

**POLITICAL REGIONALISMS IN A GLOBALIZED
WORLD-SYSTEM: LOCAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS
IN EUROPE**

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ABSTRACT

In this article we shall put forward a typology of the various expressions of political regionalism in Europe grounded in the assumption of the existence of two basic yet, surprisingly enough, not fully divergent forms; i.e. *ethnic* regionalism and *transnational* regionalism. In the first case, we paradoxically encounter a scaled down replica of the national State (Catalonia, Basque Country, “Padania” etc.) while in the second case, apparently with a post-ethnic connotation, just as paradoxically we are dealing with transnational yet not entirely *non-ethnic* projects (Black Sea Region, Tatarstan etc.).

KEY WORDS: Political Anthropology, Europe, Glocalization, National State, Sovereignty, Political Regionalism, Ethnicity, Transnationalism.

ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje siekiama aiškiau susisteminti įvairias Europos politinio regionalizmo sąvokas, grindžiamas dviem esminėmis, bet (deja) nepakankamai apibrėžtomis sampratomis – „etninis regionalizmas“ ir „transnacionalinis regionalizmas“. Pirmuoju atveju paprastai yra apsiribojama laipsniška nacionalinės valstybės regionų įvardijimo tvarka (Katalonija, Baskų šalis, „Padanija“ ar pan.), tuo tarpu antruoju atveju šiai sampratai suteikiamas papildomas postetninės reikšmės atspalvis, pasiliekant tarptautinėje, nevienalytėje etninėje erdvėje (Juodosios jūros regionas, Tatarstanas ir t. t.).

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: politinė antropologija, Europa, glocalizacija, nacionalinė valstybė, suverenitetas, politinis regionalizmas, etniškumas, transnacionalizmas.

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Illusions and spectres of globalization

For a long time the first apostles of globalization would have us believe that the world is in the midst of an epoch-making socioeconomic, political, and cultural mutation by which all societies are coming closer together and consequently becoming more similar. Whether neo-liberal or not, enthusiasts of this process view globalization as the chance to unify the world thus making it more fair because less unequal¹. In which case, quite unlikely at any rate, globalization would ensure a totalizing process of democratization².

¹ See: FUKUYAMA, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Macmillan: Free Press, 1992.

² GIORDANO, Christian. Zur Regionalisierung der Identitäten und der Konflikte. Die Rückkehr des Nationalstaates und die Versuchung der *territorialen Ethnizität* in Mittel und Osteuropa. In: Hettlage, Robert & Vogt, Ludgera (eds.). *Identitäten in der modernen Welt*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000, S. 383.

Radical critics of globalization, instead, fear that this process may lead to a dull, bleak future populated by obtuse and unidimensional societies like the ones already imagined by some exponents of the *Frankfurt School*, specifically Herbert Marcuse³. Yet, this quite pessimistic view of globalization can actually be traced back to the theory of increasing bureaucratization of Western societies developed by Max Weber⁴. According to the latter, bureaucratization is closely associated to socio-cultural standardization and uniformity and thus gives rise to *homologous* societies, quoting Italian writer Pier Paolo Pasolini⁵. In time, these societies confine their members within the well-known *iron cage*, which, according to Max Weber, is the harrowing point of arrival of an excessive rationalization brought on by an ominous hyperbureaucratization⁶. American sociologist George Ritzer linked rationalization and political-administrative bureaucratization, sociocultural uniformity and globalization; the *McDonaldization of society*, an expression he coined, is an appropriate metaphor of the near-future world whose characteristics, according to this author, are already clearly perceivable⁷. Globalization, therefore, is imposing a uniform social system organized in accordance with the totalizing and, gastronomically at least, totalitarian model of the notorious global chain of *standardized feeders* known as McDonald's.

Neither one of these nearly opposite projects of society is particularly enticing or suggestive of rosy visions. Their interesting aspect however is that despite antithetical visions they both stem from a shared premise, i.e., that differences, especially cultural ones, will gradually decrease and finally come to an end in the near future. Though opposites, both outlooks after all pursue the same hypothesis that can be traced back to a prophecy already found in some lesser-known writings by Friedrich Engels to which the theoreticians of the *homo sovieticus* would subsequently refer to⁸. Paradoxically, this prophecy practically matches the one of the *end of history* proposed by Francis Fukuyama, standard-bearer of neo-liberalism⁹. Drawing analogies between neo-liberalism and socialism may appear contradictory and out of place, yet these similarities are not incidental, especially if we bear in mind that they are the outcome of two doctrines grounded in a universalistic fundamentalism.

Nevertheless, both of the above-mentioned models of globalization are highly debatable and ultimately rather untenable for those social scientists who work with empirical evidence, not abstract speculation. In fact, there certainly are experts of social sciences other than the ones indicated in this introduction who have proposed far more discerning and differentiated visions concerning globalization processes. We need only mention for example the works of Saskia Sassen on “global

³ See: MARCUSE, Herbert. *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

⁴ See: WEBER, Max. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Vol. 2. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr & Siebeck, 1956, p. 843, seq.

