

**Belonging, ethnic diversity and everyday experience:  
co-existing identities on the Italo-Slovene frontier**

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## Abstract

Early on, this paper cites a writer on human rights, civil liberties, democracy and the sovereignty of the nation-state. Some studies on nationalism tend to conflate the three without further explanation. Yet, many of the current problems arising out of inter-state or (allegedly) inter-ethnic confrontation and conflict stem precisely from the fact that state-nationalism subsumes the other elements; this harms the interests of many in society subject to the actions of the state and its leaders. Indeed, people often do not identify primarily with the state they live in; it is not, for them, the most significant 'imagined community'. Identities derived from regional and local associations are usually more significant in people's daily experience, especially in a world where globalisation at one level and regional autonomy movements at another, challenge the nation-state's *raison d'être*. Further, studies of socio-economic activities and associations and of civil rights are critical to an understanding of identity formation. The paper examines and illustrates these by reference to the Italo-Slovene frontier zone with its complex mosaic of ethno-linguistic communities. Despite frequent outside interventions, the region endures in ways which suggest that state-nationalism can often be irrelevant or even inimical to a region rooted in its qualities of multiple-identity coexistence. In Europe, where frontiers are dissolving, such border areas may offer us lessons in living when language, religion and cultural diversity are considered not as sources of division and conflict but as part of the social and economic practice of everyday life.

## Introduction - nations, states and identities

In 1991, the year of Slovenian independence, the Ljubljana journal *Nova Revija* brought out a collection of papers on the new state edited by N. Grafenauer [1991]. Every one supported independence, but some raised provisos about the nature of that independence and set out terms for their new country's future actions. In so doing, they invoked social and civic issues concerning the nature and exercise of power which have confronted societies throughout history. But such issues especially reflect concerns of the modern era, ever since the enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century addressed the situation of individuals and their civil rights when confronted by political power - and, above all, by the power of the state.

In an article originally written in 1988, T. Persak offers thoughts on nationalism and human rights which go to the heart of the issues facing the present paper. He writes:

I would like to avoid any possible reproach that I attribute a higher value to the nation and the state than to the individual or that I do not take into consideration the fact that *the first preconditions of a true democracy are human rights and civil liberties*. This fundamental level of *democracy is the essential prerequisite for the real sovereignty of a nation*. On the other hand, it is equally true that for most people, belonging to a nation, - i.e. the individual's national awareness and linguistic, ethical and ethnic determination - is an inseparable part of their personality and, as such, is also one of the decisive factors in the process of decision-making, when the individual functions...as the principal subject of political decisions. It is precisely for this reason that the question of the sovereignty of a nation, of its statehood and also the national question as a question of a nation's ontological certainty, are of paramount importance for everyday practice. The declaration and assertion of belonging to a nation and of national interests are thus crucial human rights and civil liberties, and as such pertain to

the above-mentioned fundamental level of democracy [Persak, 1991, 95] (italics added).

The latter part of the quote reflects the tone and emotions of the time when the Slovenian state was tentatively establishing itself in the world community - although there does not appear to be a self-evident link established between civil liberties and human rights and belonging to a nation-state. Nevertheless, in the scale of human priorities, Persak ranks human rights, social justice and civil liberty higher than any claims that the state might make on its citizens.

We are also confronted with a semantic problem here; and it arises from conflating the concept of nation with those of the state or nation-state. What does a commitment to nationalism suggest? Is it support for the nation or the state - or both?<sup>1</sup> The two are far from identical. In contrast to Gertrude Stein's characterisation of a rose, we cannot sensibly get a grip on the matter by asserting that 'nationalism is nationalism is nationalism'; rather, it presents us with a mercurial image which slips and slides from one time, or place, or situation to another. Each expression of nationalism is unique. It is the outgrowth of a myriad actions and attitudes in society, of the society's specific history and geography, of networks of association and relationships of power. If we are to gain any understanding of its functions and character in a given society, we have to know something of its culture, its political system, its history and its social relationships, including those of the social classes and regional and other groupings which make it up. *In extremis* - at its most blatantly unidimensional - we can see the impact of nationalist ideology in the intensity of those caught up in the single-mindedness of a state at war - or, perhaps more frivolously, in the passion and chauvinism of fans at an international sporting contest.

