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Regional Memory: Reflections on the Role of History in (Re)constructing Regional Identity

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ABSTRACT

This contribution analyses the specificity of the construction of regional history in comparison with the construction of national history. The point of departure is the differentiation between 'nation' and 'region', both in historical development and in scientific discourse. The term "region" itself is used in contemporary social sciences and history in a rather confusing way, as if all units below the level of state had to be called regions. Under this term, we find historical territorial bodies, present and past administrative units, territories defined by ethnicity and territories defined by 'natural borders'.

Consequently, an all-embracing construct of "regional history" is a mere abstraction and today is far from real practice. We must distinguish different types of regional history: first, history of a region as a part of a larger state or national territory; second, history of an ethnically defined region, usually developing towards national history; third, history of macro-regions, which include territory of more than one state (or nation). Besides these different understandings of regional history, there is also local history to be considered as a separate category.

Common features of all three kinds of regional history seem to be their partiality (i.e. that they are histories of a part of larger unit); often the absence or marginalization of political history (in favour of cultural, social, economic history); attention to changing borders and, finally, the relative weakness or even absence of the image of an 'enemy'.

Tento článek se zabývá otázkou specifiky regionálních dějin ve srovnání s dějinami národními. Proto nejprve vymezuje rozdíly mezi národem a regionem a konstatuje, že tyto rozdíly nelze ignorovat. Následně sleduje v jakém smyslu se užívá termínu „region“ v současném bádání a konstatuje, že je to užívání většinou spontánní a chaotické, jako by vše, co nelze určit jako stát, bylo regionem. Kritéria vymezující region kolísají od historických hranic přes hranice správních obvodů, etnických celků, až po hranice přírodní. Také z hlediska

teritoriálního rozsahu se regionem označují drobná území, stejně jako velké celky zahrnující několik států.

Odtud vyplývá i problém vymezení regionálních dějin, který lze řešit jen vymezením několika typů regionů (a tedy i regionálních dějin):

- 1. dějiny regionu jako součást dějin určitého národa, resp. národního státu,*
- 2. dějiny národního hnutí, v jehož průběhu se regionální území stává územím národním, resp. regionální dějiny, které přerostly do kategorie dějin národních,*
- 3. dějiny makroregionu, který zahrnuje dějiny několika národů.*

Společným rysem regionálních dějin je jejich parcialita (jsou dějinami jisté části většího státního celku), koncentrace na kulturní, sociální a hospodářské dějiny, často také proměnnost hranic a slabá či žádná představa „nepřítele“ v sousedství.

This chapter aims to ascertain to what degree a preference for regional history may modify or even replace a collective identity based on national history. Studying the processes of regionalization at this time, we also have to be aware of the historical dimension of regionality. Thus, the present contribution should be understood in essence as a complement to the excellent introduction to this volume written by Steven Ellis and Raingard Eßer¹. Let us start with the accepted view that the myth of a common past was one of the most important factors in strengthening national identity. If collective memory and the construct of national history accompanied modern nation-formation, what role did history play (and does it still play) in the case of regional identity? There is no doubt that the role or the cultural impact of regional historical consciousness (collective memory) differs from that of national history. Does it mean that the regional historical discourse differs from that of the nation? Even if we accept this meaning, we have to face another conceptual problem: we have no clear-cut criteria by which to distinguish between where the nation ends and the region starts. For this reason, the first part of this contribution is dedicated to the clarification of the concept of “region”.

REGION AND NATION

As regards the relationship between region and nation, it is difficult to approach this problem empirically – for instance, to ask ourselves what has already been published on the history of regions. A short overview of those scientific texts which describe themselves as “regional” histories highlights the wide range of topics presented under this term. For this reason, I find it preferable to start with some kind of “ideal typical” (in the sense of Max Weber) procedure, trying to compare these two concepts so as to define similarities and differences between them. Only then can we reflect on the issue of the historical roots of regional and national identity.

