Painting Regional Identities: Nationalism in the Arts, France, Germany and Spain, 1890–1914

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ABSTRACT

During the decades before 1914, nationalism pervaded cultural discourse more than ever before as a new type of subjectivist, organic nationalism came to the fore. At the same time nations were seen as consisting of a harmonious whole of organically grown regional folk cultures. Thus, a new more activist nationalism coincided and overlapped with the rise of a more folkloristic and regionalist interpretation of the respective national identities. But how did this affect the arts? Paintings by highly relevant fin-de-siècle artists such as Simon and Cottet in France, Bantzer and Mackensen in Germany and Zuloaga in Spain could be seen as interpretations of a specific national or regional 'soul'. A detailed, comparative analysis of the reviews of their work in the major art magazines of the period shows that their paintings skilfully translated the new, more activist and popular nationalist ideology into art, using similar arguments and rhetorical devices.

KEY WORDS: art, fin-de-siècle, national identity, regionalism

In the course of the nineteenth century, European high culture became thoroughly nationalized. As part of this process, the common European past, mainly found in Antiquity and Christianity, was redefined along national lines and art, literature and music increasingly operated within national contexts. Writers and novelists searched their national past for inspiration and appropriate subjects. The same applied to the visual arts: painters and sculptors gradually turned away from scenes of classical history or the bible, in favour of themes from national history.[1]

Academic painting was not the only vehicle for nationalism, however. During the second half of the nineteenth century Realists and Impressionists also frequently resorted to a nationalist language, albeit more subtle. Instead of idealized classical landscapes they preferred national scenery and the faithful representation of ordinary people in their native country. The competition between the various countries in the art sections at the World's Fairs induced some artists even to pose as essentially 'national' painters.[2]

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By concentrating on cosmopolitan modernism and the rise of the avant-garde at the end of the nineteenth century, scholars have paid little attention to the influence of nationalist ideology on modern art. This is especially surprising as the cultural and political climate in the decades before the outbreak of the First World War was marked by the rise of more aggressive nationalism. Recent studies have made clear, however, that nationalism continued to have a huge impact on young artists, not only in countries with a strong independence movement, such as Finland and other 'oppressed' nations in eastern Europe, but also in those that were long established nation states. Many *Art Nouveau* artists were, at least during part of their career, strongly inspired by nationalism. The same is true for some of the German expressionists and the fauves.[3] However, in order to fully assess the relation between modern art and nationalism a more systematic exploration of the influence of nationalism on the arts in the period between 1890 and 1914 is necessary. A detailed study of nationalist art could also tell us more about how and why artists and critics appropriated nationalist motives and strategies.

A New Nationalism

During the greater part of the nineteenth century most nationalist efforts were directed towards the process of nation-building, which slowly progressed in the major West European countries. Most nationalists claimed that if every people had a state in which the citizens would effectively control the political institutions a bright future of peaceful coexisting nation states awaited mankind. At the end of the century, however, these optimistic hopes slowly faded as on both the left and the right fast-growing groups refused to accept the nation as the highest ideal. Socialists and anarchists preferred the solidarity of the workers, whereas confessional parties primarily observed their religion and guidelines set by their leaders which did not generally stop at national frontiers.

At the same time, international cooperation and free trade suffered as the competition for colonies and the introduction of tariff barriers increased political and economic rivalry between European powers. This led to a more aggressive foreign policy, not only of the major colonial powers, but also of latecomers like Germany and Italy. In most European countries, these escalating international tensions contributed to the rise of a new nationalism, as they fuelled the need to nationalize the masses in order to overcome internal discord and stimulate national unity.

During the first part of the nineteenth century, the process of nation-building, led by bourgeois elites, had been directed towards defeating the forces of the *Ancien Régime* and legitimizing a more or less constitutional liberal government. After about 1870 it became increasingly necessary to socialize new voters from the lower classes and make them aware of their national identity. Conscious attempts to stimulate national feeling were consequently no longer directed toward clubs and learned societies, but had instead to be visible to wider audiences. Nationalism thus conquered the

streets in the form of national holidays, parades, festivals, statues, and large-scale commemorations. This process had already started around 1870 but clearly gained momentum during the last decade of the nineteenth century.[4]

Not only the political climate deteriorated, dampening optimism, but the same was true for the cultural sphere. Belief in progress and the possibility of an increased general well-being that would reach all strata of the population faded. Many intellectuals now began to fear that society, instead of producing better and more sensible citizens, was disintegrating. They felt that a moral and physical degeneration of broad layers of the population constituted a serious threat to political stability. The rationalist and positivistic attitude of scientists, intellectuals and politicians was increasingly criticized as being too limited. Reality could not be fully understood with rational methods, nor could science solve all human and social problems. After all, man was not only a rational being, but also had irrational feelings, subjective fears and dreams that were as real as the objective world.[5]

Both the more difficult political situation and the subjectivist cultural turn heavily influenced young intellectuals across Europe. Some, like Julius Langbehn, Maurice Barrès and Ángel Ganivet, started to revise existing nationalist ideologies. They were deeply influenced by the French historian Hippolyte Taine who had tried to develop a scientific method to study the cultural past. According to Taine, every cultural expression was determined by *race, milieu et moment* (race, environment and moment). Every work of art, literature, or music could be explained by studying the national traditions, the natural environment and the specific historical situation in which it was produced. This view implied that every cultural expression was almost completely determined by its context. Whereas Taine used race, environment and moment as analytical concepts to study the past, these young intellectuals converted them into present-day moral categories. Meaningful cultural expressions had to be rooted in a national past and a geographic environment and had to reflect current needs. In this way they converted an 'objective' method of historical study into a subjective, present-day obligation to create a truly national culture.[6]

Their idealist outlook also manifested itself in their endeavour to revive the romantic idea of *Volksgeist* (spirit/genius of the people/nation). Since they accepted the influence of physical environment on cultural expression, they expanded *Volksgeist's* meaning to include regions as well as nations. Mountainous areas, for example, required different cultural adaptations by its inhabitants than did living on plains or along a coast. They consequently concluded that every region had its own 'genius' and that all regions combined constituted the national spirit. This mode of thinking became entwined with equally popular biological terminology, especially the term 'organic'. The nation was seen as a body and the regions as its organs. If one part was missing or had been amputated, the whole organism suffered. Such a loss could even threaten its existence. The health of the whole could only be guaranteed by the well-being of its parts; and health, in the vocabulary of *Volksgeist*, meant being faithful to its unique personality.

This kind of reasoning did not necessarily lead to a reactionary or extremely conservative attitude. A 'popular spirit' could, after all, be seen as the historical product of a people living in a certain area. Within the natural and geographic limits set by the environment, people adapted themselves to circumstance. At the same time they also exploited nature to meet their needs. The result of this historical process of adaptation to and dominance of nature constituted a particular area's specific cultural form. Crucially, however, these intellectuals believed this process should not be halted or undone. It should only be rectified if necessary and then only in accordance with the voice of the 'collective soul', in order to maintain its true course.