For most of the time, however, the idea of nationalism is complex and negotiable. It is far from certain that the 'imagined community' of Benedict Anderson's conception when applied to the nation-state is much more than an occasional notion in people's lives. In recent years, with the rise of secessionist regional movements, many state frontiers - internal and external - have become the objects of contention. Regions in even long-established nation-states are now adopting interpretations of national identity which conflict with the interests of the central state itself. The most obvious examples are the separatist and autonomist movements challenging the structures of both new states and those with a much longer unitary history in Western Europe. The contemporary nation-state faces two main competitors, an emerging global order, and the discontents of autonomist movements within its own borders. Both are ruffling the surface of long-held comfortable assumptions.

As Eugen Weber [1979] shows in his classic study on the modernisation of the French peasantry, the sense of conquest of the regions by the French state rankled for decades; the process of establishing a centralised state in the nineteenth century was akin to colonial mastery as customs, laws and language from the Franche-Comte to the Southwestern were overthrown by the alien power of Paris:

Order imposed by men of different code and speech, somebody else's order, is not easily distinguished from foreign conquest [Weber, 1979, 487].

So, the imagined community promoted by the apparatus of the central state and of favoured regions often fails to resonate in harmony with those on the margins of privilege. What Weber

calls the condescension and incomprehension of the capital and its elites have also affected other nation-states in Western Europe. His comment on the methods of regional assimilation which were imposed against the will of those who opposed merging with the centre are widely applicable:

Native communities were despoiled of their rights (forest code, pasture, commons, fishing and hunting rights) in the name of progress, of freedom, of productivity, and of a common good that made no sense to those in whose name it was proclaimed [ibid.].

Nor is this a matter of a long-past history where groups in the French Pyrenees and Corsica took up arms against the administrators and forces of order sent to discipline and civilise locals dissidents. In 1998, a representative administrator from Paris has been assassinated in the streets of Ajaccio; the imagined communities to which the victim and the assassin could subscribe were clearly far from identical. Basque gunmen (although by no means representative of most Basque nationalists) periodically carry out assassinations in the name of independence and Republicans and Loyalists in Northern Ireland have, over the years confronted and killed each other, and the innocent, to advance their own visions - or spectres - of the acceptable imagined community.

Another example: I live in a Canadian province, Quebec, where close to a majority of the citizens appear to believe that the federal state is inimical to their interests and aspirations. In fact, a strong majority of francophones have formally voted to rid themselves of the encumbrance<sup>2</sup>. And in the not too-distant past, a small group resorted to violence to make their separatist claims heard. In Europe, too, autonomist movements have emerged even in the wealthiest of countries. Some, like the Scots and Welsh (and earlier, the Irish) question having to subsist in the poorer and depopulated marginal areas within a wealthy state. Wealthier regions, including Catalonia and the Basque Country (and would-be Padania in Northern Italy) are disaffected for other reasons; in addition to long-held cultural resentments, they resent being - as they see it - the inadequately compensated subsidisers of poorer regions within the state. Some, such as Slovenia and the Czech Republic, have shaken themselves loose from federal states in which they had perceived themselves as milch cows to succour the indigent. Their struggle for national state independence arises from economic as well as cultural, historical and ethnic causes.

We also find difference and diversity of identity ranging over other scales. Identification with the nation-state, A.D. Smith explains, can bring a sense of belonging and even a quasi-religious feeling of acquired immortality. Nationalism may have supplemented or, in some cases, even replaced religion as providing a mystical feeling of security, integration and continuity. Yet, a similar sense of belonging can strike a resonant chord not only at the level of the state, but also the region and the local community.<sup>3</sup> Infra-state groups, too, can engender a spirit of shared identity and mutual interest which may not always act in harmony with those of the nation-state. Contiguous towns and villages on either side of state frontiers, for instance, may have more in common with each other than they do with their own distant state capitals or other regions of the country; there may be disagreements over economic policies appropriate to the country as a whole but prejudicial to local production and exchange systems. The frontier, itself, may be a barrier not only to local material prosperity but also to shared cultural activities. Comparable issues may affect minorities living within the heart of the nation-state. Their strongest associations and networks may well be with co-religionists or co-linguists across state frontiers. In such instances, international frontiers are a constraint upon democratic freedoms and civil rights.