At its most banal, an almost self-evident but very often forgotten difference between the phenomena which we call region and nation is the fact that the term “modern nation” is understood as a more or less homogeneous large social group which is composed of self-conscious members, i.e. those who accept a national identity. The term “region” defines above all a space, a land which is settled by a collection of people – the region does not have members, but inhabitants, who are not necessarily aware of belonging to this region. We cannot study nation regardless of the degree of national identity (or “national awareness”, “nationalism”), but we can study regions without “regionalism”. In other words, regions may exist independently of the subjective identity of their inhabitants. Therefore, it is prudent to distinguish regionality as an “objective” fact and regionalism as a political or cultural activity which has sometimes but not always resulted from regionality. Since the nation, as a social group, cannot be constructed without national identity, it is impossible to regard “regionalism” and “nationalism” as terms of the same category and therefore also as synonyms. This does not exclude the occasional complementarity of the two terms.

What does this mean in the case of frontiers? Perhaps regions, and so by definition ‘regional interests’, need not have stable, clear, and generally accepted frontiers. On the other hand, a nation or national interest has by definition to be characterized by clear-cut borders (be they historical, ethnical or political). As a consequence, a regional community is derived from living in ‘the same’ territory and its interests correspond to this fact. The national community is created by and based on a national consciousness, as a result of a combination of many common features, thoughts and ties. In regard to this, regional identity and a sense of belonging seem to be only a part of this national sample of ties and relationships. For this reason, it was not difficult to personalize the nation and to construct its history based on some kind of narrative about the personal past. The “collective memory” needs a subject, with a memory of ‘its own’ past – and the personalized nation fits this role much better than a collection of inhabitants of a territory or a region. Irrespective of this difference, the regional “collective memory” naturally existed. It differed from the national one not only through the inconsistency of its subject, but also – and above all – through the object of memory: it was not only about “us”, but about “our region”. National memory is concerned above all with the group – its members – naturally living in a given territory: regional memory is primarily related to a territory – naturally an inhabited one.

In linguistic and cultural respects difference is evident: national identity is founded on the existence of a distinct culture that is defined as national and differs from other national cultures, but regional culture is usually a part of one or more national cultures. Sometimes – for example, in Schleswig, Transylvania or Moravia – regional culture is a part of two or more national cultures. In this second case, however, we have to ask, in terms of regional culture, if the two identities – the two or more ethnicities – cancel each other out. Sometimes they may be complementary. Could the same be said about the overlapping of regional and national history? Having their own regional histories, Transylvania could at the same time be understood and interpreted as a part both of

Romanian and Hungarian histories, Flanders analogically as a part of the history of Netherlands, of Belgium and recently as a part of the Flemish national territory. In this connection, unfortunately, it is too often forgotten that there are rather different connotations of the term “nation” in English, “die Nation” in German, “la nation” in French, “národ” in Czech, and so on².

DIFFERENT TYPES OF REGIONS

There are two separate levels in the relationship between the nation state and the region. At the level of politics and administration, regions are part of the state and their position oscillates between a simple administrative unit and what is essentially an autonomous province. At the level of economic and social structure, however, regions may differ strongly from each other within the same nation state. In regard to the present chapter, we need to begin with typological reflections about differences among regions. To distinguish between such types, we may use various criteria. If we use as a criterion of comparison the presence or absence of political subjectivity of regions, four basic types of region emerge.

Firstly, there are regions corresponding largely to former historical units, which played some time in the past the role of subjects in political history – like Moravia, Transylvania, Bavaria, Holland, Tuscany, Brittany. As they were formerly smaller states or autonomous territories, where for some time they played a limited role in political history, this type of region is usually defined in terms of political frontiers, which sometimes survive albeit in an altered form to the present day. Secondly, there are the traditional units of internal state-administration without international political subjectivity, but with some degree of autonomy and clear-cut frontiers, like English counties or French départements. Thirdly, we can understand regions as “non-political units”, territories defined primarily by geographical, ethnographic, or by an almost forgotten political specificity – by various valleys, defined by mountains, as in Norway or Slovakia. Similarly, regions can be defined by historical myths, as in Moravia and also other parts of Central Europe, or by specific dialects. In most cases the frontiers are not clear cut. Finally, in recent times, some newly created ‘artificial’ regions have been constructed by decisions from above; and consequently, their elites have had to start searching for historical background, inventing traditions – all this in order to strengthen a newly-formed regional identity.

