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The birth of regionalism and the crisis of reason: France, Germany and Spain[1]

Eric Storm

The interest for regional identities underwent a fundamental shift around 1890. According to many recent studies, it is even doubtful whether during the greater part of the nineteenth century it would make sense to speak of regionalism. The region was studied, but this was almost exclusively the work of a limited group of amateurs belonging to learned societies or associations. The major themes of their debates were the historical, archaeological and geographical backgrounds of the region, and its significance within the national context. The writings they produced and the lectures they organised were mainly intended for their fellow members, who came from a small élite of local notables. In fact, it is not clear if this should fall under the label of regionalism, as the region was considered from a national perspective. In general, it was the historical contribution of the proper region to the greatness of the fatherland that mattered, not the idiosyncratic identity that distinguished the region from the whole.[2]

The nature of this growing attention to the regions changed at the end of the nineteenth century when young middle-class members of these provincial societies began to address a larger audience. Instead of promoting scholarly studies, new regionalist associations tried to mobilise the middle and lower classes by encouraging them to participate in recreational activities. They did this by establishing local museums, organising excursions and festivals, and celebrating a shared identity, which was not based on a mythic past, but on contemporary popular culture such as folklore, rural traditions and vernacular architecture. To ensure success it was important that this regional identity differed as much as possible form that of other regions. According to most recent studies, this development of a mass interest constituted a profound transformation and should I believe be seen as the birth of regionalism. In most cases, regionalism thus served as a means to integrate the inhabitants of the countryside into the greater nation, while only in exceptional cases it underpinned claims for regional autonomy or even separatism.

The question remains yet to be answered why regionalism suddenly rose to prominence at the end of the nineteenth century. Although specialists agree on the nature of this shift, there is not much agreement on its causes. This is also due to the fact that no epoch-making event can be identified that functioned as a kind of watershed. As a result various possible explanations for its prominence have been proposed, which in general are located within the national framework that still forms the context of most investigations into regionalism. It has now, however, become clear that its rise happened almost everywhere in Europe at about the same time, and an international comparative perspective therefore could provide a new and better understanding of its sources and origins.

Historiography

[1] The research for this chapter has been made possible by a post-doctoral fellowship of NWO, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research.

[2] S. Gerson, *The Pride of Place: Local Memories and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London 2003), G. Kunz, *Verortete Geschichte. Regionales Geschichtsbewusstsein in den deutschen Historischen Vereinen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen 2000) and S. Brinkmann, *Der Stolz der Provinzen, Regionalbewußtein und Nationalstaatsbau im Spanien des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt 2005).

Until now, most publications were based on case-studies of one region, or one regional movement. In these studies, the rise of regionalism around 1890 is generally understood as a new collective self-awareness that was made possible by the erosion of the traditional structures of provincial society through a profound process of social and economic modernisation and the subsequent substitution of the dominance of the local notables by a more democratic and open public sphere. In her detailed study of the development of the regional movement in the Palatinate, Celia Applegate argues that the breaking up of a regional society and culture dominated by a small group of notables was caused by 'advancing industrialisation, commercialisation, and urbanisation'. Moreover the rise of a less elitist regional movement was part of the 'expansion and democratisation of public life'.[3] In another well-documented study on the neighbouring region of Württemberg, Alon Confino argues that the rise of the market economy and the development of education, transportation and communication profoundly changed rural society, whereas the emancipation of the middle classes, proletarians and peasants and their associations brought about 'the enlargement of the public realm and the consequent end of the notables' domination of it'.[4] Historians who studied regional movements in other European countries often also refer to the profound socio-economic transformations and the subsequent political emancipation of the masses as the preconditions for the growth of a stronger regional awareness.[5]

Echoing the modernist interpretation of nationalism as put forward by Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, these scholars understand regionalism as the product of the modernisation of society. Moreover, they support their interpretation by pointing out that most regional movements were led by modern, urban professionals. However, their attitude towards modernisation was often highly ambivalent. For instance, both Applegate and Confino emphasise that regionalism should also be understood as a reaction to the negative consequences of the general modernisation process. Thus, Applegate argues that 'the regionalist movement was above all concerned with the disappearance of distinctive regional cultures', whereas Confino understands regionalism as a 'response to modernity' and to 'political, economic and cultural homogenisation'. Regionalists thus underlined the 'uniqueness of a locality' as a response to national and international standardisation.[6]

This interpretation is confirmed by authors who study regionalism on a national level. Anne-Marie Thiesse, in her influential study of French regionalist literature, asserts that the acceleration of the modernisation process at the end of the nineteenth century caused the break-down of the relatively stable rural society and therefore functioned as an incentive to protect and promote the values of a traditional 'peasant civilisation'. In Germany, Karl Ditt, equally attributes the new interest in rural culture to the growing awareness of the losses caused by the fast industrialisation of the country, whereas Hermann Bausinger argues that the 'bourgeois *Heimat* image' was a kind of utopia, which functioned as an answer to the contradiction between a 'relatively advanced industrial development' and the more stagnant 'traditional political and social structures'. According to him, this contradiction was more acute in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century than anywhere else. Interestingly, these

[3] C. Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley 1990) 60-3 and 106-7.
[4] A. Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill 1997) 98-99.
[5] C. Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton 1993), J. Ll. Marfany, *La cultura del catalanisme. El nacionalisme català en els seus inicis* (Barcelona 1995), K. Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland 1848-1914* (Ithaca 2001), J. King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-194*8 (Princeton 2002) and K. M.Guy, *When Champagne became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity* (Baltimore 2003).
[6] Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, 85 and Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 98.