Divergent social class interests, too, can colour interpretations of nation-state interests. For most citizens, there are only occasional and minor clashes between personal financial interests and national loyalties. For those living and working within the national economy, any effort to dodge paying taxes is a domestic affair. But for the minority operating at the planetary scale, visions of wealth-making and the means of protecting that wealth lie beyond the compass of the nation-state. The very groups which are often loudest in their protestations of loyalty to king or constitution and country, may adopt rather more fluid attitudes to nationalism of a financial nature. Their economic interests, then, run up against what are perceived as unnecessary constrictions on their strategies for wealth accumulation. In other cases, profit-orientated cosmopolitanism is paramount as business chooses footloose alternatives, searching for the cheapest labour and materials to source their production - or as investors seeking avenues to express their deeper loyalties in off-shore and tax-sheltered investments. Here, the tax-avoiding practices of the wealthy and privileged appear as antagonistic to fiscal nationalism. These are not often discussed, yet they do offer valuable illustrations of the limitations which hedge around the pretensions and potency of state nationalism. Indeed, we can see that financial cosmopolitanism has corroded the will and effective powers of the nation-state to act as effective gatekeepers of economic decision-making. Most now accept the market nostrums of the IMF, World Bank, OECD and other global groupings which further undercut nation-state economic autonomy.

There are, then, limits to generalisations about nationalism; it is a relative and situational phenomenon, each case being associated with particular places and times. Eric Hobsbawm [1983/1992; 1990] cites historical cases to show that (state) nationalism has been intentionally fashioned and amplified to suit the agendas and objectives of powerful groups in modern society; this invention of tradition can be applied to most states.<sup>4</sup> But this is insufficient. Ethnic or regional or national identities are also an integral part of daily existence for many, even if they do not always consciously express it this way. The claims of the perennialists about the deep-rootedness of (cultural) nationalism also have their historical foundations. And rarely can traditions be merely fabricated and imposed unilaterally upon inconscient populations. As Michel de Certeau has argued, social habits and practices are usually the outcome of bilateral or multilateral negotiations among members of society. So, it may be more helpful to take a less absolutist stance on the issue of identity and accept that there are many strands to the 'modernist' and the 'primordialist' approaches which have claims to validity. They may, in fact, often overlap although the semantic blurring of distinctions between state and nation continues to muddy the arguments.

To digress for a moment: practical advantages can follow from transcending the modernist versus primordialist contest (see Smith, 1991; Armstrong, 1998) in an era of openly-expressed ethnic, linguistic and religious difference. Too often the tendency by the United Nations and others who intervene in border and domestic conflicts is to take a Manichean view, supporting one side against the other. And culpability is attributed, founded upon to inappropriate interpretations and values and ideologies prevailing in their own societies. There are two discernable problems in this. The first is summed up in the statement of J. McGarry's [1995] criticism of Western thinking. In considering divided societies, he argues:

Conflict resolution requires less attention to prescriptions based on standard liberal or socialist models - like integration, growth, or individual equality - and more study of methods of conflict resolution which recognize the resilience and legitimacy of ethnonationalism. Social scientists need to devote more attention to consociational

devices, including power-sharing, federalism and other forms of self-government and they need to think about how to protect collective cultural rights as well as individual rights. By so doing, they will better equip themselves to understand the most important political phenomena of the 1990s and probably the twenty-first century too [139].

Using the former Yugoslavia as illustration, S. Saideman [1996] takes a more oblique stand on the question of ethnonationalism as a cause for conflict; he claims that the breakup of Yugoslavia stems from the extremist positions of Milosevic intent on asserting Serbian state control over the federation. This created a domino effect, with Slovenia and Croatia entering into competitive ethnic outbidding, so closing off any options beyond those of complete eventual secession. Moreover, both republics determined to protect themselves from the consequences of a downward-spiralling federal economy. Their withdrawal spread a sense of insecurity to other republics now deprived of links with the two stronger economies and this set the stage for the final calamity. Ethnicity and national difference do not figure as prominently as inter-state and economic confrontation in this account.