Developments around 1890 led not only to changes in the national sphere, but also occasioned a fundamental shift at the local level. Until that point the study of regional identity had been a quite limited phenomenon, appealing only to a small group of provincial notables. The historical and geographic background of a region was analysed within a wider context as an indispensable contribution to national greatness. The results of these studies were generally presented to the members of learned societies or a limited, local audience. During the last decade of the nineteenth century this situation changed as young, well educated members of the local elite attempted to reach a broader public. In order to mobilize the middle and lower classes, they organized new associations that were essentially oriented towards recreational activities. Instead of giving lectures, organizing banquets and publishing erudite studies, they now undertook excursions, organized festivals and opened local museums. At the same time, probably influenced by the new interpretations of the *Volksgeist* concept, their attention shifted from a distant past, in which the roots of regional and national identity were to be found, to the current cultural and natural heritage that distinguished their region from the rest of the nation. Thus excursions were taken to particular landscapes, historical and natural sights, and typical villages and buildings. Regional museums began to display local handicrafts, traditional costumes, and other folk items, and vernacular art, architecture, literature and other expressions of traditional popular culture became the focus of attention.[7]

The rise of both a more activist nationalism – in which ample space was accorded to idiosyncratic regional identities, as long as they continued to form an integral part of the national body – and the new regionalism had an enormous impact upon the various European countries. The new appreciation of local landscapes, sights, monuments and customs led to attempts to protect the highlights of the regional and national heritage. As a result the preservation of natural and historical sites received massive support, and all kinds of traditional artefacts were collected by both individuals and museums. Even high culture was affected as ethnology became a new branch of science and as composers, writers, architects and sculptors increasingly included popular motifs in their works. While this was not completely new, its scale was now much larger. A few isolated precursors became part of a broad movement and a highly influential public discourse. The question remains, how did this affect painting? And what does the way nationalist and regionalist

identities were depicted tell us about the new type of nationalism and regionalism?

In order to answer these questions, I will analyse nationalist discourse in the major art magazines of the period. This approach permits the study of the influence of the new nationalist rhetoric on art in France, Germany and Spain over a longer period and across a broad spectrum of written media. These three countries each played a major role in art at the turn of the nineteenth century. Moreover, France is generally seen as the prototype of political nationalism, whereas in Germany cultural nationalism was considered the dominant force. As Spain was an old nation state in which no new regime (e.g. the French Third Republic) or a new state (e.g. the German Empire) needed to legitimize itself, it constitutes a good third case.

Reviewing art magazines of this period, it is noteworthy that certain groups of artists were singled out both for the nationalist content of their work and for their talent and innovation. These groups did not produce manifestos, nor did they present themselves as formal movements with their own exhibitions or publications. Yet neither the public nor critics had any difficulty distinguishing them as coherent and influential groups. As they chose their subjects mostly from specific parts of their fatherland, they were known by different names in each country. In France, one such group was referred to as painters of 'Breton life and scenery'. In Germany artists like Bantzer and Mackensen were known as *Heimatkünstler* (homeland artists), although some disliked this term's provincial undertone. In Spain, on the other hand, the term regionalist (*regionalista*) was used to characterize the paintings by Zuloaga and others.[8] Similar painters could be found in other European countries as well.[9]

France

In France, the main representatives of a nationalist inspired artistic trend, who showed ample attention for more regional folkloric elements, were Lucien Simon and Charles Cottet. They specialized in Breton subjects and their works were generally discussed together by art critics. By some, they were even presented as a highly relevant innovative artistic trend that could indicate a way out of the impressionist deadlock.

At the end of the nineteenth century many art critics observed that Impressionism had become the dominant artistic style in France. By this they did not so much mean a general recognition of the art of the most important impressionist painters, but the widespread influence of their way of painting. Most paintings that were seen at the salon showed the light palette and choppy brushwork of Impressionism and its emphasis on capturing the atmosphere and light of a fleeting moment. Not all progressive critics applauded these developments. They argued that Impressionism, while it had successfully eliminated the stale conventions of academic art, had itself degenerated into a superficial exercise in virtuosity, in which the subject of the painting had become completely irrelevant. The almost exclusive concentration on the representation of objective reality was also increasingly criticized.[10]

Symbolist art was one possible alternative to Impressionism. However, the

Symbolists' highly individualist paintings, based on dreams and fantasies, did not convince all observers that they were the answer to the call for a new art as they could only be appreciated by the initiated few.[11] Around 1895 another possible alternative was offered, at least according to some critics, by a group of young painters, who began to attract critical and public attention at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (which had seceded in 1890 from the official Salon des Artistes Français). These painters preferred full and dark colours and even used black. Their compositions were well worked out, their technique was not sketchy and they generally painted from memory. René Ménard, who specialized in landscapes, Charles Cottet and Lucien Simon were seen as the most important members of this informal group, which for some time was known as the 'Bande noir'.[12]

Cottet and Simon could not only be distinguished from the impressionists by their technique, compositions and colours, but also by their choice of subject. They preferred countryside to city. Both showed a clear preference for Brittany, but they steered clear of the many artists' colonies in the region. Their subject choice and painting mode also differed from those of the realist *pleinairistes* of the many existing artists' colonies. They did not produce pictures of charming hills or woods, but preferred the unimpressive, flat landscapes of the coastal plains. In contrast to these *pleinairistes*, who mainly painted landscapes, they also depicted the countryside's inhabitants and buildings. Like Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard, who had painted in Brittany some years before, they showed great interest in the local population's primitive and authentic way of life. Yet in contrast to the generic (Breton) peasants in Gauguin's paintings, the local inhabitants represented in their works were clearly recognizable as representing a specific area or part of Brittany. Traditional costumes, vernacular architecture, typical landscapes and specific local types thereby functioned as signifiers of a particular local identity. Thus, whereas the *pleinairistes* generally painted anonymous peasants from an unspecified region dressed in ordinary working clothes, and Gauguin and Bernard painted primitive people who happened to live in Brittany, Simon and Cottet clearly depicted identifiable types dressed in the traditional garb of a specific village which itself could often even be recognized in the background.

Simon and Cottet also employed a painting technique that differed from most of the more realist painters who still dominated the artists' colonies in that they adopted some of the innovations of the Impressionists, such as their virtuoso use of colour, their way of representing effects of light and shade, and their unconventional compositions.[13] Precisely because their scenes were so lively, they could be easily distinguished from the more anecdotal, theatrical and slick representations by somewhat older, naturalistic painters of Breton subjects like Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, whose paintings also referred to Brittany in general and were not clearly recognizable as depicting a specific part or village.[14]

However, what distinguished the oeuvre of Simon and Cottet from the impressionists was that they continued to paint for the salon. Their main works were rather large. Although they had some exhibitions at commercial galleries, they continued

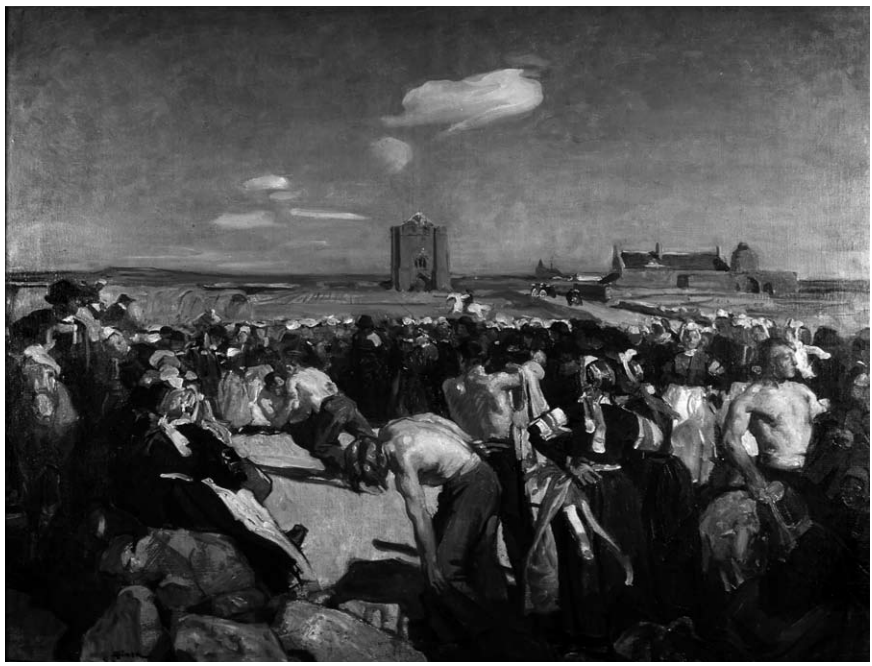

Figure 1 Lucien Simon, *The Wrestling Match*, 1898. Brest, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

to address themselves in a conventional way to a broad public of art lovers. Their highest aspiration was a gold medal and the purchase of their paintings by the State.