authors also see regionalism as a response to a broadly felt identity crisis. However, whereas this identity crisis in Germany was supposedly caused by a too sudden acceleration of the modernisation process, Thiesse argues that in France it was the lagging economic development of the country that led many people to reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of the French national character and its regional variants.[7]

Most scholars further link this identity crisis to specific developments within the national context and particularly to events that were seen as having an enormous impact on the course of national history, such as a humiliating military defeat. Thiesse maintains that the need to reflect on one's collective identity was particularly acute in France after the disastrous war against Prussia in 1870-1871. Regional rootedness became increasingly important when the international position of France, marked by military failures and the rise of new economic powers, declined.[8] For Austria-Hungary the Compromise of 1867 – the creation of the Dual Monarchy after the lost war against Prussia – was seen as a similar turning point, whereas in Spain scholars argue that the loss of the last major colonies in the Spanish-American War of 1898 caused a nation-wide identity crisis that strongly favoured the already existing, but still weak regionalist movements.[9]

In Germany, surprisingly it was the victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and the national unification that became a reality in its aftermath which was seen as a defining moment. Applegate asserts that: 'For the incomplete nation of 1871, the invented traditions of the Heimat bridged the gap between national aspiration and provincial reality'. And Confino maintains that 'The invention of the local and national Heimat ideas was a symbolic response to the post-1871 temporal and spatial demands of the homeland. The Heimat idea provided a symbolic national common denominator among different regions, their inhabitants and territories'.[10] Moreover, while in Germany apparently a lack of national unity stimulated regionalism, in France, as Julian Wright argues, it was the strong centralist state that favoured a regionalist counter reaction.[11]

Although during the last few years an increasing number of specialists acknowledge that regionalism should be understood as a transnational phenomenon,[12] in most studies it is clearly still largely explained by reference to some specific local or national background. As we have seen, some of the interpretations that have been put forward in effect largely contradict each other. So both military defeat and victory could lead to regionalism. The same apparently was true for fast socio-economic change and a lagging economic development, as well as a very centralised nation-state and a late and incomplete national unification. The clear national bias of these explanations is also visible in the terminology, as most authors tend to adopt terms which are often very difficult to translate, such as the German *Heimat* or the French *pays*, or *terroire*.

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[7] A. M. Thiesse, *Écrire la France. Le mouvement littéraire regionaliste de la langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Liberátion* (Paris 1991) 13, 240-3 and 292. K. Ditt, 'Die deutsche Heimatbewegung 1871-1945' in: W. Cremer and A. Klein (eds), *Heimat. Analysen, Themen, Perspektiven* (Bielefeld 1990) 135-55, here 135 and Hermann Bausinger, 'Heimat in einer offenen Gesellschaft. Begriffsgeschichte als Problemgeschichte' in: Ibid., 76-91, here 79.

[8] Thiesse, *Écrire la France*, 12-13 and 240-3.

[9] Stauter-Halsted, *Nation in the Village*, 13, King, *Budweisers*, 36-40 and X. M. Núñez, 'The Region as Essence of the Fatherland: Regionalist Variants of Spanish Nationalism (1840-1936)', *European History Quarterly* (2001) 483-518.

[10] Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*, 13 and Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 126.

[11] J. Wright, *The Regionalist Movement in France 1890-1914: Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought* (Oxford 2003) VII-XI.

[12] C. Applegate, 'A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times', *American Historical Review* (1999) 1157-83, E. Storm, 'Regionalism in History, 1890-1945: The Cultural Approach', *European History Quarterly* (2003) 251-65 and X. M. Núñez Seixas (ed.), *Ayer* 64 *La construcción de la identidad regional en Europa y España (siglos XIX y XX)* (2006).

If regionalism really was a transnational phenomenon, then its origins should also in the first place be transnational. Moreover, although many authors leave it implicit, they all assume that the origins of regionalism were closely connected with the modernisation of the countryside and the subsequent democratisation of the local public sphere. These developments were in fact not limited to one region or one country, but occurred, maybe with small differences in time-scale and intensity, all over Europe. Nevertheless, the way propagandists perceived these changes and formulated regional identities are still explained by reference to some specific regional and national background. This is understandable because most regionalist authors from the turn of the century explicitly referred to this context, but is this really sufficient?

A comparative analysis of (cultural) regionalism in France, Germany and Spain could give us the necessary clues about the shared transnational origins of regionalism. Instead of focusing on activists in various regions, this chapter will analyse the writings of a few extremely influential intellectuals whom can be seen as precursors of the regionalist ideology on national level, and their impact on artists and architects who decided to include aspects of popular rural culture in their own work, thus contributing in a very significant manner to the creation of more clearly circumscribed regional identities. In this way it is hoped to show the common, transnational intellectual roots of the culture of regionalism which have not received due attention until now.