Saideman's conflation of the term 'ethnonational' with the reality of state-contrived power play among ambitious politicians competing for power (see also Crnobrnja, 1995) muddies the waters, but for both writers ethnonationalism in the sense McGarry suggests may have played a relatively minor role in the civil war among the republics. Yet, in most reportage on the war, the tragic events took place under the heading of ethnic conflict from the initial skirmishes to their conclusion. It is known that the republics had chafed at times within the frame of the federal state, and increasingly after the strong hand of Tito was removed, but earlier constitutional changes, particularly that of 1972, indicated that compromises could be reached among them. With the arrival of others on the political stage, together with growing economic strains, the scene was set for growing social dissension and deepening inter-state rivalries among the republics. Even then, in the late 1980s, surveys show that a majority of Slovenians still believed that solutions could be found within the framework of the federal state.

But this is still insufficient as an explanation for the destruction of a state. There is still the question raised by Saideman: should the Yugoslav economy be downwardly spiralling? This paper cannot treat the question in detail, but we do need to understand something of the destabilising effects of federal indebtedness even before the death of Tito - and the growing dependence upon the Bretton Woods institutions to help bail out the economy. The consequences for the Yugoslav social market experiment as successive federal governments accepted the conditions for the enterprise reforms insisted upon in the International Monetary Fund are critical here. The IMF's structural adjustment and austerity programme throughout the 1980s shut down factories and other industrial enterprises in the social sector, forcing them into bankruptcy and throwing thousands of workers out of their jobs [Chossudovsky 1996]. It does not require a large imaginative leap to trace potential linkages among massive unemployment, social distress and political frustration; these could then translate into sentiments of popular discontent manipulable by unscrupulous and demagogic political leaders. Latent ethnic differences and irritations there had always been within the federation, but they had been manageable. It is facile to attribute the resulting civil wars solely to ethnic confrontation and it skates too lightly over the complex of economic, social and political issues, some of which are traceable to foreign influences<sup>5</sup>.

To return to the central themes: the objectives in the remainder of this paper are twofold. The first is to agree that the sense of national (state) identity can incorporate expressions of deeper forces of cultural and historical belonging. It can also be the modernist creature fabricated by

influential circles as part of a deliberate state-building design. There is historical evidence for both positions, as A.D. Smith [1991] has comprehensively pointed out. Secondly, I want to take up an issue which may seem evident but demands explicit reference in an examination of the nationalism-identity relationship: that in our daily lives we live with multiple identities - and the nation-state provides but one expression of them. In our storehouse of identities, the nation-state may play a dominant role at times, but other forms of identity are usually more significant in articulating our feelings of who we are and about our most significant associations.

So, the concept of national identity is, itself, an elusive one whose mercurial character often escapes our understanding as we turn from one part of modern civil society to another. But, more central to this paper's argument, human identity contains more elements than those condensed within the notion of state-nationalism - which, in any case, it encompasses. There is, in identity, a kaleidoscope of time-place specificities about loyalty and commitment to social groups, community, locality which may variously converge, compete with, or reinforce each other. After the initial generalisations are made about nationalism and identity the diverse realities of people's consciousness and practices in their daily lives require further explanation.

It is understandable that Persak, cited earlier, should be arguing the rights of the Republic of Slovenia within the larger Yugoslav state which is seen as depriving Slovenian citizens of their guarantees of human rights and legal security. Within the Yugoslav Federation, the Slovenian nation is still unrealised and so:

Unitarian or common solutions should be decided upon only in cases when they do not endanger anyone's specificity [Persak, 1991, 97].