⁵ See: PASOLINI, Pier Paolo. *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milan: Mondadori: Meridiani, 1999.

⁶ See: BENDIX, Reinhard. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960, p. 459; BAEHR, Peter. The “Iron Cage” and the “Shell as Hard as Steel”: Parsons, Weber, and the *Stahlhartes Gehäuse* Metaphor in the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2001, p. 153, seq.

⁷ See: RITZER, George. *The McDonaldization of Society. An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. Revised Edition. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 1996; RITZER, George. *The McDonaldization Thesis: Explorations and Extensions*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 1998; SMART, Barry (ed.). *Resisting McDonaldization*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999.

⁸ See: ENGELS, Friedrich. Po und Rhein. In: *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels Werke*, Vol. 13. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1971, p. 225.

⁹ See: FUKUYAMA, F. (...) 1992.

cities”¹⁰, those of Manuel Castells on the “network society”¹¹, or the socio-historical analyses of Immanuel Wallerstein on the “world-system”¹², and the more recent historical-economic-political studies reflections of Niall Fergusson¹³. Yet, all these authors as well as for example Anthony Giddens¹⁴, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri¹⁵ or Ulrich Beck¹⁶, have focused on fundamental aspects of globalization that could be defined as *structural*, *institutional* and *technological* ones. If not utterly neglected, the cultural dimension of globalization has been somewhat overlooked to say the least.

It is always interesting instead to bear in mind that the three models previously examined in detail are nevertheless the most popular ones in public debates, though they present a misleading view of the cultural dimension in globalization processes precisely because of their too universalistic call that tends to underestimate complexity, which can be grasped only with the aid of some amount of relativism.

In conclusion, neither the *end of history* nor the *McDonaldization of society* are corroborated by empirical evidence; thus, none of the three scenarios seems likely to occur in the near future.

Undeniably, due to globalization processes many sections of society, especially in the field of economics such as stock exchanges, banking and insurance systems, airlines etc. willingly or not have to conform to standardizing drives to survive in global markets. Likewise, the world of mass media is increasingly uniform; the same movies, TV series, commercials, quiz shows, music videos etc. can now be seen in Italy, Russia, Malaysia and Venezuela. Several other examples come to mind such as some sports events or large hotel chains.

The socio-cultural reality of globalized world is and continues to be far more diversified than many would have us believe. Featherstone is correct in highlighting that globalization leads to a greater awareness of differences, especially cultural or social ones. After all, even the great nerve centres of globalization, such as television networks like CNN or worldwide fast-food chains like McDonald’s have become producers and managers of difference. We need only view infomercials and tourism ads such as ‘*Sights and Sounds*’, ‘*Malaysia, truly Asia*’, ‘*India, incredible India*’ broadcasted by the former, and the various ads devised by the latter for specific local contexts. By now, McDonald’s hamburger is presented as something entirely different depending on whether we are in Kuala Lumpur, Berne, or Fortaleza. This is definitely no coincidence, since McDonald’s opted for a regional fare differentiation after a disastrous financial crisis at the end of the 1990s, which established the collapse of the old model based on a worldwide standardization of culinary suggestions. Ironically, even McDonald’s has had to retrace its steps to avoid an impending bankruptcy, thus forgoing *McDonaldization*.

We also ought to mention Arjun Appadurai’s diagnosis according to which we should be aware that globalization, except maybe in some extremely specialized economic sections, coincides with

¹⁰ See: SASSEN, Saskia. *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press, 1994; SASSEN, Saskia. *The Global City*. New York, London, Tokyo, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001.

¹¹ See: CASTELLS, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

¹² See: WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. *The Modern World-System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press, 1974.

¹³ See: FERGUSSON, Niall. *Colossus*. New York: Penguin, 2004.

¹⁴ See: GIDDENS, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

¹⁵ See: HARDT, Michael & NEGRI, Antonio. *Empire*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

¹⁶ See: BECK, Ulrich. *Was ist Globalisierung? Irrtümer des Globalismus – Antworten auf Globalisierung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007.

a global landscape of cultures on the verge of increasing differentiation¹⁷. Joel Kahn¹⁸ has rightly added that globalization not only heightens the awareness of differences, as Featherstone stresses¹⁹, and not only goes hand in hand with the development of an increasingly diversified global landscape of cultures as Appadurai shows. Globalization is also concurrent with a veritable industry of distinctions, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu²⁰, perceived as such by end-users and consequently purchased and used by the latter as if they were actual goods. Apparently, therefore, the notion of *glocalization* coined by Roland Robertson²¹ is legitimate albeit rather contrived and highlights that the standard response to globalization is local social strategies which always produce new cultural differences as well.