Although their way of painting and their choice of subjects showed many similarities, neither Simon and Cottet's paintings nor their personalities were identical. Lucien Simon was born into an upper-class Parisian family and was well educated. After his discovery of Brittany he succeeded in transferring some of the warmth and intimacy of his family portraits to interior scenes, such as *Famille bigoudène en deuil* (Bigoudène Family in Mourning, 1912). Most of the scenes he painted were outside events, however, in which people and buildings were placed against the background of the local landscape. In *Cirque forain* (Fairground Circus, 1898) and *Les lutteurs, Penmarc'h* (The Wrestling Match, Penmarc'h, 1898; see Figure 1) he depicted local feasts. He also celebrated daily work in paintings such as *La récolte de pommes de terre* (The Potato Harvest, 1907) and *La sardinerie, Camaret* (The Sardinery, Camaret, 1911). Another often repeated subject was religion, such as in *La procession à Penmarc'h* (The Procession at Penmarc'h, 1900) and *Le menhir* (The Menhir, 1900).

Simon's choice of subjects was very specific. He did not just depict a contingent moment, but always chose a meaningful event in which people, nature and tradition seemed to form a harmonious union. This was especially the case in the open-air scenes. Thus, in *Les lutteurs*, the traditionally dressed villagers gather around the wrestlers, who, stripped to the waist, defend the honour of their parish in a primitive

game celebrating the local patron saint of Penmarc'h. A sheep visible on the right is the trophy. Some women are seated on the rocks in the left foreground, while a few men watch the spectacle from horseback. Although the scene looks like a faithful representation of the event, the background is, in fact, a composite scene. In the centre we see the tower of the ancient church of Saint-Guénolé, a small village not far from Simon's summer residence, and on its right a fortified farmhouse. In reality such a farmhouse was found several kilometres away, whereas some ordinary houses, eliminated by the painter, surrounded the tower.[15] It is clear that it was not Simon's goal to represent visual reality truthfully. And while some of his departures from reality may have been motivated by aesthetic considerations, it appears that the most conspicuous changes were made to give the picture a clearer meaning. Through Simon's manipulation of the background, both the solitude and desolation of the landscape and the central role of the church were underlined.

Raised in Savoy, Charles Cottet was the son of a magistrate. He was a solitary figure and travelled a great deal. Like Simon, he often recorded the ceremonial aspects of Breton life in pictures of processions, feasts and other activities, such as *Femmes de Plougastel au pardon de Sainte-Anne-la-Palud* (Women of Plougastel at the Pilgrimage of Saint Anne-la-Palud, 1903). But he generally focused on tragic events, painting mourning and farewell scenes, such as *Enterrement* (Burial, 1895), *Repas d'Adieu* (Farewell Dinner, 1898; Figure 2) and *Douleur* (Sorrow, 1908). Both *Enterrement* and *Douleur* treat the sorrow of mothers, wives and other family members over the death of a fisherman. *Repas d'Adieu* depicts a farewell dinner in which the women do not know if they will ever see their beloved again. The imminent threat of the sea was a lasting presence in these communities. The sea gives them their daily bread, but at any time, can take whomever it likes. Although the landscape is almost invisible in these pictures, Cottet indirectly shows that the dependence on nature was almost complete, and that this determined almost all aspects of human existence around these small harbours, leading its inhabitants to place their life in God's hands.

Like nature, religious feeling was only hinted at indirectly by Cottet as he stylized many of his pictures in a religious fashion. *Douleur* was clearly modelled on the Lamentation of Christ, with a group of women resembling the three Marys behind the almost Christ-like body of the dead fisherman. *Repas d'Adieu* was even given the form of a triptych, depicting those who are to leave on a long fishing trip on the left panel, and those who stay behind on the right. The central scene was fashioned after the Last Supper, although again no direct religious signs were visible.[16]

Compared to Simon his colour scheme generally was more restrained, the costumes of the villagers less exuberant and his compositions more austere. Cottet often also omitted a clear reference to the exact location of his representations in the titles and used instead the generic subtitle: *Au pays de la mer* (At the Land by the Sea) for many of his works. Instead of a special local event, he represented a scene of more general significance, with which the observer could easily identify. Thus it seems that from

Figure 2 Charles Cottet, *Farewell Dinner*, 1898. Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Photo RMN/Hervé Lewardowski).

within a similar ideological framework, both painters followed their own personal preferences, Simon stressing the role of tradition, whereas Cottet underlined the bond with nature.

The works of Simon and Cottet were well received by the critics. Major French art magazines regularly reviewed their paintings at the salon and from time to time even dedicated an essay to their oeuvre. Many foreign art periodicals also published pieces on Simon and Cottet. But how were these pictures of Breton folk life interpreted?

Highly influential art critics, such as Gabriel Mourey, director of *L'Art décoratif* and the Parisian correspondent for *The Studio*, and Léonce Bénédite, director of the Musée du Luxembourg (then the Parisian museum for modern art), who were well acquainted with Simon and Cottet, observed that both painters deliberately suppressed details in order to produce simplified images. Instead of copying reality, they sought to convey an idea. They tried to penetrate the character of the scene by concentrating on its essence. Thus instead of literally representing the fleeting aspects of nature, they sought to unveil permanent forms and distil the 'essence of things'. Or as Raymond Bouyer defined the 'poetics' of Cottet: '[He] departs from nature in order to interpret and recompose it, to make it speak, by adding to its mute suggestions the answer of his heart'. For these reasons their compositions were seen as meaningful and morally significant.[17]

Most critics agreed that Simon's figures were the product of a sharp psychological insight. He succeeded in representing his sitters' individuality by closely observing their dominant traits. His pictures of Breton folk life, such as *La Procession à Penmarc'h*, were similarly seen as powerful expressions of the Breton *Volksgeist*. Indeed, Henry Marcel, who between 1903 and 1905 was the highest state official for Beaux-Arts, saw these paintings as true portraits of the 'Breton race', whereas Bénédite believed that Simon provided a faithful expression 'of the environment, of the soil, and of the race'. In Simon's pictures, simple peasants and fishermen of Brittany appeared to live in close contact with nature and to have been shaped by their 'milieu', or, as Mourey said, 'humankind [was] in perfect accord with its surroundings'. Cottet's paintings inspired similar remarks. Mourey particularly praised the

Repas d'Adieu (which Bénédite acquired for the Luxembourg Museum), in which the people's austere melancholy and sadness were shown as the fatal consequence of nature's hardships. The people's silent, meditative demeanour was accompanied by the indifference of sky and sea in the background behind the windows of this triptych's central scene. This critic concluded that by depicting significant moments of Breton folk life in sombre colours Cottet succeeded in evoking the local *Volksgeist*: [18]