We may take another criterion, the criterion of size (and of the intensity of social communication), and use it as a basis for a modified typology which may be defined as follows. There may be small regions, where almost everyone knows everybody else, and where the term “regional” means almost the same as “local”. In this instance, identity is based on everyday experience, concerning what is understood as “our common interests”, or “our common past”. This type may be related to the “non-political regions”. Secondly we have regions of sub-national size, with stable “historical” frontiers, to which the indi-

vidual is taught that he belongs, and where he needs the ability of imagination to regard himself as its inhabitant, without meeting all the other members. This region is, or was in the past, a political unit, but not a national one (Moravia, Slavonia, Saxony, Tuscany and so on). We can also have regions of sub-national size without exact and clear frontiers, representing a traditional space, where the individual inhabitant may feel himself in “his” land, because he has better possibilities for communication (thanks to a common dialect, ease of travel, common living standards, and administrative structures). Examples of such regions are Provence, Pomorze in Poland, Upper or Lower Germany, or the Alps. Finally we have macro-regions (also “mezzo-regions”) on a trans-national scale. What is meant here is several nations existing within the territory of a particular region, such as Central Europe, the Baltic countries or the Balkans.

Now let us reflect on the differences and difficulties in constructing “regional history” under conditions of these different types. Even though it is more a field for future research, the construct of regional history has to be related to the above-mentioned different types of regions. It has also to take into account that there are different branches of historiography and historical research. So long as we understand history in the narrow, traditionalist sense of the word, the history of political activities and institutions, the difference between national history and all types of regional histories is evident. The term “region” itself evokes the idea of a partial territory, usually on the periphery, or of a province of a state-nation or nation state. It can be argued that nations which lived in the territory of multi-ethnic empires also developed their regional history, but there is an important difference. In this case, national identity adopted a standpoint which rejected the nation’s peripheral position within a multiethnic empire and the construct of national history was concentrated on a personalized nation without regard to regional structure. This is not to accept the traditional opinion that all national politics attempted to achieve a statehood. There is, however, no doubt that the narrative of national history – in this traditional political sense of the word – implicitly tended to be interpreted, understood as a nation-state history (naturally with exception of that type of nation-formation which could not construct its continuity with any political subject in the past, such as the Estonian, Latvian, Slovene or Slovak national movements)³. By contrast, regional history is usually understood as a part of the history of the state (not necessarily of a nation-state).

If we agree that history is “understood”, it leads to a further question, understood by whom, and in which language? These questions raise the problem of perspectives. To be more intelligible, let us begin with some examples. From a British perspective and in linguistic use, Scottish or Welsh movements (and histories) are called regional, regionalist movements, while in their own vocabulary, they see themselves as nations, having a national history and as being “nationalist”. The Catalan patriotic associations at the end of the 19th century initially described themselves as “regionalist”, but during the following decades they relabelled themselves as “national”. This problem of terminol-

ogy naturally has a linguistic aspect. In the Czech or German linguistic tradition, the term “nation” or “*národ*” is not primarily connected with statehood, but with language and culture. Consequently, it is acceptable to speak about Slovak or Slovene national history, even if these regions represented no political unit at all. By contrast, states like Saxony or Bavaria did not seek to construct their “national” history but rather regarded themselves as part of the German nation.

While nations – or more specifically their members – defined themselves by their relationship (also their differences and conflicts) with other nations, regional identity might be defined both in relation to a nation (nation-state), as its component, and in relation to its neighbourhood, the neighbouring regions. The historical dimension of these different types of “living in a neighbourhood” evokes a very different selection of events and processes. In the case of the nation, the history of “living in a neighbourhood” was the history of “international relations” with other (state-)nations, including war and peace. The structure of this relationship centred on the border, including its defence and any changes in its character. International relations were conducted in terms of national interests, interpreted as group-interests of all members of the nation. These relations also developed and exploited stereotypes (sometimes even “institutionalized” stereotypes) about other nations. In the case of the region, there existed a permanent tension between feudal landlords during the Middle Ages, but we have difficulty in imagining a persuasive construct of a modern inter-regional war in the name of “regional interests” which could mobilize politically the masses of one region against the inhabitants of another region, unless regional differences were to be expressed in terms of ethnic xenophobia. Much more persuasive is another construct of regional interests, a construct based on the relationship between the region as province and the state – as some kind of tension between a (regional) periphery and the centre, which might be represented by a centralist nation-state or an Empire.