In this context, we could mention the global tourism industry that has amazingly increased the supply of *cultural tourism*, given the higher demand of difference. Nowadays, even the most popular destinations of *seaside tourism* like the Maldives or Mauritius cannot afford to offer beach, sky, sea, and palm trees alone, but invite tourists to take part in cultural programs in customized venues based on the hosting country's purported or genuine ethno-cultural plurality. An evening show in Mauritius featuring a performance of *sega* – the Creole slaves' dance – will invariably include local gourmet foods, i.e., Indian and Chinese cuisine. To further the impression of local cultural variety, Thai or Vietnamese dishes will be added, though they are unrelated with the multiculturalism of this small island of the Indian Ocean. This example shows that globalization is far more a *Disneyfication* as far as cultural pluralism is concerned than a *McDonaldization*²².

If the previously mentioned trends are not utterly incongruous, then we should not be surprised if the globalization process seems a mammoth apparatus in which borders are undone and redone, inclusions and exclusions are deconstructed and reconstructed, social equalities and inequalities between groups and individuals based on belonging and cultural affiliations are wiped out and redefined at an accelerating pace.

For these reasons, the globalization process can be linked to the idea of a permanent *regionalization of identities*, accompanied by the inevitable conflicts and contrasts which these changes entail, without these tensions necessarily escalating however into a devastating and widespread *clash of civilizations* or into a single collective animosity.

Regionalization of identities and political regionalisms

There is a wide range of collective discourses and social strategies in the globalized landscape that thematize and put into practice the current manufacturing of cultural differences, which are devised in political and intellectual spheres as well as in everyday life.

Ethnicity, in terms of discourse, practice, or process, is still an important opportunity, though certainly not the only one, to define boundaries by *inventing*, in this term's positive connotation,

¹⁷ See: APPADURAI, Arjun. Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture*, Vol. 2(2), 1990, p. 1–24; APPADURAI, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Minneapolis: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

¹⁸ See: KAHN, Joel. *Culture, Multiculture, Postculture*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995.

¹⁹ See: FEATHERSTONE, Mike. Global Culture: An Introduction. In: Featherstone, Mike (ed.). *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 1, seq.

²⁰ See: BOURDIEU, Pierre. *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

²¹ See: ROBERTSON, Roland. Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity. In: Featherstone, Mike (ed.). *Global Modernities*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995, p. 25, seq.

²² See: WOOD, Robert E. Touristic Ethnicity: A Brief Itinerary. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1998, p. 218.

distinctions and thus *building* new belongings and affiliations. As such, *ethnic power* should not be regarded as a relic of the past, i.e., of the 19th and 20th century, but should also be seen as a phenomenon linked to the several territorial redefinitions, regionalizations, and reconfigurations of identities in times of globalized late modernity. As we shall see, ethnicity is an extremely multiform phenomenon, which, according to circumstances, historical space of experience, and social needs, both symbolic and material, is conceived rather differently. While in many regions of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East the ethnicized regionalizations of identity and their associated conflicts are correlated to the colonial invention of tribal differences as in the bloody war between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi, or the violent struggles between segmentary communities led by local warlords, or again the resurgence of rivalries between tribes along the Pakistani/Afghan border, in Latin America we encounter other types of ethnic-based regionalization of identities. In this part of the world actualization is brought into play, i.e., the revitalization and/or ethnicization of the pre-Columbian era communities and affiliations when everything was still authentic and not polluted by the influence of colonialism and western capitalism, according to present-day managers of these regional identities. In these cases, the regionalization of identities, with somewhat populist overtones, rethinks the myths of the glorious past of *great empires* wiped out by Spanish colonial expansionism and the utopian vision of the *good savage*, mindful of his fellows and nature: more specifically, the myth of the *land of no evil*, i.e., the primordial innocence of *indigenous peoples*. Paradigmatic in this sense are the regionalistic movements of the Maya populations of Guatemala and Mexico and particularly the *Zapatista Army* operating in Chiapas led by the by now legendary charismatic intellectual, *subcommander Marcos*.

Europe: Ethnic versus transnational regionalism?

Yet, even in old, jaded Europe, though probably more in the western than the eastern parts, we can observe multifaceted phenomena of regionalization of identities, although in many cases less extreme, politically milder, and less socially conflictual ideological forms than in the other continents mentioned.

German anthropologist Rolf Lindner has rightly spoken of a *resurgence of regionalism*, i.e., what he called the *Wiederkehr des Regionalen*, already perceivable from the mid-1990s²³. He specifically mentions a resurgence of nationalism because, despite undeniable similarities, it differs substantially from Europe's regionalistic drives of the 1970s.

Inspired by the disillusioned heirs of the 1968 protest movement, a wave of regionalism occurred in the 1970s, which some experts called *the provincial rebellion* mainly because of its quite radical ideologies²⁴. For the sake of argument, we could say that, given also the role played by some of the leaders of student's movements frustrated by the political outcome of 1968, it was a shift from *class struggle* to a *struggle for subaltern identity recognition*. Stating that these movements patently stemmed from Gramscian-inspired ideological reflections²⁵ adopted by the European radical left of the time would not be an overstatement. Ironically, for their own political ends they discovered the concepts of *identity* and *ethnicity*.

²³ See: LINDNER, Rolf (Hg.). *Die Wiederkehr des Regionalen*. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 1994.