> … how can M. Cottet be blamed if, in striving to render as impressive as possible a country such as Brittany, with all its old traditions, its primitive manners, its mysticism, its air of wildness and fatality, if, having to evoke the spirit of the soil and its people, he should choose its most impressive manifestations, those which have acted most strongly upon his own sensibility? The essential point is that his manner of realizing his work is in adequate accordance with the very spirit of its subject.[19]

According to most critics, Simon and Cottet depicted the harmony between the inhabitants, the sea, the land and the sky in Brittany. The sea generally constituted the dominant menacing presence, but it was the sky that foretold the weather and thus signalled whether it was wise to go out fishing. The resigned, diligent, simple men and women, residing in small granite houses seemed to live in close contact with their surroundings. Their gestures were instinctive and only an almost superstitious religious belief could reconcile them with their destiny. Simon's pictures in particular testify to religion's central role. In almost all of his outdoor scenes a church is the most impressive building and in other pictures he showed pilgrimages and processions. Bénédite even argued that by depicting menhirs and other megalithic holy places he stressed continuity with past religious feeling.[20]

Thus by representing these traditionally dressed people engaged in typical activities against the background of a village in its natural surroundings, Simon and Cottet tried to penetrate the collective 'soul' of this part of Brittany. This, at least, is what most critics saw in their pictures. They also agreed that Simon and Cottet's paintings should not only be judged on their high artistic qualities, but also on their significance. What did these pictures mean? Did they merely record a somewhat picturesque part of France, thus stimulating knowledge and awareness of the beauty and variety of the Fatherland, or did they convey a more profound message?

There was general agreement in the nineteenth century that Brittany was one of the most primitive regions of France. Time seemed to have come to a halt in its villages where prehistoric and medieval elements persisted and modern civilization, seemingly, had not yet arrived. Not all critics appreciated this primitiveness. Some, like Raymond Bouyer, openly rejected the region and its rural population as backward and as an obstacle to progress. In Brittany, as painted by Simon and Cottet, he only saw ignorance, brutality, degeneration, violence and superstition.[21] Mostly, however, the local population as depicted by Simon and Cottet was seen as authentic and pure. Living in close contact with nature and respecting ancestral traditions, they

still preserved their ancient collective personality. Thus, when speaking of Cottet's pictures of the Breton fishing communities, Bénédite said that it was possible to deduce a more general and mythical meaning from them:

> [these representations] remove the distance between the people from today and their distant ancestors and show that across the times, across the religions, across the civilizations, across everything that passes, these maritime races have preserved their former character intact, and their moral unity entirely.[22]

Their world, however, was threatened by modern civilization, by trains and schooling on one hand and by alcohol, political strife, disbelief and degeneration on the other.

The appreciation of the countryside, as backward and uncivilized on the one hand, or close to nature and morally intact on the other, had not changed fundamentally compared to earlier decades in which, for example, the paintings of Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton had received similar comments.[23] However, the main difference was that now both critics and painters did not refer to the countryside and its inhabitants in a general sense, but were very specific in their references. The countryside did not so much embody a generic heartland of the nation, but represented the 'soul' of a specific region, and had to be represented with its own particular natural environment and cultural traditions.

Yet, Brittany was a special case. It was not just a primitive region, like Tahiti or Morocco, but one of the most savage areas of France. Although contrary to most parts of the country, Brittany had deep Celtic roots and few Roman traces, it was seen as one of the most typical of French regions. Cultural practices which had disappeared elsewhere in France supposedly still existed in Brittany. When Bénédite discussed some of Simon and Cottet's Breton scenes he spoke of 'ethnic' and 'antehistorical survivals'. Hence according to some, traces of the true, original character of France could still be studied in this remote part of the country.[22] To many nationalists this implied that Brittany might be able to provide guidelines for national regeneration. They did not want France to return to this primitive stage, but believed she should harmoniously fuse international modernity with her own historical character.[23]

The way paintings by Simon and Cottet were interpreted by most critics can be easily connected with the new type of more activist and subjectivist nationalism. Simon and Cottet followed Barrès' maxim that contemporary culture should reflect the *Volksgeist*. The French popular spirit, according to many, could probably best be studied in its most primary form in some of the most remote areas of the country; this was exactly what Simon and Cottet did. At the same time, their stress on the idiosyncratic nature of Breton folk life contributed to the rise of regionalism. Although they were not born in Brittany, they made an important contribution to the definition of a distinct regional identity. Consequently they were a source of inspiration for young Breton painters such as Lemordant and Méhuet, some of whom eventually became involved in the regionalist movement.

Germany

In Germany the relation between artists who painted similar themes as Simon and Cottet and the new type of nationalism was more direct. They were all well acquainted with the ideas of Langbehn, the most influential theorist of the new nationalist ideology and author of the 1890 bestseller *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as educator). The painter Fritz Mackensen, for example, discussed this book extensively with his friends. He saw his decision to establish himself in the tiny village of Worpswede in the moors north of Bremen confirmed by Langbehn, whose book contained quite a few chapters on art. According to Langbehn, good art must be national art, which meant that it should have roots in the national artistic tradition and close contact with the folk culture of the German countryside. He maintained that individuality was characteristic of the Germanic peoples and that the most individual and therefore most 'German' artist had been Rembrandt. However, contemporary art followed international trends and was produced in major towns. So, Langbehn advised German painters to move to the countryside and develop a new, original art form with strong local roots. He argued further that national character was best preserved in the northern German countryside where Roman and Slavonic influences were almost nonexistent. This highly nationalistic view did not mean that he completely rejected contemporary foreign influences. He dismissed the existing 'biased German peasant painting' and maintained that Germany needed a 'healthy, clear and vigorous' modern art, which could come into existence by adopting some of the technical innovations of the Impressionists. He even advised German painters to combine the Impressionists' stress on the moment with the eternal character of the 'popular soul' in order to give a lively picture of contemporary local culture.[24]

Some German painters followed Langbehn's advice, adopting at least some of the Impressionists' lessons, showing a clear preference for north German coastal plains, staying for longer or shorter periods in isolated villages, and demonstrating a lively interest in local folk culture. At the same time, their attitude in many ways resembled that of similar painters, such as Simon and Cottet, from other countries.

Although nationalism during this period appeared to be a more powerful force in Germany than in France, as many German authors lamented their country's lack of international influence and artistic independence, this new type of painting was not better represented in Germany than elsewhere. Bantzer, Dettmann, Engel and Mackensen had more national and international success than the secondary French painters of regional folk life, but none reached the level of Simon, Cottet or the Spanish regionalist Zuloaga. Nor did they receive much attention in foreign art magazines. Their teaching activities may have absorbed much of their energy, as most became a professor at one of the German art academies relatively early in their career.