Intellectual roots

Although regionalist activists generally presented their views as logical and natural, and thus in many ways as timeless, some of them recognised the importance of the ideas of a few thinkers. Surprisingly the most striking precursors were intellectuals who prominently figured in the subjectivist fin-de-siècle, but who were also seen as the principle harbingers of a new and more exalted form of nationalism. In Germany, regionalists thus often referred to Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as Educator (1890)) as a fundamental source of inspiration, while in France the writings of Maurice Barrès and in Spain those of Ángel Ganivet played a similar role.[13]

Although there were fundamental differences between these authors, their work showed striking similarities. Langbehn (1851-1907) and Ganivet (1865-1898) were social outsiders who gained fame mainly through one book. In his *Idearium español* (Spain, an Interpretation (1897)) Ganivet provided an overview of the geographical and historical determinants of Spain's national identity, whereas Langbehn in a highly impressionistic fashion explored the German soul. *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (1902), the main contribution of Barrès (1862-1923) to nationalist ideology, was a collection of articles and essays that – contrary to the broad historical overviews of Langbehn and Ganivet – mainly dealt with current French topics such as the Dreyfus Affair. Unlike Langbehn and Ganivet, he had a very successful literary career, and although his political views were contested he became part of the cultural establishment. In 1921, the Dadaists even singled him out for a mock trial, condemning him to twenty years of forced labour for having betrayed the nonconformist ideals of his early works. The writings of these authors have attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention, whereby most historians focus on their influential redefinition of national identity, and their alarmist warnings against threats to national unity from both external and internal enemies. Because of their exalted nationalism, some even portrayed them as important precursors of fascist ideology.[14] Nevertheless, these three

[13] As Ganivet committed suicide in 1898, his personal influence in Spain was quite limited. However, as many of the members of the literary generation of 1898 advocated similar ideas, these became widely known.

[14] See particularly F. Stern, *The Politics Of Cultural Despair; A Study In The Rise Of The Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley 1961) and Z. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, (1972; Paris 2000).

authors were also highly sensitive to regional differences and to the integrative potential of regionalist culture and as a consequence they also functioned as a source of inspiration for many regionalists.

Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet were very aware of the rise of mass society, and their work could be seen as a reaction to it. They were deeply concerned about what they considered to be the destabilising effects of the modernisation of society. They were particularly afraid that the masses would be captivated by internationalist revolutionary utopian schemes. However, they did not reject the broadening of the public sphere and the political emancipation of the masses, but tried to influence the course of events by embracing the new situation. This was most visible in the work of Barrès, who as a young man took part in the populist movement which centred around general Boulanger and in 1889 was elected to the National Assembly on a platform of 'nationalism, protectionism and socialism'. Langbehn, like Barrès, was acutely aware of the growing political participation of the masses and of the subsequent urgent need to integrate the masses into the national community, which could be accomplished both by adopting social legislation and by trying to stimulate national feelings. Moreover, he considered the simple inhabitants of the countryside as the soul of the nation instead of the upper classes of the big towns. Ganivet's views on these issues were very similar.[15]

In their main works, Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet asserted that their respective fatherland was in a severe state of crisis, which was particularly visible in the cultural and political sphere and which in fact amounted to a profound collective identity crisis. Their diagnosis was that science, culture and politics were led by false ideas. This analysis would be shared by many regionalists. Langbehn and his colleagues thought that the dominance of materialistic and positivist ideas had very detrimental effects. According to them, the rationalistic approach of the natural sciences provided a very limited view of reality by excluding those aspects of the outer reality that could not be measured, and by rejecting non-rationalist methods of experiencing and understanding. As a result the 'science of appearances', as Langbehn called the positivistic approach, could only provide a very fragmented and partial view of reality. According to him, true understanding of the essence of things and a more synthetic view based on the intuition of a genius were much more important and useful to unravel the riddles of history, human existence and society.[16] This scepticism regarding the possibilities of the natural and social sciences also affected their view on human nature. According to the positivists human beings were rational creatures. They also argued that there was a kind of independent reason, in which all men participated and which enabled them to approach the truth. However, as Barrès explained, this abstract human being, and the natural laws to which he supposedly was subjected, could not be found in reality.[17]

According to these same three authors, this type of abstract reasoning also had had a very detrimental influence on politics. By basing themselves on abstract principles, such as human rights and natural laws, the thinkers of the Enlightenment and their equally rationalist nineteenth-century followers completely ignored the fundamental differences between societies. The same ideas were applied everywhere regardless of the specific situation. Parliamentary rule took the mechanic idea that decisions were taken by a majority of half

[15] J. Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen*, 24th edn (Leipzig 1890) 121, 130, 149-50, 258-9 and 196-297, and M. Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (1902; Paris 1925) I, 115 and II, 23, 158-68 and 192. For Ganivet: E. Storm, *La perspectiva del progreso. Pensamiento político en la España del cambio de siglo (1890-1914)* (Madrid 2001) 156-76.

[16] Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 4, 54-5, 75-83, 276, Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 60-1 and A. Ganivet, *Idearium español* (1897) in: Idem, *Obras completas* 3rd edn (Madrid 1961) I, 151-309, here 164-5 and 224.

[17] Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 17-18.

plus one as its starting point. But how could one be sure that these were the best decisions? By turning down abstract and egalitarian ideas, these authors also rejected almost all existing political ideologies. Neither laissez-faire liberalism nor constitutional democracy could lead to a more just society with better and happier citizens. The application of rationalist solutions from the social sciences, as the new current of social liberalism proposed, would only lead to superficial successes. They even more fiercely dismissed the materialistic and pseudo-scientific egalitarian theories of the Marxist socialists or anarchists. These progressive ideologies could never offer satisfactory solutions, as their underlying mechanical rationalism was based on a very partial understanding of reality and because their abstract theories systematically overlooked the concrete circumstances and background of actual problems. Real progress could thus not be reached by applying the existing theoretical and abstract solutions.[18]

Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet were not traditional conservatives either. They did not base their less than optimistic interpretation of human nature and their lack of confidence in the possibility of social progress on a sceptical or religious world view. They tried to provide fresh alternatives. Intuition, subjective experience, and synthetic wisdom should supersede the exact but partial knowledge provided by abstract reasoning. Human beings were not all equal as they had fundamentally differing capacities and abilities, and as a consequence they should not be treated in exactly the same way. The same was true for societies. A society was not the mere sum of a great number of identical individuals, but was an organic whole that should be understood in its entirety. Led by faulty concepts society had deviated from its natural course and many of their fellow countrymen had become 'uprooted' or 'apathetic'. Society could only progress by rejecting these false ideas and by trying to return to its roots. What was needed was a restoration of the country's true collective personality, which could be found in the nation's past from which one could distil its authentic traits and predilections.[19]

In their view of society these intellectuals in fact revived the Romantic notion of *Volksgeist* (spirit of the people). Every people had its proper personality, spirit or soul, which was the result of the interaction between man and nature over the ages. Every nation had to be faithful to its own 'spirit', or as Barrès formulated it, to the 'voice of the blood and the instinct of the soil'.[20] Instead of trying to design a rational blueprint for the future one should look for guidelines in the past, or in those areas where the original traits were still alive, such as among those inhabitants of the countryside that still were faithful to the ancestral traditions. However, the original 'spirit of the people' probably came best to light in the work of the nation's most idiosyncratic geniuses. Langbehn singled out the Dutch seventeenth century painter Rembrandt as the most Germanic artist ever, who as a consequence should be a shining example for current German culture. Langbehn asserted that: 'The spiritual ancestors of the German people, the representatives of its great, typical characteristics and the inherited historical ideals' are its heroes and gods, which still can provide inspiration.[21]

According to Langbehn, the existing professional historical studies were of little use to those who wanted to understand the proper *Volksgeist*. Instead of an objective study of the past, based on official documents and focusing on the history of states and international relations, what was needed was an evaluation of the inner development of a people, of its character and mores. This was not a superficial analysis but a profound synthesis, which would be the work of a subjective genius. What Germany needed, according to Langbehn,

[18] Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 1, 159 and 258-9, Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 83-4, 131 and II, 157-8 and 169-177.
[19] Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 7, 217, 240 and 292-3, Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 10-13, 18-19 and II, 221-2, and Ganivet, *Idearium*, 167-8, 175 and 209.
[20] Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 93.
[21] Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 302.

was a new 'aristocracy' or a 'prophet' that would show the way. Led by farseeing men like himself, Germany could rediscover its innermost personality and return to its true natural inclinations.[22]

Not only was it necessary to reject the abstract rationalist theories and to follow the guidelines of the national spirit, it was also important to exclude foreign influences, especially those that were incompatible with the proper inclinations. Barrès and Langbehn, accused Germany and France respectively of being the origin of the abstract rationalism that had such harmful effects on their fatherlands. Both authors later highlighted the presumably debasing influence of the Jews. In 1891, Langbehn added some new chapters to the thirty-seventh edition of his book which were fiercely anti-Semitic. Barrès turned to anti-Semitism in his unsuccessful 1898 electoral campaign. His rejection of the Jewish influence on French culture and politics became even more pronounced during the Dreyfus Affair in which he became one of the leaders of the anti-Dreyfusard camp.[23] Ganivet in turn argued that foreign kings, like the Habsburgs and Bourbons, had used the country for all kind of dynastic wars and imperial conquests. The regeneration of Spain was only possible if the country would return to itself: 'We have to close with bolts, keys and padlocks all the doors through which the Spanish spirit escaped from Spain, flowing away to the four corners of the earth'.[24]

These authors however not only applied the concept of *Volksgeist* to nations, but also to regions. Langbehn for example distinguished various regions within Germany, each with its own personality and characteristics. He even used the term 'tribes' to characterise the various primitive groupings that together formed the German nation (see chapter five). According to him, each 'German tribe had to fulfil its specific function' within the broader nation. Thus, Schleswig-Holstein – where he himself was born – could function as a mediator between the 'north-west Germanics' (with which he referred to Great-Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia) and the inhabitants of the German Empire. Moreover, while Prussia had brought political unity, according to the author, Lower Germany would lead Germany's spiritual rebirth.[25]

Barrès was even more explicit. He also strongly believed that every region had its specific personality, which should be protected and reinforced. He argued that local pride was a kind of precondition for true patriotism. As people continued the traditions of their ancestors in their particular territories, it was logical that people felt connected to their families, to their town, to their region, and implicitly also to the nation as a whole. The fatherland, in fact, 'is the soil and the ancestors, it is the land of our dead'. Love for the fatherland was therefore not an abstract principle, but a very real and concrete feeling, that moved out from the family through the region to the nation. In order to protect and reinforce these idiosyncratic regional identities, they should be allowed to develop organically, not hampered by an overly strict and uniform political system.[26]

In *Idearium español* Ganivet gave little attention to the regions of Spain. Nonetheless, he was also very sensitive to regional differences. In 1898, in a public exchange with the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno he underlined the regional and racial differences in Spain. As a native from the Andalusian town of Granada, he wrote: 'If you eliminate the Romans and the Arabs [from the Spanish traditions and history], perhaps there will remain no more of me than my legs'. He also agreed with Barrès, whom he mentioned explicitly, in pleading for greater municipal autonomy as a good measure against the excessive centralisation of the Spanish state. In a short book on his hometown, which was first published in 1896, he

[22] Ibid., 244-53, 262-7 and 286-93.
[23] Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, 109-10 and 139-43 and Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès*, 262-77.
[24] Ganivet, *Idearium*, 276-7.
[25] Langbehn, *Rembrandt*, 19, 103-14, 226 and 230.
[26] Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines*, I, 67, 79-80 and II, 209 and 231-3.