²⁴ See: GERDES, Dirk. *Aufstand der Provinz. Regionalismus in Westeuropa*. Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 1980; LINDNER, R. (...) 1994, p. 7, seq.

²⁵ See: GRAMSCI, Antonio. *Quaderni dal carcere*. Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1975.

Current political regionalisms instead, as Lindner credibly indicates, cannot be likened to rebellions, in any case solely ideological ones or regarding viewpoints and thus not mass uprisings, but rather to arrangements; hence, present-day regionalisms are not *counter-* but *co-* phenomena. As such, sociologist Lothar Baier highlights that all over Europe nowadays, and contrary to the past, the term regionalism has lost its original dissenting, subversive, transgressive, and thus pejorative connotation with public authorities exercising a hegemonic function²⁶. By now, established authorities too have come to accept it and thus it is now part of the common parlance of politicians and bureaucrats. We need only mention catchwords like the *Europe of regions* or *devolution*. In the end, the latter political concept is simply regionalism from the opposite standpoint, i.e., of those who wield power and grant the demanded autonomies.

Current regionalisms in Europe can no longer be regarded as movements that fight back or openly challenge globalization, but rather as political orientations trying to reach arrangements or compromises through negotiations. From the point of view of political anthropology, we could venture a preliminary characterization of regionalism in the current European context. Agreeing with Lindner, the following necessary though still insufficient and thus partial definition of regionalism can be formulated.

Current regionalisms in Europe are foremost a political phenomenon based on the appeal to local identity belongings in an attempt to adapt to radical socio-structural changes triggered and/or imposed by the globalization process. Furthermore, they are social strategies aiming to overcome difficulties and problems caused by globalization via the mobilization of local societies whose members think and/or believe they belong to the group due to specific shared qualities. Thus, these local identities are the expression of what Max Weber called the *Gemeinsamkeitsglauben*, i.e., a belief in commonality²⁷. Finally, regionalism is a response in line with national States' gradual cession of sovereignty to social, political, and economic institutions of *global governance*.

In fact, most of Europe's national States have more or less willingly handed over shares of political, economic, and social sovereignty to a supranational organization known as the European Union. At the same time, some global governance institutions, such as WTO or NATO amongst others, have increasingly limited the sovereignty of the above national States, which, though certainly not at a crisis point, are definitely on the defensive.

Since these structural changes are crucial to the overall globalization process, on the one hand they certainly kindled neo-nationalistic ambitions (see the overreactions of intellectuals and people alike in Poland, Baltic Nations and Bulgaria), while on the other they just as certainly fostered regionalistic drives.

Admittedly, between the gradual cession of national States' sovereignty and regionalistic claims there is a dialectic relation now, which via constant accommodations generates new political setups, in some cases even based on a lasting, though often shaky, *power sharing*, both locally and nationally. Not to mention that nowadays in Spain or Romania, Italy or Bulgaria, governing is a difficult or impossible task at all levels without the support of parties advocating regionalism. The recent victory of the Scottish National Party in the latest regional elections seems to confirm this trend also in Great Britain where the single majority voting system, precisely because of its electoral structure, leaves few chances to regionalistic political forces.

²⁶ See: BAIER, Lothar. Abschied vom Regionalismus. *Freibeuter*, Vol. 43, 1991, p. 14; BAIER, Lothar. Neun Thesen zum real existierenden Regionalismus. *Allmende*, Vol. 34-35, 1992, p. 3, seq.

²⁷ See: WEBER, Max. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Vol. 1. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr & Siebeck, 1956, p. 234, seq.

At this point, our analysis introduces differentiations, thus distinguishing between various types of regionalism. Accordingly, we have conceived two ideal types in a Weberian sense, placed at the opposite ends of a continuum²⁸. Being ideal types, we are dealing with abstractions for a heuristic scope, which, as Max Weber stressed, are not corroborated by pure empirical reality but are extremely useful for our comparative analysis.

We shall thus distinguish between *ethnic regionalism* and *transnational regionalism*. By ethnic regionalism we intend a sociopolitical movement striving to build an imagined collectivity whose belief in commonality is based on ethnic criteria regarded as qualities unique to one's own group such as origin, ancestry, history, traditions, culture, religion, language, and not least territory.

To clarify these aspects we will use two examples, amongst the several ones available: namely, the so-called Padania and Catalonia, which, though very different from each other, can be regarded as classic cases of ethnic regionalism in Europe.

The Lega Nord, as the most endorsed representative of regionalism in northern Italy, has constantly endeavoured to imagine and popularize the idea of an ethnically homogeneous community in the vast and culturally multifaceted territory of the Po Valley, which the Leghisti purposefully call Padania²⁹.

Consequently, with quite some political success, the term *popolo padano* (people of Padania), following the Herderian notion of *Volk*, was created. Umberto Bossi, undisputed leader of the Leghisti movement, addresses his torrential speeches to a purported *popolo padano* or *popolo della Padania*³⁰.

Apparently, matters were rather clear-cut but the question turned thorny once the characteristics of the imagined regional community called Padania had to be established during the ethnicization process intentionally set in motion by the Lega Nord.