As with the *Bande noire*, some of these German painters were singled out for their painting technique, although this time not as an alternative to impressionism but as an importation of it. However, Bantzer, Dettmann and Engel differed in many ways

Figure 3 Carl Bantzer, *Dance from the Schwalm*, 1898. Marburg, Marburger Universitätmuseum (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg).

from the French Impressionists. In some of his major paintings Carl Bantzer used an Impressionistic technique to achieve a sense of directness and suggest movement, but he did so on huge, carefully composed canvasses upon which he sometimes worked for more than a year and which were meant to be shown at a salon. His *Abendmahl in einer hessischen Dorfkirche* (Communion at a Hessian Village Church, 1892), *Schwälmer Tanz* (Dance from the Schwalm, 1898, Figure 3), *Hessischer Erntearbeiter* (Hessian Harvester, 1907) and *Abendruhe* (Evening Rest, 1912) all portrayed traditionally dressed people from the Schwalm region near Marburg. Like Simon, instead of choosing modern urban themes he depicted important events in the rural calendar such as weddings, attending church, local feasts, harvesting, and resting after work. In his large paintings he gave a monumental picture of these simple, but honest country folk.[25]

Ludwig Dettmann applied Impressionistic techniques to traditional genres, such as religious and historical painting and genre scenes. Thus in his *Überführung der Leiche Kaiser Wilhelms I. vom Palais zum Dom* (1895) he took a kind of monumental 'snapshot' of a contemporary historical event: the winter night when the coffin of the old Emperor William I was conveyed from his palace to the cathedral. Works like *Arbeit* (Work, 1894) and *Das deutsche Volkslied* (German Folk Song, 1895) were executed as triptychs, in which, in a way similar to Cottet, simple folk scenes were presented with an almost religious aura. He often worked in artists' colonies on the north German coast such as Ahrenshoop, Ekensund and Nidden where he produced many paintings, such as *Heimfahrt vom Kirchdorf* (Return Home from Kirchdorf, 1895) and *Fischerkirchhof* (Fishermen's Cemetery 1895), depicting the simple and authentic life of these relatively isolated communities.[26]

Figure 4 Otto Heinrich Engel, *Memorial Service on Föhr*, 1904. Husum, Nissen-Haus.

His friend Otto Heinrich Engel painted many of the same motifs using a similar style and technique. Often accompanied by Dettmann, he stayed for long periods in Ekensund and Föhr island. Some of his best known paintings are the triptych *Von de Waterkant* (From the 'Waterkant', 1898), *Arm in Arm zum Fest (Friesische Mädchen)* (Arm in Arm to the Feast; Frisian Girls, 1902) and *Trauerfeier auf Föhr* (Memorial Service on Föhr, 1904; Figure 4). He clearly preferred to paint wedding scenes, funerals, local feasts, people in traditional costumes, and typical local activities such as fishing and rope making.[27]

Fritz Mackensen was an exception as he did not go to an existing artists' colony, but founded a new one with some friends – most of them specialized in landscape painting – in the moor village of Worpswede. The influence of impressionist techniques was less clear in his work and whereas most of his colleagues' pictures were quite similar to the cheerful images of Breton folk life by Lucien Simon, Mackensen's paintings were more closely related to Cottet's gloomy images. Both shared a preference for the hardships and tragic moments faced by the villagers they were living with. This manifests itself in some of Mackensen's huge salon paintings such as *Mutter und Kind* (Mother and Child, 1892) also known as the *Moormadonna*, in which we see a young women with clogs taking a rest from work on a barrow to nurse

her baby, *Gottesdienst im Freien* (Open-Air Service, 1895), *Die trauernde Familie* (The Mourning Family, 1896) and *Die Scholle* (Native Soil, 1898).[28]

Although every painter put his own accents on them, all focused on the most salient moments of rural life – on the natural and traditional events that regulated human existence in these untouched villages. Birth, marriage, death, local festivities, sowing, harvesting, taking a rest from work and going to church on Sundays, were depicted time after time by these painters.

As in France, many critics understood their pictures as convincing interpretations of the local *Volksgeist*. Most observers asserted that these painters should not be seen as mere realists. They did not offer an empty, 'soulless' representation of nature, but by simplifying and eliminating the unnecessary, they tried to reach the 'essence' and give a sensitive and poetic interpretation of visual reality.[29] From their pictures one could understand how the monotony of the plains, sky and sea determined local life. The peasants, fishermen and shepherds depicted still lived in close contact with nature. In order to fully understand the interpenetration of man and nature, these painters stayed for longer periods of time among these simple folk. By observing life in these villages, interacting with its inhabitants, and plunging into local nature, their paintings should ultimately be considered an organic product of the spirit of the land and its people.[30] Or as the biographer Friedrich Deibel commented upon the paintings of Dettmann:

> The farmers, fishers and shepherds of the coast of Schleswig-Holstein, these simple children of nature with their joys and sorrows, their toilsome struggle with the barren soil of the land and their struggle with the elements are painterly brought to live in Dettmann's art … In piles of images the painter has found time and again new motifs to artistically vivify this people in the framework of its landscape … [W]e can learn new things and peculiarities about the soul of this people and the soul of this landscape from his art.[31]

Real national art, these critics argued, could only be produced by those who have an intimate bond with the earth, who are rooted in native soil. This did not necessarily mean that one had to be born in the place where one worked. An intimate feeling of personal affinity and identification was indispensable, however.[32]

A few critical reviewers nevertheless remarked that the selection of motifs, especially by Mackensen and the other Worpswede painters was deliberately one-sided. They only showed the traditional, desolate parts of the village, not the comfortable new houses of a few rich farmers or Worpswede's modern economic activities. Nor did they paint the clusters of bicycle riders or elegant carriages that arrived with good weather from nearby Bremen.[33]

As in France, some observers were aware that the traditional world found in these isolated villages was threatened by modern civilization. Traditional dress, like other habits, was likely to disappear under the influence of towns, military service and the levelling advance of modernity.[34] But, depicting these primitive communities did

not only have an archaeological value. Some German critics used an argument left implicit by their French colleagues when they openly praised work as an 'elevating ethical force'. By this remark they meant primarily the labour of the fishermen and farmers seen in the paintings. These countrymen still went to work cheerfully; they accepted labour as an intrinsic part of life and did not complain or protest – as did many uprooted urban workers. Thus Mackensen's *Die Scholle* is called a 'hymn to work, which promises peace'.[35]

The painters themselves also commented upon the moral value of the rural scenes. Dettmann, who according to his biographer was not a social critic asked himself in a letter: 'which worker or artisan still loves, like in former times, his own work and creations?' adding that he hoped that 'through my paintings, many may again enjoy work'.[38] Bantzer – although writing some 20 years later – also presented rural simplicity and zeal as an example to his fellow countrymen. In a longer essay on his native region of Hesse, he maintained that the impression he got from the farmers of the Schwalm area was that of 'proud, self-conscious and free' men. They formed a type of man, who

> … in general was diligent and after sour weeks also knew joyful feasts, feasts of cheerfulness and feasts of work. On Sundays the busy churchgoing showed the faithful holding on to the Church … Everywhere the meaningful customs and traditions from the cradle to the grave were still alive and enriched people's existence … Life and work was one … Striking also was the modesty and contentment of the poor.[39]

Most of the critics agreed that the paintings of these rural communities could have a moral impact and cure the soul, conferring a sense of power, seriousness and peace, and reinforcing a sense of belonging. Thus Paul Warncke, speaking of a particular poetical image of Worpswede, maintained:

> Like a fresh breath from the sea it blows towards us; its name speaks of strength and health, of quiet seriousness and sustained, iron, patient work. An unparalleled national feeling comes over us: joy in German art and German soil, joy in the glowing colourful beauty of a plain, native landscape, and joy, proud joy about the men, who with open heart and clear eyes sought, found and revealed you.[40]

Nevertheless, these harmonious rural pictures should not only be seen as a nationalist antidote against the social unrest of urban lower classes. These scenes could also be a medicine for other social groups in big towns where the bustle of the masses and the metropolitan noise made people nervous and irritable and where the longing for comfort and fashionable products had weakened the collective identity. Thus, referring again to Worpswede, Andreas Gildemeister claimed:

> However, I would like to know which popular tribe bears the character of his taciturn being more plainly, truthfully and powerfully on his countenance

> than ours. Without a doubt this silent, genuine Nature and these people with their taciturn confidence exert an impulse towards strength and seriousness and tranquillity upon strangers who observe them with open eyes. When this strength and seriousness now, by means of art also affect the observer, who lives far from this land and its character – would that not be a worthy moral influence on our weak, absent-minded, nervous generation?[41]

Thus, as in France, both German critics and painters seemed to agree that a reorientation inspired by these traditional, rural communities could regenerate the nation and strengthen its threatened identity.

