world through a multiplicity of experiences and social representations, and the challenge for historians consists in being able to grasp them.[52] Josep M. Fradera has remarked that it is not easy to accurately measure the intensity of national feelings in the past, despite all the efforts to determine literacy rates, density of communication networks and the economic integration of the national territory, and to qualitatively analyse the messages propagated by the state and other actors in festivals, commemorations and mass demonstrations.[53] The sources from which historians can infer the experience of ordinary people are problematic and not always socially representative (such as handwritten diaries and letters). Even in this latter case, and contrary to Ernest Gellner's position, there is not necessarily a direct line linking socio-economic modernisation, cultural homogenisation and the spread of national consciousness. Last but not least, politics, collective action and social mobilisation may also contribute to generate sentiments of territorial identity.

7. The region and the local sphere should be treated as nested identities and understood within the framework of nineteenth-century European overseas expansion and empire formation. Empires have contributed to the consolidation of European nation-states. They also provided a way to integrate different spheres of identification, by offering ways of combining sub-national territorial allegiances that could also claim to be alternative national identities (from Scotland to Catalonia) within

a broader imperial worldview, where more flexible models for integrating diverse territories had a better chance of being framed. Such models varied from overseas to continental empires, with diverging effects on the 'regional integration' of the territories in the imperial core.[54] However, a question still to be definitively answered is whether 'integration' and centralisation in the imperial core was really necessary, rather than a more general tendency towards a varied geometry of relationships among different territories, regions, localities and ethnic groups around a monarchic or imperial 'centre'. Here the example of Spain's imperial crisis of 1898, which led to gradual regional 'disintegration' and parallel attempts by some regionalists/nationalists to rebuild a new empire based on cultural diversity, could be compared to those of Britain, Belgium and France, where the overseas empire tended to integrate different ethnic groups and territories within the national project (or at least within a shared project).[55] Another point of comparison was the continental empires, where Peter Haslinger has shown that sub-state nationalisms competed with other versions of territorial identity (regional, supraethnic) that were usually considered more compatible with imperial loyalty. The same could be said about the Siberian, Northern Russian and Carelian regionalisms that developed within the Russian empire prior to 1918.[56]

Conclusions

To conclude, it can be argued that region-building processes in Europe involve historical dynamics somewhat similar to nation-building processes. The tendency has been to build regional identity upon arguments (history, tradition, the people's will) similar to those incorporated or defended by elites in pursuit of their own political or other interests. The theoretical difference between the region and the nation, and therefore between regionalism and nationalism, must be found in the notion of present-day collective sovereignty, which is exclusively ascribed to the nation. Thus, the difference does not necessarily lie in the principles of collective identification with a territory, since the mechanisms of nation and region-building are quite similar. As Rolf Petri argues, the differences must be sought, in the outcome of these building processes, particularly in the presence or absence of a territorial foundation of sovereignty. This may also be a result of historical contingency, which is directly linked to the breakdown of multinational empires before and after the First World War. The border changes sanctioned by international politics contributed to the legitimisation of some of them as 'natural'. Even so, the identity-building processes before and after those changes were not necessarily different in nature, but rather in outcome.[57]

There are several European cases that illustrate how these dynamics may converge or diverge over time, but they remain deeply interrelated due to their similar historical origins. Although not all forms of regionalism,

localism or ethno-territorial vindication have actually led to the emergence of a new sub-state nationalism, it is hard to find a nationalist movement that has not emerged from a previously existing form of collective identity or 'ethno-territorial' mobilisation. The egg did not always produce a chicken, but it is rare for a chicken not to have come from an egg (although a few 'eccentric' cases such as Macedonia could be seen this way). A complex relationship between regionalism and sub-state nationalism emerges, especially within a single political system or at the frontiers of a single state (or empire). Sub-state nationalist movements project a clear demonstration effect vis-à-vis regionalist and even localist movements. Concurrent ethno-territorial movements within the borders of a single political entity introduce more intricate dynamics that may turn 'cultural regionalism' or 'regionalised nationalism' into political regionalisms and even contribute to the emergence of new minority nationalisms. While this may have a decisive influence on the level of theoretical discourse or ideology involved, it contributes almost nothing to the social spread of new nationalisms. On the contrary, the history of multinational empires reveals concurrent, local, 'pre-modern' identities based on different forms of *Landespatriotismus* and ethno-nationalism. These translate into a fight between the perceived relics of old-fashioned imperial rule based on dynastic loyalty and religious belief, and the new 'modernity' based on the principle of nationality, as became evident before the outbreak of the First World War.

As with the nation, mesoterritorial identity constitutes an 'imagined community' as long as it remains supralocal and outside the sphere of daily life and experience. Nevertheless, institutional mechanisms help to spread regional and local consciousness. Hence, the more real power regional institutions have, the more they consciously promote the territorial loyalty of their inhabitants. With increased regional devolution and decentralisation come increased possibilities for the emergence of some form of political regionalism or regionalist movement. Regional devolution does not always create regionalism as a separate political movement, but it does reinforce regional/mesoterritorial identification processes among the targeted populations.

While regionalism or mesoterritorial political mobilisation did not imply an inherent contradiction or opposition to nation-building, in some cases it threw decisive elements of ideological and cultural friction into the mesoterritorial political arena, which may have resulted in the development of a distinct sub-state nationalism. In other words, region-building may be, but is not always, in conflict with nation-building. It depends on the precise and particular articulation of both processes, each inspired by actors with their own social interests and cultural worldviews, as well as their interaction with political and social movements that would 'territorialise' their projects and aims. Once again, this is more the outcome of contingency than the necessary result of a set of given social, cultural or ethnic preconditions.

Historical research on sub-national identities definitively supports methodological constructivism. The question is: how constructivist do we need to be?

Acknowledgement

Funding for this research has been provided by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Research Project HAR 2008-06252-C02-01.

Notes

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