It could not be language, given the huge variety of the region's dialects. Neither could religion be taken into account because laic constituents and politicians in the Leghista movement would not appreciate a *Catholic discourse* evoking ghosts of the defunct Democrazia Cristiana party, historic enemy of the Lega because of its unitary outlook as well. Likewise, territory was difficult to establish. In fact, neither the movement's leaders nor its backers have ever been able to establish boundaries nor have they been able to clarify where *Padania* begins or ends³¹.

To overcome these problems, managers of the Padania regional identity have had to fall back on other two criteria, probably slightly less dubious than the others: shared history and origins, i.e., a shared ancestry. These two aspects are used rather often in several ethnicity-building projects. Accordingly, they claimed an *historical right* to a federalist, thus an autonomist political set-up based on a regionalist tradition grounded in a distant and glorious past. To corroborate an historical right, choice past events, represented as exemplary, need to be actualized. Consequently, Leghista regionalism revitalized and reinterpreted events dating from the Lombard Middle Ages in order to claim the *historical right* of the *people of Padania* to regional autonomy. The two crucial events of the past used by the Lega are the Pontida oath of allegiance and the Battle of Legnano against Frederick Barbarossa, the foreign alleged centralizer who wanted to put an end to municipal au-

²⁸ See: WEBER, Max. Die *Objektivität* sozialwissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse. In: Weber, Max. *Soziologie, Weltgeschichtliche Analysen, Politik*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1968, p. 235, seq.

²⁹ See: GIORDANO, Christian. Regionalizing Identities. Ethnicity in Italy between Crisis and Loyalty to Tradition. In: Niedermüller, Peter & Stocklund, Bjarne (eds.). *Europe: Cultural Construction and Reality*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press & University of Copenhagen, 2001, p. 126, seq.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 129.

³¹ Ibid, p. 130.

tonomies. Frederick Barbarossa thus becomes a metaphor of the centralizing aims of the Italian unified state. Bizarrely enough, a similar strategy employing the same events was produced during the Risorgimento with a unifying and anti-Austrian slant. Giuseppe Verdi, surely the most popular ideologist of Italy's unification, composed the opera *La Battaglia di Legnano* (battle of Legnano) while a minor Risorgimento poet, Giovanni Berchet, wrote a poem called *Il giuramento di Pontida* (the Pontida oath of allegiance) which was learned by heart by generation after generation of Italian students. The original, unabridged version of this poem can be found on the web site of the *Movimento dei Giovani Padani* (www.giovanipadani.leganord.org). Besides, the name Lega is inspired by the Lombard League against Frederick Barbarossa³².

Shared origins instead, resorting even to the ancient historian Polybius, have been imagined by which present-day *people of Padania* would be direct descendants of legendary *Celtic populations* who settled the Po Valley in pre-Roman times (www.legavarese.com). Therefore, traditions have been invented, i.e., a veritable cult with allegedly ancestral rituals and ceremonies performed along the banks of the Po River held to be the sacred river of the people of Padania ever since Celtic times.

Catalan regionalism, contrary to the Lega Nord's one, dates far more back and is far more acknowledged nationally and internationally³³. Jordi Pujol, the historic leader during the post-Franco period, is definitely regarded as the most charismatic, skilled, expert, and acknowledged representative of European regionalism throughout the world. However, Catalan autonomy, which currently governs at a national level in Spain, is probably the best example of an ideal type of ethnoregionalism in the Old Continent. Based on a concept of ethnicity including various characteristics, language plays a major and nearly obsessive role.

The region's linguistic Catalanization after the downfall of Francoism and the subsequent recognition of political autonomy have been radically applied, although the population is mainly bilingual and using Spanish and/or switching from one language to the other is very widespread in everyday life. Yet, all public acts (including official statements or affidavits for foreigners), road signs, place names etc. are strictly in Catalan.

Catalan regionalism to a lesser extent has also employed other hallmarks of regional identity, such as:

- shared history, i.e., the fact that Catalonia was a distinct political entity ever since the Middle Ages,
- culture and traditions, ranging from architecture (Catalan gothic and the modernism of Antoni Gaudì) to gastronomy (the fabled Catalan cream),
- territory via the concept of *Paisos Catalans* which includes not only present-day Catalan territory but also the Spanish *Levante* (reaching Elche) and the Balearic Islands, as well as territories outside Spain, i.e., in southern France (Perpignan) and the Catalan enclave of Alghero in Sardinia. We may also add that the term *Paisos Catalans* brings to mind the representation of a *Great Catalonia*, which in many ways resembles similar conceptions such as *Megali Idea*, Great Hungary, Great Serbia, Great Romania, Great Bulgaria, as well as *Grossdeutschland*.

³² See: GIORDANO, Christian. The Past in the Present. Actualized History in the Social Construction of Reality. In: Kalb, Don & Tak, Herman. *Critical Junctions. Anthropology and History beyond the Cultural Turn*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005, p. 57.

³³ See: NAGEL Klaus. Katalanistische Bewegung und Gesellschaft 1898-1939. In: *Zeitschrift für Katalanistik*, Vol. 7, 1994, p. 9–36.