defended the need to protect local traditions and customs; he also argued that architects should take into account the local geographical and climatic circumstances instead of building fashionable constructions that could have been build anywhere.[27]

The culture of regionalism

Although of these three authors only Barrès – as a member of the Comité d'Honneur of the Féderation Régionaliste Française – would become a prominent leader of a regionalist movement, their ideas and their new understanding of both national and regional identities greatly influenced members of the various movements as well as intellectuals, musicians, artists and architects. By basing themselves on the presumably authentic popular culture of the countryside, the latter created new regional icons, models and stereotypes. If we look more closely at regionalist artists and architects in France, Germany and Spain, we come across several direct connections between them and intellectual precursors like Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet.[28]

For example, the German regionalist painter, Fritz Mackensen, discussed Langbehn's bestseller extensively with his friends. He felt his decision to establish himself in the small village of Worpswede in the moors north of Bremen, which he took one year before the publication of the Rembrandt book, was legitimised by Langbehn's theories. 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. As a consequence Langbehn advised German painters to move to the countryside and develop a new and original art form with strong local roots. He further argued that the national character was best preserved in the northern German countryside where Roman and Slavonic influences were almost nonexistent. Other painters such as Otto Heinrich Engel and Ludwig Dettmann followed Langbehn's advice, staying for longer or shorter periods in isolated villages in the North of Germany, and demonstrating a lively interest in local folk culture.[29]

Probably the most influential and internationally renowned regionalist painter was Ignacio Zuloaga, who specialised in dramatic depictions of the Castilian countryside. He also maintained close personal contacts with some of these intellectual precursors, and particularly with the most important writers of the generation of 1898, such as Unamuno, Azorín and Ramiro de Maeztu. Although Ganivet – because of his early death – could not exert personal influence upon him, it is likely that the Basque painter was acquainted with his ideas. Unamuno and the other exponents of the new regionally based organic nationalism recognised in Zuloaga a kindred spirit. Unamuno even asserted that in few works of art the Spanish 'soul' was better reflected than in Zuloaga's paintings. During his long stays in Paris, Zuloaga also befriended Barrès, and on the occasion of the publication of his book *Greco ou le secret de Tolède* he even painted an enormous portrait of the French author.[30]

In France, this connection seemed to have been less obvious, but in the reviews of regionalist painters there were many references to Barrès, most of which were indirect. Thus, speaking about the works of Charles Cottet – a painter specialised in Breton subjects and a

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[27] M. de Unamuno and A. Ganivet, *El porvenir de España* (1898) in: M. de Unamuno, *Obras completas* (Madrid 1958) IV, 953-1019, here 969-70 and 1009 and A. Ganivet, *Granada la Bella* (1896) in: Idem, *Obras completas* 3rd edn (Madrid 1961) I, 59-147, here 123-37.

[28] See also: E. Storm, 'Painting Regional Identities: Nationalism in the Arts, France, Germany and Spain, 1890-1914', *European History Quarterly* (2009) 557-82 and E. Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism: Art, Architecture and International Exhibitions in France, Germany and Spain, 1890-1945* (Manchester 2010).

[29] Langbehn, *Rembrand*, 9-10, 15-19, 26, 121-2 and 135, U. Hamm and B. Küster, *Fritz Mackensen 1866-1953* (Lilienthal 1990) 44, and J. Müller, *Otto H. Engel. Ein Künstlerleben um 1900 zwischen Berlin und Schleswig-Holstein* (Flensburg 1990) 50 and 72.

[30] M. de Unamuno, 'La labor patriótica de Zuloaga', *Hermes* (1917), no. 8, and E. Lafuente Ferrari, *La vida y el arte de Ignacio Zuloaga* (3 edition Barcelona 1990) 299-325.

friend of Zuloaga – a critic compared his paintings of the Spanish countryside with the mystic interpretation of Barrès. Another critic argued that the Breton painter Louis-Marie Désiré-Lucas felt detached from his homeland during his study in Paris and became what Barrès called a 'déraciné'; consequently the young 'uprooted' painter only recovered his creative powers after he had returned to his native soil.[31]

However, there were not only direct influences and indirect references. More importantly, many painters of regionalist topics and the critics that supported their work made clear that in many ways they agreed with most of the premises of the three intellectuals. Thus regionalist painting, although it did not produce manifestos, was presented as a reaction to the naïve realism of the Realists and Impressionists, which they rejected in a similar fashion as Langbehn cum suis had done with the abstract ideas of the positivists. According to them, the almost arbitrarily chosen 'snapshots' of the Impressionists recorded only some outward aspects of reality. This way art became a kind of senseless exercise in virtuosity.[32] For the regionalist painters, art was a serious matter. They could not content themselves with depicting an arbitrary aspect of outward reality in a sketchy way. Like Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet, they wanted to look behind the visual appearances and penetrate into the essence of things. Instead of mirroring nature, they wanted to interpret reality by distilling its essence, its inner truth. As a consequence one contemporary observer once called their art 'subjective realism'.[33] In philosophical terms, however, like the work of Langbehn and the others, it could be defined as neo-idealism. They understood that ideas were more important for comprehending reality than visual observations. Instead of painting immediate appearances, one critic remarked of Zuloaga that he succeeded in discerning the 'soul' through the outer forms, thus interpreting reality instead of simply copying it.[34]