This relationship between centre and province included also the aspect of social stratification and of vertical social mobility. Ruling elites at national level were somehow “higher” than those at the regional level. Social advancement at the regional level therefore included the potential step from the lower, regional to the higher national (or to state) level. Some members of regional elites succeeded in advancing from regional to national level (they became members of government, generals, bank directors, and so on). The question is: how were they represented in the regional memory? Were they traitors to their region as national heroes? Were they portrayed as a “lost son”, representing a regional contribution to national glory? This second attitude seems more common. Nevertheless, a “lost son” is usually understood in national, not regional terms. For example the Danish author Holberg, born in Norway; the Polish poet Mickiewicz, born in Lithuania; or the Austrian general Radecky, born in Bohemia. Usually, regional “great sons” are at the same time national ones. Another aspect of regional variability needs to be mentioned, migration. It is generally accepted that crossing regional fron-

tiers is much easier than crossing national ones. Consequently, when leaving the territory of a nation, a member of this nation retained (necessarily retained) his/her national identity, or at least the consciousness of belonging to this nation. As against this, it was sometimes seen as natural if the inhabitant of a region lost his original regional identity, or if it weakened, after he had settled in another region, and if he assumed the identity of "his" new region or felt a sense of belonging to it. Nevertheless, this is only a stereotype, a simplification, because the interdependence between migration and regional identity is much more complex. Migration might be limited to crossing the border of a neighbouring region, but it might also mean migration to a distant region in the territory of a different state or/and nation. The change in the hierarchy of identities could be seen in different terms if it concerned migration from one region to the other in one and the same national territory, as opposed to the case of "international" migration. Nevertheless, we know of cases in which migration into a region in the territory of a nationally different country was accompanied by assimilation (Czechs in Vienna), but also cases in which assimilation did not occur even over several generations (Saxons in Transylvania). Sometimes, immigrants from a different region of the same nation state did not abandon their regional identity (Sicilians in Northern Italy).

Last, but not least, we have to take into account the social and economic component. Both regional and national identities have to do with class differences and with the level of uneven development. From this point of view, there were distinctions between regions and also in the social belonging of migrants. To what kind of settlement did the place of departure belong? Who were the migrants and where did they find their new home, in a village or a city? All these factors might influence the intensity of their identification with the region they left and with their new home. In other words, migration cannot be regarded as a constant factor of regional identity, and it also plays a very limited role in the construction of regional history. On the other hand, inhabitants of regions with a stronger historical consciousness, with a more highly developed sense of collective memory, might prove more able or determined to retain their identity than those coming from regions with a low level of collective memory. This is, however, only a hypothesis.

CONSTRUCTING REGIONAL HISTORY

So far we have dealt with general aspects of the region-nation relationship. Let us now step down to the level of concrete forms of historical thought. The traditional view regards as regional the history of those political or administrative units which did not have statehood. In other words, they were not the subjects in the struggle for political power in international relations. Some regions whose history was regarded and constructed as part of the history of larger (and more important) units, i.e. nations, found themselves written as part of the history of France, Spain, Poland and so on. This perspective has, nevertheless, two weak points. Firstly, the struggle for political power un-

der the conditions pertaining to pre-modern society took place not only between states and their rulers, but also, as already mentioned, between local authorities, local rulers. Can we classify these conflicts as a part of regional history? Both positive and negative answers to this question cause problems. If we include these conflicts as a part of regional history, what about the conflict situations between the local ruler and state power, between the provincial and central elites? If we exclude these conflicts from regional history, we accept the dualism between national and regional history and regard all political conflicts as conflicts between subjects of political power, which might be – according to the time and place – either regional or national ones. This difficulty leads to a second, more pressing problem. Analyzing the problem of regional history, we have to abandon the limitation of the concept of history relating to political events alone. If we try – as contemporary historiography seeks to do – to include social, cultural, economic events and changes in our field of observation, we will be able to distinguish national and regional history more exactly. In this way, an orientation towards social history is almost self-evident in the research for regional history.