Given its long history, Catalan ethnoregionalism has gone through various phases³⁴. The current one however apparently confirms Rolf Lindner's thesis. In fact, we could call it a politically moderate regionalism, which avoids head-to-head conflict and seeks answers to its requests through apt compromises and accommodations; even in recent times it was able to take over further areas of sovereignty that traditionally belonged to the national State. This lack of aggressiveness has been patent, despite recent frictions and strong tensions with Madrid in relation to Catalonia's request to achieve a new state of autonomy and recognition as *a nation without a State of its own* within Spain³⁵. Due to the above-mentioned characteristics, Catalan ethnoregionalism is also frequently defined as a very specific form of nationalism.

If, based on these two examples, we wonder what ideological or structural novelty there might be in ethnoregionalism, then we have to admit that the old national State model still survives. In fact, nearly all ethnoregionalisms tend to rehash old *ethnic discourses* and reproduce territorially scaled-down institutions of the national State. Above all, no one can rule out that these movements, apparently amenable for the time being, might in the future catch the virus of nationalism and turn into regional ethno-nationalisms.

Transnational regionalism is based on a social imaginary which, at least in intent, endeavours to address the challenges of globalization and the national States' consequent gradual loss of sovereignty by means of aggregation projects that try to move beyond the limited range of current political boundaries and/or of purported ethnocultural homogeneity. For these reasons, as an ideal type this regionalism is located at the extreme opposite of ethnic regionalism.

At first glance at least, transnational regionalism by its very nature should be considered *postethnic* (in line with David Hollinger's definition of this term)³⁶ and *transboundary*. At the most, one could also speak of *cosmopolitan regionalism*, although the latter characterization seems to have taken on a rather positive connotation, evocative of an ideal model of society in which imagined, invented or real cultural differences no longer represent a criterion of social selection.

In principle – and we strongly emphasize this expression – transnational regionalism, according to Hollinger's argumentation,

- should make boundaries between groups involved in these types of regionalism more flexible, if not indeed variable,
- should allow the individuals involved to have plural belongings,
- should accept hybrid identities for these same individuals.

What we need to discover is if and to what extent this model of regionalism is feasible or put into practice; moreover, there are several projects of regionalism in Europe that could in theory be considered transnational or postethnic. Yet, how many of these projects have been achieved to-date in line with their original true intent?

Firstly, we ought to mention the Euroregions, which by juridical definition are transboundary³⁷. Therefore, these could become the institutions in charge of carrying out transnational and postet-

³⁴ See: PAYNE, Stanley G. Nationalism, Regionalism and Micronationalism in Spain. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 26, No. 3/4, 1991, p. 479, seq.; LLOBERA, Josep R. *Foundation of National Identity: from Catalonia to Europe*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004.

³⁵ See: McROBERTS, Kenneth. *Catalonia: Nation Building without a State*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001.

³⁶ See: HOLLINGER David. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

³⁷ See: ANDERSON, James O'Dowd Liam & WILSON, Thomas M. (eds.). *New Borders for a Changing Europe*, London: Frank Cass, 2003.

hnic projects locally. In most cases however, despite the proliferation of these projects and some instances of zeal and initial enthusiasm that led to believe and hope in the formation of *bottom-up* participation movements, the *top-down* aspect was strikingly prevalent. This demoted Euroregions to a question of bureaucracy and technocracy that led local societies to back out of the projects.

In a famous article, Clifford Geertz wrote that a world atlas of modernity, aside from oceans and seas, is an absolute continuum of nations. Willingly or not, every person, every place, every tree etc. belongs to a nation. Despite the manifold activities carried out, Euroregions were unable to create *authentic autonomous areas between nations* and thus interrupt the absolute continuum of the world atlas Geertz mentions. Transnational and postethnic *social imaginary* is still part of a noble utopian thought, which has rarely been achieved however in either Western or Eastern Europe.

We could mention several other examples. Yet, we would like to specifically introduce the one linked to the notion of *Black Sea Identity*. This model of regionalism is outside the European Union's institutional framework, but its *transboundary, transnational, or transcultural social imaginary* with purposefully *postethnic* connotations is strongly supported by the intellectuals and politicians in Georgia, particularly after the dramatic political changes that occurred a few years ago.

However, the *Black Sea Identity* discourse is not limited to Georgia's narrow national context, as it has been circulating for some years now along the coastal region that in bygone glorious epochs was known as *Pontos Axeinos* (in Latin: *Pontus Euxinus*, i.e., *the welcoming sea*)³⁸.

The idea of *Black Sea Identity* is posited on a shared feeling of transnational regional belonging. According to this view, this feeling would stem precisely from the hypothetical shared past characterized by constant and intense cultural and socioeconomic contacts between the various coastal populations plus Greece due to its massive diaspora, which occurred in a not so recent past³⁹. Thus, the *Black Sea Identity* label has become the ideological instrument or, better yet, the socio-cultural pretext of that new political forum known as *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC)⁴⁰.