However, a good picture not only required a meaningful method of depiction, but also a relevant subject. Depicting air or light could not be the highest aspiration of art. The impressionists' world of pleasure and vice and the landscapes devoid of any intrinsic metaphysical references seemed irrelevant to the regionalist painters. They preferred the countryside – which they saw as the essence of the nation – to the cosmopolitan urban world. Yet the mere outward representation of landscapes or village scenes could not satisfy them either. They did not want to depict a generic countryside, like predecessors such as Jean-François Millet had done. Every region had its particular characteristics and precisely through this uniqueness it constituted an indispensable part of the nation. Exploring the specific character of a particular region was thus considered to be a patriotic deed. Zuloaga, for instance, like Barrès, Ganivet, and Langbehn, believed that a general reorientation on the popular spirit, which was still alive in the countryside, could regenerate the nation. Therefore in his paintings he tried to 'synthesise the Castilian soul' and unravel the 'psychology' of the Spanish 'race'. Moreover in 1913, during an unforeseen encounter with Maeztu in Navarre – accompanied by the composer Maurice Ravel and some other 'Bergsonian intellectuals' – he explained that Parisian refinement only meant calculations, numbers and decadence, whereas in the traditional Spanish countryside one could still find strength, passion and vitality.[35]

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[31] J. Chantavoine, 'Artistes contemporains. M. Charles Cottet', *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (August 1911) 117, and Y. Rambosson, 'Désiré-Lucas', *L'Art Décoratif* (March 1906) 104-6.

[32] See for example: G. Mourey, 'Charles Cottet's "Au Pays de la Mer" and Other Works', *The Studio* (January 1899) 240 and K. Krummacher, 'Die Malerkolonie Worpswede', *Westermanns Illustrierte Deutsche Monatshefte* (April 1899) 20 and 24.

[33] L. Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', *Art et Décoration* (April 1904) 112.

[34] C. Mauclair, 'Ignacio Zuloaga', *Kunst für Alle* (1 Oct. 1911), XXVII, 9-12.

[35] Zuloaga cited in Lafuente Ferrari, *Ignacio Zuloaga*, 208 and J. M. de Arozamena, *Ignacio Zuloaga. El pintor, el hombre* (San Sebastian 1970) 18-19, and R. de Maeztu, 'Por la España abrupta', *Heraldo de Madrid* (29 September 1913).

Contrary to painters and art critics, architects in general defended their work without referring to more general ideas and concepts. Thus, in the architectural press of the first decades of the twentieth century authors did not directly refer to the publications of Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet. Nonetheless, architects and critics who advocated a new, regionalist architecture also showed the same subjective and anti-rationalist reaction to their forerunners as we have already seen in the writings of these three intellectuals and of those in favour of regionalist painting.

Whereas regionalist painting was a reaction to Realism and Impressionism, regionalist architecture was opposed to the historicism and eclecticism of academic architecture. Their opulent facades in a fake historicising style had no organic relation with the interior and in general the advocates of a new regionalist architecture rejected this type of building as pompous, false and unauthentic. Instead of constructing a villa that could be built anywhere, these architects preferred a house that perfectly fitted into the local setting and in which the arrangements of the rooms was visible from the outside. The façade should not be an anonymous mask, but the natural skin of an organic whole. Whereas Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet preached a return to native traditions on a more general level, the advocates of regionalist architecture advised their colleagues to find inspiration in the authentic vernacular buildings of the countryside.[36] Thus, the French architect Louis Sézille praised the traditional architecture of the (French) Basque Country. According to him, the Basque artists and artisans of the past had perfected their own characteristic way of building, creating a style that was perfectly suited to the local geographical and climatic conditions. As a consequence, it would be logical for contemporary architects working in the area to follow these native traditions.[37]

A critic explained the same principle in the German architectural review *Der Baukunst*, although he made a clear distinction between old vernacular buildings and new constructions inspired by them. In former times, farmers and the inhabitants of small towns generally built as they saw fit. They were not aware that their half-timbered or thatched houses and gables looked as if they were born out of the landscape. This harmony between art and nature had developed as a matter of course over the generations. However, in modern times people had arrived at a higher level of consciousness. This was particularly true of the well-educated classes. They knew that other areas and epochs had produced their own art, and that these foreign and ancient styles could now be used in new creations. At the same time, the author understood that even buildings in the countryside had to be adapted to the new circumstances of the industrialised age. Consequently, the ancient and collective 'habitual art' was replaced by 'initiative art'. A truly contemporary architecture that was rooted in the native soil therefore had to be the conscious creation of a strong artistic personality. In an era with ample knowledge about the past and about other parts of the world, art that both reflected the spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*) and of the area (*Volksgeist*) had to be the individual creation of a highly gifted and sensitive artist.[38]

Architects, thus, should not build abstract constructions that have no connection to their function and to the surrounding landscape, nor should they produce copies of existing popular types. What was needed were well-considered contemporary creations that were inspired by existing vernacular architecture. Moreover, according to a reviewer of the work of the regionalist architect Richard Riemerschmid, an architect had to be a subjective genius, who – like Langbehn's prophet – with his intuition and the use of all his senses could grasp

[36] See C. Plumet, 'Une maison de campagne', *Art et Décoration* (1902), 2, 198-200, L. Sézille, 'Trois cottages aux environs de Paris', *Art et Décoration* (1910) 25-31, 'Die Pflege heimatlicher Bauweise', *Dekorative Kunst* (August 1914), VII, 433-43, G. J. Wolf, 'Richard Riemerschmid', *Dekorative Kunst* (May 1912), XV, 345-59.
[37] L. Sézille, 'Une maison en Pays Basque', *La Vie à la Campagne* (1 September 1909), 153-4.
[38] F. Seesselberg, 'Niedersachsenkunst', *Der Baumeister* (May 1910), VIII, 88-94.

the essence of the local popular spirit and translate the concrete necessities of a given assignment into a coherent and organic whole that was perfectly adapted to the surrounding landscape, the local building traditions and the modern needs of the inhabitants.[39]

In Spain, the two most prominent regionalist architects, Leonardo Rucabado and Aníbal González Álvarez, who professed very similar views as their French and German colleagues, even pleaded for a new organic national architecture. In a lecture at the conference of Spanish architects in 1915, they argued that a regionally varied architecture based on native traditions and adapted to local geographical and climatic circumstances could in the long run create a new and truly Spanish architecture.[40] Thus, as with Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet, nationalism and cultural regionalism were two sides of the same coin.