History is written by historians who usually have their national and regional background and who are formed by their own tradition of education. The main feature of this traditional education is, as already mentioned, the concept of national history as the basic central concept, to which both general (continental), and regional history has to be related. Since the reality of a “national past” (i.e. the sample of events which might be constructed as national) has strongly differed in the case of the different European nations, so the placement of regional history in a national context has also strongly differed. In such cases, we have to distinguish several types of conceptualization of regional history in relationship to the national past. This includes regional history as a part of national history, as it was reconstructed under conditions of “old” nation states – i.e. nations whose history can without too much difficulty be identified with the past of a state with stable borders, such as France, Portugal or England. Each of these states or state-nations was divided into smaller units – provinces, départements, counties etc. – and the history of these units is regarded as a regional one. These regional units emerged either as a result of their conquest by, or integration into the state, usually during the Middle Ages (County of Toulouse, Wales) and in early modern times (Alsace in France). They may also be result of administrative decisions (regions as counties, départements). Naturally, this duality of historical integration and administrative division might sometimes give rise to overlapping regional histories. As long as the level of national history was regarded as the dominant and decisive one, such overlapping did not play any important role: but the higher the relevance of the regional approach, the higher the importance of overlapping regional histories. When looked at from a comparative European perspective, this type of relationship between national and regional history is rather unique and concerns not more than three or four states. The number of cases could be increased, if we were also to take into account

the history of state-nations which emerged during the early modern period – Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, also in a specific sense Brandenburg-Prussia. These states emerged through the political unification of independent medieval states which were themselves the subjects in political history (Castile, Aragon, Catalonia in the case of Spain; the Dutch provinces struggling against the Spanish rule; the Swiss cantons). In other words, national history in the Middle Ages might in these states only be constructed as a collection of several state-histories. The extreme case of constructing national history through the integration of regional state histories is represented by Italy after its national unification. Less extreme, but also belonging to this category, is the construct of Romanian national history.

The Italians were not the only modern nation which was formed during the 19th century in order to achieve statehood. National movements tried to construct or “discover” their past, their history. This task was less complicated where the modern national movement was able to invoke a pre-existing independent medieval (or even an early modern) state which had lost independence during the 17th or 18th centuries. Most famous in this category are the Poles, who demanded the restitution of their multi-ethnic Empire, redefined as a nation-state. The Magyars regarded the kingdom of Hungary as their national state, likewise the Czechs in regard to the lands of the crown of Bohemia, Lithuanians in regard to the medieval Grand Duchy, Croats as regards their three-fold medieval kingdom, and the Norwegians in regard to their Kingdom. In all these cases, except the Polish one, the construct of national history concerned territories which had been for several centuries part of other larger states or empires. Their history was in this context in the position of a regional history. In other words, national history was constructed as an integrated history of one or several regions, whose specific feature was that they possessed stable borders: Bohemia and Moravia as regards Czech history; Slavonia, Dalmatia and Croatia proper in respect of Croatian history; Transylvania as a part of Hungarian history. Nevertheless, all these historic lands, which were accepted as the basis for national history, were inhabited not only by members of the modern nation so constituted, but also by other ethnic groups who regarded themselves as nations or (in the case of minorities) as members of another nation which lived outside the territory claimed by the national movement (Slovaks in Hungary, Germans in Bohemia). Their collective memory was oriented towards another type of regional history. The space of this regional history was defined by ethnic and in some cases by natural borders.

Those European national movements that could construct their national history only as a transformed regional history have to be regarded as a specific type: Estonians, Latvians, Slovenes, Finns, Slovaks. Having no or almost no “political history”, and having also only very vague and ambivalent units of administration, these nations constructed their national history by focusing on social conditions of life and on cultural specificity: they corresponded in a high degree to the “ideal type” of regional history as a history of the people without politics. This last type might be called “adopted” history.

Here we have on the one side great medieval multi-ethnic empires historiographically transformed into the predecessors of modern nations: the most famous case are those German historians responsible for the adoption of the Holy Roman Empire as their national state, together with another adoption, Prussia, as the teleologically interpreted predecessor of Germany. In this understanding, the history of Saxony, Bavaria, Baden, and so on are regional histories of a specific kind, “Landesgeschichte”. Less famous adoptions are the medieval Bulgarian and Serbian empires as the construct of national histories; and above all the controversial construct of Greek national history, with its interrupted continuity not only with Ancient Greece, but also with the Byzantine Empire. The adoption of the history of smaller lands as *pars pro toto* of the modern nation may be observed in the Flemish movement which adopted the regional history of Flanders for national aims; or the Byelorussian movement, adopting the history of the medieval Lithuanian state. Naturally, we must not forget that recently-created regions (or their leading elites) also try to foster the collective memory of their inhabitants in order to strengthen regional identity through its historical dimension. Statistically, this is the most numerous group; politically, this is the group which is most welcomed in the name of the vision of a de-nationalized Europe.