From an intellectual point of view, the vision of a *Black Sea Identity* as the founding idea of a transnational regionalism is certainly fascinating for two reasons. In the first place, the *Black Sea Identity* project, on paper at least, represents an actual effort to break out of the classic mood of ethno-regionalism.

The second one probably lies in the model from which the *Black Sea Identity* more or less openly draws inspiration, i.e., that captivating description of the Mediterranean world's historical panorama traced by Fernand Braudel's renowned book *La Méditerranée à l'époque de Philippe II*⁴¹.

However, taking a too optimistic view would be naïve because, as Charles King aptly points up, an organization like BSEC, created on the initiative of Turkey, stands few chances in the near future of becoming the means to forward a transnational regionalism⁴². In fact, the above-mentioned author writes: "No politician around the sea today believes that BSEC should be a substitute for the kinds that really matter: membership in NATO and the European Union. While presidents and prime ministers repeatedly affirm their commitment to building a Black Sea region, in practice there

³⁸ See: ASCHERSON, Neal. *Black Sea*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1996; KING, Charles. *The Black Sea: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. XI.

³⁹ See: ASCHERSON, N. (...) 1996.

⁴⁰ See: KING, Ch. (...) 2005, P. 242 ff.; VAHL, Marius & CELAC, Sergiu. Ready for a Breakthrough: Elements for a European Strategy towards the Black Sea Region. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2006, p. 169 ff.

⁴¹ See: BRAUDEL, Fernand. *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. Vol. 2. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1982.

⁴² See: KING, Ch. (...) 2005, p. 244.

is little incentive to cooperate with countries whose prospect for membership in the truly important organizations are even slimmer than one's own"⁴³.

The main problem of the *Black Sea Identity* and its related transnational regionalism continues to be its feasibility, which can be ascribed to various reasons.

In the first place, the more influential political and cultural elite's members of some countries such as Bulgaria, Romania and Greece for example, by long-established tradition have been far more inclined towards reference societies located in the Old Continent's west rather than the east, which they hold to be less civilized if not indeed barbarian. This westward inclination has been steadily increasing with these countries' integration in the European Union. This holds true also for Turkey and Ukraine who look forward to their own integration. Probably only a small number of politicians and intellectuals of the coastal areas and seaports are truly interested in the transnational regionalism project based on the idea of *Black Sea Identity*. In brief, this endeavour has neither been truly problematized nor actually set in motion yet.

We also need to add that a *Black Sea Identity* is too intellectualistic and abstract, far removed from the *social imaginary* of common people who are still too accustomed to the nation's patterns. A project of transnational regionalism such as this one is difficult to achieve precisely because it tends to counter the nation's social imaginary, which has lost none of its popularity even though the national State has actually ceded sovereignty within the process of globalization.

We also ought to wonder whether the current ostensible consensus surrounding the BSEC project of *Black Sea Identity* might screen various national hidden agendas with divergent and possibly conflicting aims and interests. For example, we can hypothesize that Turkey, contrary to Georgia, could use the *Black Sea Identity* vision for national hegemonic purposes. Yet, should each country actually resort to this project of regionalism for its own ends, the transnational character would go wasted and everything would become a sort of supermarket where everyone shops according to their own needs.

Finally, we need to add a slightly unpleasant comment at this point. In the end, the *Black Sea Identity* project resembles a *Verlegenheitslösung*, or, better yet, a ploy through which some of the various countries' political and intellectual elites, the Georgian one in particular, while cloaked by a smokescreen of regionalism strive to renegotiate and redefine traditional geopolitical set-ups, in an endeavour to countervail supposed discriminatory or indeed humiliating labels such as *Caucasian*, *Balkans* or *Russian* in exchange for politically correct and thus well-respected attributes. On that account, the underlying reason could probably be a relatively covert urge to revalorize national honour.

Before drawing to a close, we should also discuss the rather interesting case of current regionalism in the Romanian Banat. Local elites quite insistently present this region as being by definition intercultural. Actually, the notion of interculturality appears within a transnational and postethnic regionalistic discourse that refers may be to a glorious past but is employed to characterize present-day reality. Stressing the peaceful and cordial coexistence among different "ethnic groups" (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs, Jews, Bulgarian Catholics etc.), this discourse strives to highlight the existence of a transnational regional identity determined by "unity in diversity". Though this could have been true about social practices up to the beginning of World War II, circumstances nowadays are quite different. In fact, cultural diversity gradually decreased significantly over the past seventy years. The Jewish community (consisting of both Ashkenazim and Sephardim) was notoriously all but physically annihilated during the holocaust, the Germans,

⁴³ Ibid.

i.e., the *Donauschwaben*, to a great extent emigrated to the *Bundesrepublik* (especially after 1989), while government-promoted internal migrations during socialism have significantly strengthened Romanian presence in the Banat, thus making it by far the dominant community. The loudly extolled interculturality has sadly dwindled, though compared to the country's other multiethnic regions (for example, Transylvania and the city of Cluj in particular) a kind of *entente cordiale* prevails amongst the various ethnic groups (especially between Romanians and Hungarians). Considering regionalism in the Banat in terms of transnational regionalism is a striking overstatement, given especially the obvious divergence between the discourse brought forth by small political and cultural elite on the one hand, and current ethno-demographic data as well as the reality of everyday-life social practices on the other.