Spain

Folk-inspired painting was more important in Spain than in France or Germany. This tendency arrived somewhat later in Spain, but gained ground rapidly. The artistic scene and the biennial salon in Madrid were both still dominated by academic painting, but regionalism, as it was called in Spain, became its main contestant. Even Spain's internationally best known, *juste-milieu* painter Joaquín Sorolla adopted the new trend. When asked in 1911 to decorate the library of the Hispanic Society in New York with the most important scenes from Spanish history, Sorrolla convinced the commissioners that it would be better to represent his native country through its regions. As a consequence he travelled the country and dedicated some eight years to painting Spain's regions on huge canvasses.[42] Strikingly, in Barcelona, where the Catalan regionalist movement was very powerful and even started to agitate for political autonomy, this type of painting was almost non-existent. Although regional motives and arguments were present, most Catalan painters chose to connect their collective identity with international Parisian modernity, whereas a conservative minority tightened relations with Catholicism.[43]

Spanish regionalist painting should not however be considered backward. On the contrary, most of the painters who followed the new trend adopted a somewhat more modern style than most of their French and German counterparts. This was particularly the case with Ignacio Zuloaga, a painter who started his career in Paris and became internationally renowned for his paintings of Spanish folk life. In Paris he maintained close contact with important post-Impressionist artists like Carrière, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec and he befriended Emile Bernard and Auguste Rodin. In his early years he was influenced by Art Nouveau arabesques and Gauguin and Bernard's *cloisonniste* style; later he frequently used deformations to stress the expressive strength of his pictures. After he turned to regional themes, around 1896, his work became more stylized, decorative and solid, but somewhat less vivid than that of those who remained under the spell of Impressionism such as Simon, Bantzer and Dettmann.

Like Gauguin and Bernard, Zuloaga was fascinated by primitivism. In 1895, the same year Gauguin returned to Tahiti and two years after Bernard went to Egypt,

Figure 5 Ignacio Zuloaga, *The Christ of Blood*, 1911. Madrid, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

Zuloaga left Paris for Seville in order to live among beggars, dancers and bullfighters in a *corral* – a traditional tenement house around a common patio. Here he found the material and inspiration for his paintings. One of the first major results of his new style was *Víspera de la corrida* (The Eve of the Bullfight, 1898), in which he painted eight elegantly dressed Andalusian women accompanied by a picador and a greyhound taking a look at the bulls on the eve of the bullfight. In the background we can discern a village, dominated by a church and a castle.

After a few years he moved to the small Castilian town of Segovia, where he did most of his painting, including *Gregorio en Sepúlveda* (Gregorio in Sepúlveda, 1908) and *El Cristo de la Sangre* (The Christ of Blood, 1911; Figure 5), which caused a stir at the Parisian salon and other international exhibitions. Contrary to the farmers painted by his French and German colleagues, his life-size local types were not generally engaged in any activity, but posed in front of a characteristic village or small town embedded in the landscape, thus harmoniously fusing the environment with remnants from the past.[44]

Zuloaga was not the only Spanish painters of regional folk life who preferred Castile. Secondary painters like Eduardo Chicharro and Marceliano Santa María were born in this centrally located region and painted it often. Basques, like Zuloaga himself and the Zubiaurre brothers, also had a clear preference for Castilian themes

and the same applied to the Valencian Manuel Benedito and the Galician Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor. They opted for themes similar to those chosen by their French and German colleagues: baptisms, weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, pilgrimages, local feasts, and agricultural work, all in a traditional setting. Unlike Galicia, the Basque country, and Brittany in France, Castile was a not peripheral region, nor especially known for its pre-Roman cultural heritage. On the contrary, it had played a leading role in Spanish national history colonizing the Americas and consequently acquiring enormous economic wealth. Yet stagnation since the seventeenth century seemed to preserve the past so that it seemed to many to be the most authentic and profoundly Spanish part of the country. In this way it performed a similar function as Brittany in France and the coastal areas in Germany.[45]

The critical reception of this type of painting in Spain was almost completely determined by Zuloaga's international success which dated from the early years of the twentieth century. Whereas in Germany few had commented on the biased image some Worpswede painters gave of their village, in Spain this argument was frequently used against Zuloaga. Many critics even argued that his work was unpatriotic because he perpetuated the myth of Spain as a backward and barbaric country, by only showing the decadence of the Spanish countryside and the misery, barbarity and stupidity of its population.[46] He was consequently boycotted by the Spanish art establishment from the very start and his work could only rarely be seen in his native country.

Other authors did not so much criticize Zuloaga's presentation of the Castilian countryside as the heartland of the nation, but its interpretation. Instead of his gloomy, tragic pictures of poor and sometimes even deformed Castilian villagers, they preferred Sorolla's cheerful, brightly coloured images. This discussion of what the two most famous contemporary Spanish painters chose as subject matter did not restrict itself to the specialized magazines but became a subject of national debate.[47]

Zuloaga was chiefly defended by prominent writers from his own generation, among whom were Ramiro de Maeztu, Azorín and the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. All three, at least during part of their career, defended a type of exalted nationalism that had much in common with that of Ganivet and Barrès. Azorín and Maeztu did not always praise Zuloaga's choice of subject, but in general they agreed that the rural Spain represented in his paintings, contrary to the sometimes superficial modernity of the towns, was indeed the real Spain. Unamuno even asserted that in few works of art the Spanish 'soul' was better reflected than in Zuloaga's paintings.[48] Other painters occasioned less debate. The critics generally saw their paintings as a striking representation of the local *Volksgeist*. Thus it was said of Sotomayor that he 'reached the Galician race's innermost soul', whereas Chicharro's paintings convincingly characterized Castile's 'tradition and race'. One critic even tried to convince Benedito to stop painting in Brittany and Dutch fishing villages and instead find a Spanish region that would correspond with both his own and the general Spanish 'pictorial disposition'.[49]

In contrast to their German colleagues, Spanish critics did not present diligent villagers as an example to the urban working classes. Nevertheless, most painters were praised as exemplary in their seriousness, perseverance and dedication. Zuloaga was even called the 'first among Spanish workers'.[50] More important, however, was that these painters proved that Spain was not limited to the civilized surface layer of the major cities. After the humiliating defeat in the 1898 war against the United States, known simply as 'el Desastre', most Spaniards were very aware of their country's fundamental weaknesses. If Spain were to modernize one could not overlook the disastrous situation of the Spanish countryside as, in fact, many politicians did. Some thus interpreted Zuloaga's paintings as the 'protest of a patriot'. His works, Maeztu remarked, 'offend our vanity [and] strengthen our longing for reform'; another critic called them 'expiatory practices'.[51]