This typology based on the relationship between national and regional history takes into account only one regional type – the political one. But to complete the picture we have to remember other types – from the point of view of their size, or better yet their categorization according to the space of the region. It is generally known that some authors (Szucs) use as a historical category the term region as a supra-national space – Western or Central Europe as regions. On the other hand, as already mentioned, regional historical research includes also small units, such as one valley, one feudal domain, one town and its environment.

GENERAL ASPECTS OF REGIONAL HISTORIES

Since the ambiguity of the term region is well known, the use of plural-regional histories is well-founded. Does this also mean that these different types of regions inhibit us in making general observations about our problem? The answer is both yes and no. There are very few characteristics, indeed, which could be regarded as a common feature of regional history. Among the few common characteristics of regional history one seems to me to be basic – and this its partial nature. The reflections in this chapter began by trying to define an “ideal type” of regional history as history: a component of the state, or of the nation and its characteristics as measured in relation to this larger “higher” unit. In addition, regional history in this ideal type described and analyzed the population, its life in the past, while national history was regarded as a history of a specified quality, of a personalized whole. Naturally, we know that in some cases, regional history was re-organized and constructed as national history. In other words, we

are accepting such a category of regions in which regional history might be transformed from the regional to the national, with corresponding consequences concerning the change of collective identity. With the exception of this particular type, which represents a transitional situation towards national history, regional history has difficulty in defining its exact frontiers. Regional frontiers were usually flexible and changed both according to changes in the historical situation but also according to the way regions were defined. It is difficult to draw clear and unambiguous frontiers of regions which are defined by their social and/or economic specificity and it is also difficult in those cases where internally heterogeneous regions were called by traditional terms borrowed from ancient times (like Dordogne, Franken, Provence), usually without clear-cut frontiers. Moreover, these traditional territories were also composed of some smaller regional units which had their own provincial history. The degree of overlapping of regional territories and the openness of the frontier was less in those cases where we are dealing with the type of the region which was demarcated by historical (political and administrative) borders, such as, for example, the case of Moravia, Franche-Comté or Carniola. A region might be both mono- and multi-ethnic, but its frontiers might also from time to time be called in question: they might be “redefined” and the historic regional territory might be divided by reference to new ethnic or economic criteria. For example, Moravia as a historic region was divided during the 19th century firstly through an ethnic border between the Czech- and German-speaking parts, while the German-speaking territory itself consisted of two parts which had little in common – the northern part adjoining Silesia and the southern part adjoining Austria. As a result of industrialization, the north-eastern corner emerged as a specific region which included also a part of the historical Silesia and was inhabited by three ethnic groups – German, Polish and Czech.

A specific case which has not been mentioned in this contribution is border-regions, i.e. those regions which include parts of different states in their neighbourhood. The reason for this omission is above all that these are usually artificial territorial units, constructed with a political goal: to weaken nationalist prejudices and to strengthen international cooperation. No matter how noble-minded the purpose of this territorial contract, it is difficult to accept it as an object of historical research.

The image of the national enemy is regarded as a very important instrument in strengthening national identity. What role was assigned to the enemy in the regional past? Neighbouring regions are, in theory, possible to imagine as an enemy only if the difference with the neighbour was combined with other relevant differences, such as ethnic or religious differences, or a difference in living standards (poor regions in highlands as against rich ones in lowlands). “The other”, who belongs to another confession, has different habits, speaks a different language – this other can without difficulty be portrayed as a historic enemy. It is, however, not self-evident that these differences may be transferred into the past and written in terms of the history of a hostile neighbour. Such

a switch could only be successful if the reason for present hostility (such as, for example, a surviving linguistic or religious difference) could be extrapolated from the present time to the past. In most cases, such kinds of apparent demarcation of regional alterity were absent and it may very much be doubted whether an inter-regional historical conflict could be based only on a difference in the place where people lived.

While the construct of other regions and their people as “regional enemies” depends only on very specific preconditions, it does, however, seem to be a rather frequent phenomenon in the relationship between the regional province and the (national) centre. We often find historical constructions and arguments aimed at fostering regional antagonism against the central government, against the state and its rulers, or its elites, as “our” enemy – also in such cases as when they belonged to the same nation as the regional population. Such historical arguments were under certain circumstances understood by the inhabitants of the region, especially if the centre-periphery relationship was accompanied by differences of wealth, power or education. In such instances, likewise, we need more empirical research to prove or modify this hypothesis.