But, at what point does this principle cease to apply? How far might regions, ethnic groups and local communities also claim exemption in the name of specificity - and social justice? Might they equally insist on the right to object to the policies and laws of a remote state apparatus? How far might they oppose legislation or government actions which run counter to their perceived interests? Where is the balance to be found between the nation-state interests and those of its constituent parts? What claims to Persak's 'specificity' have the human rights and liberties of local places and groups if these do not coincide with state objectives? Even in a democracy, the tyranny of the majority can be oppressive. Nation-state sovereignty and its demands for allegiance from its citizens are not necessarily coincident with human rights and civil liberties and there may be differences within the state as well as on the borders of what Persak earlier called its 'linguistic, ethical and ethnic determination'. ( Slovenian-speaking minorities in the Julian region of Northern Italy have been claiming special protective legislation from the Italian state for some time now [Bufon, 1998].) What are the rights of those marginalised by the strategies of central authority?<sup>6</sup>

Greater attention to the study of identity may be one way through the thickets which seem to surround nationalism. And occasionally, writers become too engrossed in their logical trajectories and the joy of the hunt as they engage other scholars in their intellectual debates<sup>7</sup>. There is also the problem of specialisation. Theories of nationalism often seem to address concerns over human rights and civil liberties only tangentially; these lie beyond the compass - or interest - of the nationalist debate, being the expression of different scales of human identity (and need) and thus of minor concern.

To redress this, then: Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' exists not just - or even primarily, perhaps - at the level of the nation-state. The assumption that there is a natural sort

of homogeneity, a convergence of interests and aspirations within nation-states may be valid when one nation-state is compared with others; there are, doubtless, similarities of feeling, for instance, among Australians which distinguishes them from Chileans or Italians (except for their own more ambivalent Chilean or Italian minorities perhaps). But this becomes more nuanced under closer examination - within the state itself where there are differences from one region or even locality to another, or among social groups and ethnic minorities within the state's imagined community. The nation-state's imagined community exists as a legal and formal artifact for many of its citizens; this definition tells us much about the governing, media-articulate groups in society but hardly identifies a range of other imagined and real communities. These may be accommodated readily within the larger political construct, but there may also be significant areas of opposition to it.

To go beyond the generalisations, then, it is necessary to peel off the layers of reality and search for the mosaics of difference. The challenge is to discover these other identities - to reveal not only the character of the nation-state in all its diversity, but also the constituents which make up that diversity. One approach for opening up the varieties of local and regional experience missed by more general accounts is to focus upon specific time-space linkages. Events are of significance because of the time at which they occur - and because of the place in which they occur. If we situate events simultaneously in their temporal and spatial contexts, we have a time-place intersection which gives a specificity and uniqueness to the occasion not measurable or definable in more general and overarching accounts. Eugen Weber, referring to the enormous variations of experience from one time-place to another in nineteenth century France gives a graphic illustration of this:

those who lived a scant one hundred leagues from the capital were a hundred years removed from it in their manner of thought and action. This equation of time and space is one we should retain, for it can as appropriately be applied to nineteenth-century France as it can be applied to different continents today [Weber, 1979, 97]<sup>8</sup>.

Even after Napoleonic centralisation, France remained a formal state comprising many discrete components. The surface appearance of nation-statehood concealed a host of differences - and still does.

In the case of the Slovenian nation-state is it evident that it currently does possess a recognisable identity and that there is an identifiable sense of 'imagined community', especially at moments of crisis as in 1990-91. Nearly ninety per cent of the population in the republic voted in favour of secession from Yugoslavia and in response to a questionnaire, 75 per cent of university students five years later answered that they would vote the same way [Armstrong, 1995]. In the *Nova Revija* collection of essays, Jezernik Miso [1991] finds a deep well of history and culture common to Slovenians which distinguishes them as a group from others in Yugoslavia. But, he goes further. He insists that, at this particular time of crisis and confrontation, it is from more than Yugoslavia that he wants his country to escape; it is the 'Balkan den' [57] which Slovenia must leave to join - or rejoin - Catholic Western Europe. His preference is to shift towards a historical culture deriving from the renaissance, the reformation and the enlightenment and which has led to individualism, self-confidence, the protestant work ethic, civil rights and liberties. This is the world for Slovenians and not the Eastern European culture of orthodoxy, authoritarianism, the absence of private initiative and civil rights under a 'mastodontal state'. The values are too distinct to be resolved:

Identical social values are apparently a stronger bond than 'brotherhood' by blood and 'cousinhood' by language [59].