Conclusion

National States, as some experts of regionalism point up, could be and most probably are too large now to manage local issues and concurrently too small to run global affairs. Rosi Braidotti, the high priestess of postmodern *nomadic subjectivities* and *identities*, recently stated in a similar context that Europe *doesn't make us dream anymore* because its *social imaginary* continues to tap almost exclusively into the reservoir of ideas – and we would add institutions – deriving from the national State⁴⁴. Fully agreeing with her diagnosis, we believe that in a slightly modified form this could also be said about regionalisms as political phenomena. In fact, regionalisms frankly *don't make us dream*. For the most part, existing regionalisms are ethnoregionalisms based on the *social imaginary* deriving from the national State, moreover from its ethnic aspects. Transnational regionalisms instead, at least in principle, have a *social imaginary* that certainly lies outside the national State's one, but, as far as their currently inadequate political realization is concerned, for the time being we can only be skeptical. The idea of a *postnational Europe* may appeal to the open spirits, but for the present it is a chimera and will remain so also in the near future. On this disenchanting note, we would like to end this contribution.

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⁴⁴ See: BRAIDOTTI, Rosi, L'Europa non ci fa sognare / Europa lässt uns nicht träumen. In: *Kölnischer Kunstverein et al.*, Köln: Projekt Migration, 2005, p. 760.

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POLITINIS REGIONALIZMAS GLOBALIAME PASAULYJE: LOKALIOS TAPATYBĖS SAMPRATA EUROPOJE

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Santrauka

Šiais laikais prasidėjęs visuotinis globalizacijos procesas yra apėmęs visos *pasaulio sistemos* šalis ir regionus. Pastarųjų trijų dešimtmečių laikotarpiu jame vis labiau išivyrėja Vakarų civilizacijos hegemonija, pamažu užkariaujanti kitų šalių suvereniteto pozicijas. Viena vertus, toks laipsniškas įvairialypio suverenumo praradimo procesas lemia vadinamojo *globalios valdžios* susiformavimo tendencijas. Kita vertus, atsiranda vietinės institucijos, akivaizdžiai atstovaujančios dialektinio visuomenės modelio interesams. Tokį reiškinį Rolandas Robertsonas yra įvardijęs *globalizacija*.

Politinės antropologijos požiūriu, straipsnyje yra aptariami įvairūs bandymai naujai apibrėžti tokio sociopolitinio gyvenimo apraiškas, pamažu išigalinčias tokiame Europos tautų tarpusavio santykių kontekste, kuriuo savo laiku ypač žavėjosi JAV prezidentas Thomas W. Wilsonas. Konstatuojama, kad šios Europos pagrindas yra nacionalinių valstybių institucijos, nuo pat savo veiklos pradžios neišvengiamai daugiau ar mažiau priklausomos nuo biurokratinio centralizmo principų. Siekiama parodyti, kaip tokia sistema sąveikauja su įvairiais regionalistinio pobūdžio judėjimais, sąmoningai akcentuojančiais vietinių kultūrų įvairovės svarbą ir individualių tapatybių išsaugojimo būtinybę. Primenama, kad veiksmingam šios visumos egzistavimui reikia specifinių politinių susitarimų.

Regionalizmas, gerai žinomas ne tik Vakarų ar Pietryčių Europos kraštuose, bet ir kituose gretimuose regionuose (pvz., Kaukazo), yra tokių lokalių visuomenės judėjimų politinio pobūdžio samprata. Dialektinis jo vystymasis šiuo metu aiškiai atsilieka nuo jau minėto vis labiau visuotinai išigalinčio globalizacijos proceso.

Straipsnyje siekiama aiškiau susisteminti įvairias Europos politinio regionalizmo sąvokas, grindžiamas dviem esminėmis, bet (deja) nepakankamai apibrėžtomis sampratomis – „etninis regionalizmas“ ir „transnacionalinis regionalizmas“. Pirmuoju atveju paprastai yra apsiribojama laipsniška nacionalinės valstybės regionų įvardijimo tvarka (Katalonija, Baskų šalis, „Padanija“ ar pan.), tuo tarpu antruoju atveju šiai sampratai suteikiamas papildomas postetninės reikšmės atspalvis, pasiliekant tarptautinėje, nevienalytėje etninėje erdvėje (Juodosios jūros regionas, Tatarstanas ir t. t.).

Empirinių tyrimų analizė leidžia daryti išvadą, kad abi minėtos regionalizmo sampratos, nepaisant ryškaus jų skirtingumo, jau nebegali pasiūlyti fundamentalių inovacijų. Pastebima, kad tiek senieji politiniai vaizdiniai, tiek dabar tebeegzistuojantys nacionalinių valstybių valdymo struktūrų modeliai jau yra pasenę ir nebeatitinka nūdienos politinio gyvenimo aktualijų.