What about the interdependence between the construct of a common regional past and the interests of the present regional society? All narratives, including regional ones, were written for a public. Their authors aimed to be read by their own countrymen. This was a rather narrow readership, perhaps reduced in reality to local social elites and intellectuals. Since we know that national history was “rewritten” from time to time – as an answer to changing needs and interests among contemporaries – we would like to know whether an analogical phenomenon might be found in the case of regional history. The most striking case of re-writing regional history has already been mentioned: it was the switch from regional to national history, where regional identity was transformed into a national one. We might also imagine a changing attitude toward the centre: the weakening or strengthening of centre-periphery tensions might influence the narratives about this relationship in the past, constructed as national or as regional history.

Even though we are able to imagine some situations in which regional history played an integrating role, these situations are in the general context of writing regional histories rather marginal. The ideal type of regional history includes significantly less arguments and connotations for exclusiveness and aggressive stereotypes towards “the other” than is the case in national history. While national history usually serves as a basis for “national interests”, in the case of regional history this is more the exception than a rule. The applicability of this conclusion is, nevertheless, limited. Above all, we know two forms of regional history whose integrating force was rather strong, because they were immediately joined with national identity. The first is the already-mentioned case of re-writing regional history into a national one (Estonian, Welsh, Finnish and others): the second is the understanding of a regional past as a structural element of national unification, an integrating part of national history. This was the case with the history of

Italian or German towns or lands: each of these lands had its own specific history, but it was constructed as an instrument of national unification.

If we eliminate these two cases as specific ones, we are left with the convincing impression that regional history, as compared with national history, played a less important role as the factor of identification. Insofar as it is free from elements of national identity, or nationalism, the collective regional memory seems to be less aggressive, less xenophobic, more consensual, and its most frequently-invoked enemy is usually the central(ist) state power. This latent “peaceful” capacity of certain types of regional history seems to be accompanied, above all in the 19th century, by some degree of patriotism in the enlightened sense of the word, which – from the point of view of identification and social mobilization – has two faces and an ambivalent impact. One face is the call for responsibility towards “your” country, region, land; the other face is the indifference towards identification with this region. One and the same territory, the same space can be included in two or more different regional histories, sometimes even without claiming any clear identification among its inhabitants. In other words, the stronger the trend towards the regionalization of historical research, the weaker becomes the political relevance of history. We are free to discuss whether this is useful or dangerous from the point of view of regionalization in Europe.

NOTES

- ¹ See there also the rich sample of bibliographical references to the recent literature analyzing the problem of regions and frontiers. For this reason, the present chapter forbears to repeat these references and offers instead the following references to some relevant texts which are not mentioned in the Introduction. Here we will mention some texts in which the problem of regionalism – notably in connection with borders – has been discussed. Already in 1970s and 1980s, a group of Swedish historians (centred in Lund) published the results of two projects on this topic: S. Tägil, K. Gerner, G. Henrikson, R. Johansson, I. Oldberg, K. Salomon, *Studying Boundary Conflicts*, Lund Studies in International History, Lund 1977; S. Tägil (ed.), *Regions in Upheaval. Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization*, Scandinavian University Books 1984. Theoretical Aspects of regionalism have been studied with particular reference to the French case in D. Gerdes, *Regionalismus als soziale Bewegung*, Frankfurt - New York 1985. The tensions between regionalism and national identity are studied in a volume edited by K. Duwe, *Regionalismus in Europa. Beiträge über kulturelle und socio-ökonomische Hintergründe des politischen Regionalismus*, Frankfurt am Main - Bern - New York - Paris 1987; and (with a stronger emphasis on identities) an interdisciplinary team has analyzed the regions of Western Europe: G. Bosson, M. Erbe, P. Frankenberg, Ch. Grivel, W. Lilli, *Westeuropäische Regionen und ihre Identität*, Mannheimer Historische Forschungen 4, Mannheim 1994.
- ² The differences were, to my knowledge, demonstrated for the first time from a rich sample of sources by the Finnish historian, Aira Kemiläinen, *Nationalism. Problems concerning the Word, the Concept and Classification*, Jyväskylä 1964, ch. 2.
- ³ Recently, the European Science Foundation began in 2003 an important research project on the structures and aims of national history, “Representations of the Past: the Writing of National History in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe”, coordinated by Stefan Berger.

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