Only a few critics explicitly saw the countryside as the main source of national regeneration. José Francés, for example, after a visit to an exhibition of Galician art in La Coruña confirmed that in this region, with its strong Celtic roots, the 'full reintegration of man with nature, which would redeem him from all the civilized artifices and falsities' could still be found. Another critic asserted that 'the creative fibre of the old national spirit' had almost completely disappeared in Spain's upper classes and that it could only be found in 'anarchical and anachronistic forms' in Spain's 'steppe fields and somnolent towns' where painters like Zuloaga attempted to revive it. After having expressed doubts in earlier years, Azorín saw Zuloaga as a painter who tried to capture the most permanent and fundamental characteristics of the Spanish 'spirit'. He even maintained that artists were obliged to discover and express this vigorous and powerful Spanish reality.[52] Implicit in all these remarks was the conviction that a reorientation on the idiosyncratic national characteristics, which were best preserved in the countryside, could help the nation be more faithful to its own spirit and thus regenerate its strength and vigour. More directly than in France and Germany, in Spain the debate on the representation of the countryside of one region was intimately connected with the future of the whole nation and the search for concrete political remedies for the supposed ills of the country.

Zuloaga himself seemed to have agreed with the interpretation of his paintings by Maeztu, Azorín and Unamuno. In private letters from around 1912 Zuloaga claimed that he tried to 'synthesize the Castilian soul' and unravel the 'psychology of a race' in his paintings. In 1913, during an unforeseen encounter in Pamplona, he explained to Maeztu that Parisian refinement only meant calculations, numbers and decadence, whereas in the traditional Spanish countryside one could still find strength, passion and vitality. On this occasion Zuloaga was accompanied by the famous composer Maurice Ravel and some other modern French intellectuals who according to Maeztu were all supporters of Bergson's philosophy and Barrès' writing.[53] In fact, Zuloaga maintained friendly contacts with Barrès, the French propagandist of the new organic nationalism. On the occasion of the publication of his book on El Greco in 1913, Zuloaga even painted a huge portrait of the French author with El Greco's hometown Toledo in

the background. Perhaps this tells us something about Zuloaga's affinities to this new type of nationalism. Nevertheless, as Zuloaga was neither politically active nor openly expressive of his political opinions until a few decades later, we cannot conclude that he fully adhered to Barrès' neo-conservative nationalist message.

Conclusion

These painters, who turned in a new artistic direction during the 1890s, clearly formed part of a broader cultural movement that showed a new interest in folklore, typical landscapes, vernacular buildings, traditional handicrafts, and other elements of traditional rural popular culture and of which the new organic nationalism and the fast growing regional movements were also manifestations. In Germany this new interest in the local heritage and folk culture is often described by the adjective *völkisch* (popular, referring especially to the traditional rural population) and the noun *Heimat* (Homeland, which could refer to a small area, a region or even the whole Fatherland). In France and Spain the term 'regionalist' is more widely used. Thus the German *Heimatbewegung* could be translated as regionalist movement. As the designation 'regionalist' is quite neutral and can easily be applied to other countries it seems to me more apt than its German equivalents to describe this new interest for the vernacular culture of the countryside. However, can we also speak of 'regionalist art'? And how did 'regionalist painting' relate to the new regionalist movement and the new type of exalted nationalism that emerged about the same time?

To answer this question we must first analyse the characteristics and limitations of this artistic current. It was not a movement with its own manifestos and exhibitions such as Impressionism, Cubism or Futurism. Regionalist painters operated within the existing Salon system, where paintings were generally exhibited by genre. Reviewers usually followed this classification, but often linked painters with certain stylistic affinities or those who worked in the same city, village or region. Therefore, at the start of their careers, Cottet and Simon were seen as prominent members of the informal *Bande noire*. After this stylistic term became outdated they continued to be discussed together but now as painters of Breton subjects. Furthermore, salon marketing techniques did not include manifestos or separate group exhibitions. Painters often tried to impress both the public and the jury by using huge formats, choosing striking subjects, and developing a moderately personal style. Their goal was not artistic innovation for its own sake and they did not direct themselves to a small clientele of connoisseurs as did avant-garde artists later.

Nonetheless, we have seen that this type of painting was clearly distinguished by both art critics and (at least part of) the public as an important and innovative current within mainstream art. It was even seen as one of the alternatives out of the cul-de-sac into which the triumph of Impressionism had led. It showed a new, idealistic path away from the realistic superficiality of impressionistic art, one that stressed the importance of a significant and meaningful subject.

Another conclusion is that regionalist art was more intimately related to the new nationalism than it was to various regional movements. Only a few regionalist painters worked in the region in which they were born. Those who did were generally representatives of a younger generation and only some of them eventually developed connections with the local regionalist movement. Most painters operated within a national setting. They studied in the major art centres and most of them also lived there, at least part of the year. They did not work mainly for local or regional art lovers, but directed themselves primarily to the national art market. Even those like Zuloaga, who primarily produced for the international market, were seen as typical representatives of their fatherland. Thus in general regionalist painters were not so much concerned with the identity of their native region, but with the idiosyncratic characteristics of their fatherland. They therefore evidenced a clear preference for those areas that were seen as the most typical part of the country. This heartland of the nation could be found where foreign influences (especially the unifying influence of the Roman Empire) had been weak and contemporary modern civilization was almost absent. The soul of the nation could thus be found in an almost pure state in isolated coastal and rural communities in peripheral regions. Although these painters certainly played an important role in visually defining the identity of specific regions – which often would be profitably adopted by the tourist business – they were in fact more concerned with trying to reveal the most profound character of the nation as a whole.

These painters' work, at least as most critics interpreted it, was clearly related to the new, more subjective and populist nationalism. This manifested itself in their stress on regional variety, their quest to discover the true 'soul' of the nation, and their interest in contemporary, popular culture in the countryside. Their interpretation of the nation also was subjective and organic. They did not want to depict the outer surface, but sought to penetrate the essence of local folk life and produce a collective psychological portrait by expressing the organic unity of the population with its traditions and natural surroundings. They also participated in the creation of a truly national culture by consciously choosing national or regional subjects and trying to develop a corresponding national style. In the eyes of the new nationalists, however, their work had a fundamental weakness: painting continued to be a quite elitist art form and was therefore not very well suited to spreading the new nationalist message. Although illustrated magazines, in which these paintings were reproduced, reached an increasing larger public, in general their audience remained limited to the urban upper and middle classes. Other media were better suited to spread the new nationalist message to a broader public and consequently regionalist painting was slightly disregarded by most propagators of the new national gospel.

Regionalist painting was probably least ignored by Spanish nationalists. As organized labour in Spain was still relatively weak and did not constitute a significant menace to the existing political system, the need to nationalize the masses was less urgent than in France and Germany. Thus the painters' limited audience was

not a major disadvantage. As a consequence of the need for reform to combat the relative backwardness of the country – which was widely felt after 1898, their paintings were generally interpreted as a plea to dedicate more attention to rural areas where the majority of the population still lived. Reform policies should not only take into account the modern, urban parts of the country, but should in particular attempt to improve the situation in the countryside. Their paintings, and especially some of Zuloaga's best known works, therefore seemed to give a less idealized picture of an untouched, harmoniously living rural community, and instead also depict more negative aspects as degeneration, superstition and brutality, which according to the critics could be attributed to the neglectful attitude of the country's politicians.