It has become clear that painters and architects who through their work effectively contributed to the redefinition of regional identities, operated within the transnational irrational climate of the fin-de-siècle that was shaped by, among others, Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet. They all rejected the abstract and rationalist ideas of their predecessors and embraced more subjective views. At the same time, they accepted the analysis that their fatherland actually suffered a severe crisis of collective identity. The existing abstract blueprints for the future were not convincing anymore, and as Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet proposed, these had to be replaced by a wholesale orientation towards the national and regional past. The popular spirit seemed still alive particularly in the countryside, so guidelines for the regeneration of the fatherland could be distilled by studying authentic regional traditions and customs. Hence, these painters and architects did not only participate in the transnational crisis of reason, but also incorporated many elements of the solutions these three authors proposed for the modernisation and democratisation of society, namely, a more organic national unity based on a return to the country's most authentic traditions and a resurrection of its true collective personality.

Regionalist painters thus depicted remote areas, such as Brittany, the German coastal regions, and isolated parts of Castile, as the heartland of the nation. Here, time seemed to have stood still, prehistoric and medieval elements persisted, and modern civilisation, apparently, had not yet arrived. Most critics saw the villagers that figured in the paintings as authentic and pure. The original national spirit could be studied among these people, who were living in close contact with nature and respected ancestral traditions. Thus, in reference to Cottet's pictures of the Breton fishing communities, Leonce Bénédite, the director of the Parisian museum for contemporary art, wrote that 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 civilisations, across everything that passes, these maritime races have preserved their former character intact'.[41] A Spanish art critic even more explicitly maintained that 'the creative fibre of the old national spirit' had almost completely disappeared in Spain's upper classes. 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.[42]

In Germany, the pictures of a presumable harmonious and hard-working rural society were even presented as more or less explicit alternatives to the uprooted and dissatisfied urban working classes, who seemed to come increasingly under the spell of internationalist and revolutionary ideas. Thus, the painter Dettmann rhetorically asked himself in a letter

[39] W. Michel, 'Richard Riemerschmid', *Dekorative Kunst* (April 1909), XII, 289-300.
[40] L. Rucabado and A. González, 'Orientaciones para el resurgimiento de una arquitectura nacional', *Arte Español* (1915) 379-86 and 437-53.
[41] Bénédite, 'Charles Cottet', 112.
[42] J. de la Encina, *La trama del arte vasco* (Bilbao 1919) 16-17.

'which worker, which 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'. His colleague Carl Bantzer, looking back from the 1930s, asserted that the people from the Schwalm region who figured in his pictures, in general were 'diligent and after sour weeks also knew joyful feasts, feasts of cheerfulness and feasts of work. … 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'.[43]

As with the painters, regionalist tendencies in architecture could be seen as a conscious attempt to broaden the national heritage by including the popular culture of the countryside. This way, it would be easier for the lower classes to identify with a nation, which until the end of the nineteenth century had almost exclusively been defined by the products of urban high culture. Next to the works and paraphernalia of kings, generals, politicians, famous scientists and artists now also artisanal products and the vernacular creations of the countryside were deemed interesting enough for display in exhibitions and museums, to depict in paintings or inspire the work of professional architects.[44]

Nonetheless, regionalist architects also came up with more practical solutions to the problems of their time. Maybe the most striking innovation was the garden city, a concept developed around the turn of the century in England. In Germany, where many observers were preoccupied with the consequences of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation, architects and city planners embraced the garden city concept cladding it in the regionalist objectives of fitting in with the surrounding countryside. The unhealthy and immoral conditions of the urban slums could be avoided by combining the best of the countryside with the advantages of the town. This could be done by providing the lower classes with their own house, with enough fresh air and light, in new green neighbourhoods where the children would have space to play, where there would no longer be a need to waste time in a bar and where the inhabitants would really feel at home. Garden cities or garden suburbs where the different classes would live together harmoniously thus could function, according to a German author, as a 'weapon in the struggle for social peace'.[45] A happy family life, a proper house in a regionalist style with a garden and a healthy environment should convert potential revolutionaries into decent, responsible and law-abiding members of the national community. A nostalgic and idealised view of a harmonious countryside was thus consciously propagated as an alternative to the conflict-ridden and cramped working class districts of the cities.