An argument also heard in Spain and Germany, but most strongly made in France, was that isolated villages such as those painted by the regionalists conserved national traditions that had disappeared elsewhere. To prevent national decadence, France should preserve its national character and combine ancient national traditions and customs, found in their purest form in these villages, with international modernity. The strengthening of French culture was first and foremost a middle-class task. Unlike the cosmopolitan upper-classes and the uprooted urban working class, middle-class Frenchmen still had a living bond with national tradition as well as knowledge of innovations elsewhere.

More so than in Spain or France, rural villages in Germany were presented as harmonious, hard working communities in which people still lived in close contact with both nature and the past. These organic countryside communities, in which everyone knew his or her place and performed his or her duty, were thus presented as an alternative to the internationalist ideologies of the working class which aimed to overthrow the existing political system and form a classless society in which all the bonds with tradition, the past, and the national environment would be broken.

If we compare discourse on regionalist painting in these three countries strong similarities among the various interpretations are revealed. The same arguments were used nearly everywhere. While in some countries certain issues received more attention, these differences mostly concerned nuances. Whereas nationalists underlined the differences between countries and regions, in so doing they all used the same rhetoric and arguments. Consequently painters searching for the remains of their original *Volksgeist* went to remote, unspoiled regions to paint hard-working peasants, fishermen and villagers who supposedly still lived in close communion with their surroundings and maintained a living bond with ancestral traditions. They did not 'invent' these new regional identities – which presumably reconnected the nation with a remote ethnic past – from scratch, but their representations were at least extremely biased and idealized. They assembled a new identity by selecting just a few useful elements, using the same criteria in all three countries under review.

The pictures of these artists also had a clear ideological message. More than with the aggressive and exalted gospel of the new nationalist prophets, their works should be associated with a new, more widely supported phase in the nation-building

process. By revealing the nation's true soul they all hoped to bring the nation back on course, identify its 'true', original character, stimulate a new sense of belonging and in this way contribute to the regeneration of their fatherland. Their paintings could be seen, and indeed were considered as important contributions to the ever more urgent nation-building efforts of the national elites. Like local folk museums and regionalist authors, these painters, by converting plain rural themes into high art, transformed local customs, habits, traditions and crafts into an essential part of the country's national culture, thus subtly facilitating the identification of the lower classes with the national heritage and its corresponding identity.

Notes

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1. Monika Flacke (ed.), *Mythen der Nationen: Ein europäisches Panorama* (Berlin 1998).
2. Magdalena Dabrowski, *French Landscape: The Modern Vision 1880–1920* (New York 1999); Richard Thomson (ed.), *Framing France. The Representation of Landscape in France, 1870–1914* (Manchester and New York 1998).
3. Magdalena Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik und die expressionistische Kunst. Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie 1911–1912* (München 1990); Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsh (eds), *Art, Culture and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge 2003); James D. Herbert, *Fauve Painting. The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven and London 1992); Jeremy Howard, *Art Nouveau. International and National Styles in Europe* (Manchester 1996).
4. See for example: Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983; Cambridge 1995) 263–309 and Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris 1999).
5. See e.g. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890–1930* (rev. edn. New York 1977) and Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder c. 1848–c. 1918* (Cambridge 1989).
6. See e.g. Maurice Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (Paris 1902); Ángel Ganivet, *Idearium español* (Madrid 1897); Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen* (Leipzig 1890).
7. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley 1990); Karl Ditt, 'Die deutsche Heimatbewegung 1871–1945', in Will Cremer and Ansgar Klein (eds), *Heimat. Analysen, Themen, Perspektiven* (Bielefeld 1990), 135–55; Eric Storm, 'Regionalism in History, 1890–1945: The Cultural Approach', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (2003), 251–65; Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Écrire la France. Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération* (Paris 1991).
8. Achille Segard, 'Charles Cottet, Painter of Breton Life and Scenes', *The Studio* (January 1912), 269–77; Bernd Küster and Jürgen Wittstock, *Carl Bantzer. Aufbruch und Tradition* (Frankfurt am Main 2002); Carlos Reyero and Mireia Freixa, *Pintura y escultura en España (1800–1910)* (Madrid 1999), 464–67.
9. Some of the best known painters who produced similar paintings for at least part of their career were Erik Werenskiold, Anders Zorn, Akseli Gallén-Kallela and Alfons Mucha. Less known were

Jacek Malczewski, Jozef Uprka, Jean Mrkvitchka, Victor Gilsoul and Ettore Tito.

10. Henri Marcel, 'Lucien Simon. Artistes contemporains', *La Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne*, Vol. 1 (1903), 123–5; Raymond Bouyer, 'L'oeuvre de Lucien Simon', *L'Art et les Artistes*, Vol. 6 (February 1908), 528; Gabriel Mourey, 'Charles Cottet's "Au Pays de la Mer" and Other Works', *The Studio* (January 1899), 240.
11. Bouyer, 'L'oeuvre de Lucien Simon', 531.
12. Léonce Bénédite, 'Lucien Simon', *Art et Décoration. Revue mensuelle d'art moderne*, Vol. 1 (1906), 25–37; Léonce Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', *Art et Décoration. Revue mensuelle d'Art moderne* (April 1904), 102; Walther Gensel, 'Eine neue Pariser Künstlergruppe (Lucien Simon – Charles Cottet – René Ménard)', *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, Vol. 10 (1899), 20–33.
13. Léon David (pseud. Max Jacob), 'Lucien Simon', *Le Moniteur des Arts* (30 December 1898); André Saglio, 'Lucien Simon', *L'Art Décoratif*, (December 1902), 355.
14. Louis Aubert, 'L'oeuvre de Charles Cottet', *Revue de Paris* (15 June 1911), 761–81; Karl Eugen Schmidt, *Französische Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1905) 150–9.
15. André Cariou, *Lucien Simon* (Paris 2002), 33.
16. Aubert, 'L'oeuvre de Charles Cottet', 778. See for Cottet also, André Cariou, *Charles Cottet et la Bretagne* (Raillé 1988).
17. Mourey, 'Charles Cottet's "Au Pays de la Mer"', 228 and 240; Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', 106 and 116; Bénédite, 'Lucien Simon', 28–9 and 32–3; Gabriel Mourey, 'The Art of M. Lucien Simon', *The Studio* (April 1902), 157–8 and 170; Raymond Bouyer, 'Charles Cottet', *L'Art et les Artistes*, Vol. 12 (1910–1911), 167.
18. Marcel, 'Lucien Simon. Artistes contemporains', 134–5; Léonce Bénédite, 'Lucien Simon, aquarelliste', *Art et Décoration. Revue mensuelle d'art moderne*, Vol. 2 (1909), 70; Mourey, 'The Art of M. Lucien Simon', 164 and 169; Mourey, 'Charles Cottet's 'Au Pays de la Mer'', 235 and 239.
19. Mourey, 'Charles Cottet's "Au Pays de la Mer"', 239.
20. Jean Chantavoine, 'Artistes contemporains. M. Charles Cottet', *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (August 1911), 110–12; Segard, 'Charles Cottet', 273–74; Bénédite, 'Lucien Simon', 34–6.
21. Bouyer, 'L'oeuvre de Lucien Simon', 528.
22. Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', 112.
23. Neil McWilliam, 'Le paysan au salon: Critique d'art et construction d'une classe sous le Second Empire' in Jean-Paul Bouillon (ed.), *La critique d'art en France 1850–1900* (Saint-Etienne 1989), 81–95.
24. Léonce Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', *L'Art Décoratif* (1911), 226 and 232; and Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', 112.
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