Although in France and Spain the garden city movement was less influential than in Germany, architectural critics were often more explicit in their celebration of the beneficial effects of the garden city. Thus a French author, reviewing a score of workers' settlements in a neo-vernacular style in the east of France, remarked that these village-like quarters greatly improved the health and well-being of the workers and their families. This would have a positive effect on the 'morality of the masses', as the inhabitants would almost automatically avoid bars, bad company and vicious habits.[46] A Spanish author in a similar fashion confirmed that garden cities could at least partially solve 'the great social plagues: of emigration, alcoholism, criminality, lack of civilisation, prostitution, tuberculosis, social conflict and misery'.[47]

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[43] F. Deibel, *Ludwig Dettmann* (Bielefeld and Leipzig s.a.[1910]) 22-4 and C. Bantzer, *Hessens Land und Leute in der deutschen Malerei* (Marburg 1933-1935) 40.
[44] Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 125-58 and M. Wörner, *Vergnügen und Belehren. Volkskultur auf den Weltausstellungen* (Münster 1999).
[45] E. Haenel, 'Die Gartenstadt Hellerau', *Dekorative Kunst* (April 1911), XIV, 343.
[46] M. Guillemot, 'Logis d'ouvriers', *Art et Décoration* (1912), 2, 79-88.
[47] H. G. del Castillo, 'Ciudades jardines y ciudades lineales', *La Construcción Moderna* (1914) 41 and 44.

Epilogue

It is clear that many of the themes that are central to regionalism appear in the works of precursors from different countries such as Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet. Therefore regionalism could be described as a transnational reaction to the rise of mass society that was largely determined by the fin-de-siècle crisis of reason. Instead of participating in universal progress by following abstract and rationalist guidelines for the future, a reorientation towards the past and native traditions could bring concrete improvements and lead to an organic evolution of a country or region in harmony with its own personality.

In fact, even cultural regionalism had clear political implications, although in general these were not mentioned openly. By propagating the image of a traditional and organically grown community, regionalism could foster a sense of unity. Its advocates hoped to integrate the inhabitants of the countryside, and especially the simple farmers, artisans and workers, into the national community by showing that they formed an integral part of the fatherland. This was done by adopting their customs, artefacts and traditions as an essential part of the national heritage. To the lower classes of the towns, regionalism propagated the image of a harmonious, traditional and peaceful interclass community based in the countryside as an alternative to the uprooted and miserable existence of the workers. Combining, for example, the advantages of the town with those of the countryside in garden cities with cottages in a neo-vernacular style could provide an attractive and concrete alternative to the abstract, divisive and destructive ideas of the internationalist workers' movement. At the same time, regionalism also had a message for the upper classes. In order to retain a leading role in society they should reject the current cosmopolitan ideas and fashions and strengthen their bonds with the people, and particularly with the authentic traditions and popular culture of the countryside.

This also explains why regionalists made so many references to the specific difficult circumstances in their own country, such as the loss of Alsace-Lorrain and the lagging international position in France, the defeat in the Spanish-American war in Spain, and the late national unification and extremely rapid modernisation in Germany. Regionalist authors were highly concerned with the political situation of their fatherland and especially with the lack of legitimacy of the existing political system. The incompetence of politicians led by false abstract ideas had resulted in defeats, economic problems and/or a chaotic urbanisation process. However, regionalists were even more worried about the profound dissatisfaction among the workers. Universal suffrage, they feared, would in the long run confer the power to the uprooted working classes and enable them to implant their unrealistic revolutionary ideals. Something had to be done. By stimulating the identification with both the region and the nation they hoped to integrate the lower classes into the national community and by propagating concrete reforms that were in line with the presumed authentic personality of the people they hoped that a truly organic evolution would save existing society from revolution.

However, the unity-in-diversity nationalism that was defended by most regionalists also differed in some fundamental aspects from the exalted organic nationalism of Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet. Whereas regionalists stressed the integrative aspects of a traditional peaceful community that was rooted in the soil, and that could also be found in the writings of Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet, these writers also paid a lot of attention to potential threats to national unity. Xenophobic diatribes or anti-Semitic remarks seem, nonetheless, to be absent from regionalist discourse.[48] Moreover, while Langbehn, Barrès and Ganivet also functioned as a source of inspiration for those who pleaded for a more aggressive foreign policy or imperialistic expansion, regionalists generally did not advocate foreign conquest.

[48] I did not encounter anti-Semite or xenophobic remarks in the hundreds of reviews on regionalist painting and architecture in France, Germany and Spain which I have consulted.

They were primarily concerned with fostering a sense of harmony, of belonging and of community among the inhabitants of their own country or region, and they believed that this should be reached by positive, conciliatory means and not by vilifying a common enemy, be it a minority at home, a strong international rival, or exotic tribes that were opposed to beneficial colonial rule. Soldiers, colonial expeditions, battleships or *squadristi* had no place in their idealised rural world. Only the defence of the homeland against foreign aggression would legitimise the use of violence.

The question now is: Do these conclusions also apply to regionalist movements in general, even to those who pleaded for autonomy and separatism? The answer seems clear. The stress on native traditions and on the need to restore the authentic collective personality and replace the more future oriented drive for modernisation in order to join the universal march towards a just, rational and more uniform society, fostered not only the culture of regionalism at a national level, but also the activities of regional movements on a local level. Moreover this seems to have been the case in the whole of Europe. The earlier rationalist outlook had favoured economic and political considerations, but now cultural factors began to have the upper hand. This shift in fact stimulated the emancipation of smaller units. Thus, whereas before 1890, the Italian and German unifications functioned as a model of economic cooperation within a greater nation-state that could compete in the international arena, now materialist advantages of scale and power-politics had to make way for the organic growth of natural units, not hampered by artificially created states inherited from the past or created by 'foreign' conquest. The new emphasis on tradition, roots and authenticity thus clearly favoured the cultural and political emancipation of regions and the formation of new, but relatively small nation-states. However, the separatist dream of a proper state for a homogeneous community, which was revitalised after 1918, would require more nation-building efforts, forced assimilation, discrimination and in many cases even ethnic cleansing than most regionalists had imagined.