But he does not want to exchange Serbia for Germany; it is sovereignty within a Central European space to which Slovenia organically belongs, that he is advocating. Yet the burden of his case suggests that, above all, he welcomes the maternal cultural embrace of Western Europe which will comfort - and envelop - the new state. There appear few specifically Slovenian elements in his appeal.

A stronger case for Slovenia's specificity and difference is made by N. Grafenauer [1991]. He grounds his argument historically in support for the nineteenth century Slovenian poet, France Preseren, who had objected to the merging of the Slovenian language into an Illyro-Serbian linguistic synthesis. Preseren, he explains,

acts like a farmer; he is profoundly convinced that every universalism based on a sense which is superimposed on reality is in its essence against nature and oppressive in its subjectivity because it does not take into consideration the linguistic originality of a nation. [Grafenauer, 1991, 49].

Universalism is 'eclectic', lacking individual articulation, and Preseren is little concerned about taunts of 'provincialism' and acting as the purveyor of 'dwarf literature'. He is committed to the natural environment determined by his mother tongue; this is to be preferred to integrationist ideologies and linguistic uniformity. And he employs his poetic abilities both as a means of promoting independence and as a barrier to social and cultural homogenisation;

For this 'separatism' implies not only the common Slovene language but also the originality of every individual's existence which is bound to that language as the basis of actual culture [ibid, 49].

This is an argument for separation as a profound cultural principle which distinguishes one society from another; yet there is also, maintains Grafenauer, a complementary process which associates them rationally in science, technology and management at a planetary level [50]. We can infer from this that it is possible to maintain a Herderian stance of pluralism, accepting difference yet at the same acknowledging universal associations. Either-or is not the sole choice available.

Preseren's pluralism allows for differentiation and variety of all forms of life and at all levels. But, again, where is the determining principle which draws a line of distinctive self-identification at the level of the nation-state, its culture and its standard language alone? What happens among minority groups or those at the margins where cultures are adjacent or overlap, when members of border regions are commonly bi- or tri-lingual in their daily associations and transactions. How comprehensive are the case studies of state-nationalism when the world is increasingly faced with hybrid situations - when boundaries are fluid and definitions drift and merge?

### The Italo-Slovene frontier region

#### 1. Feliks Gross's portrait of the 1970s

The historically plastic Italo-Slovene international frontier provides a lucid illustration of these issues. In the introduction to his study of the Italian borderland - the Julian region - Feliks Gross [1978] discusses the concepts of nation, ethnicity and cultural difference. He also uncovers the complex array of identities which groups and individuals assume and which merge with changes in time and situation. His enquiry into the nature of ethnicity and nationality surveys the way that they have often been reduced to the modern conception of the nation-state with its centralised authority based on legal, political, and coercive policing power. He distinguishes this reductionist category from the idea of the 'nation-culture', close to the sense which Johann Gottfried Herder gave to the nation in the eighteenth century, and not dissimilar to that of the *ethnie* which A.D. Smith has more recently studied. The distinction between the cultural nation and the nation-state is important here. The nation-culture, says Gross, is a community of culture, integrated by common values, institutions, traditions, customs, usually by a common language but without coercive central authority or even, perhaps, territorial unity [Gross, 1978, 5-6]. It is this sense of the lives of communities with their own attitudes, aspirations and activities which is often missing in writings on nationalism and identity.

Gross argues that not all people identify themselves in terms of a formal state nationality. Certainly, many thousands of immigrants who passed through New York's Ellis Island did not declare themselves neatly as Poles or Russians or Slovaks; they were defined by their region or even their village. (I lived in a Dalmatian community in New Zealand; it was not then referred to as a Yugoslav or even Croat settlement.) This type of self-designation, says Gross, runs counter to the Western 'metropolitan conception' which accepts national (state) realities only, considering other identities to be ancillary, insignificant, transient, primitive and less advanced [ibid, 7]. Questionnaires, he writes, asked people what nationality they were, not what local or regional identity they felt, so that:

The perception of nationality was shaped and constructed from above, from the top down. A peasant in a village, a craftsman in an ancient town, constructs his identity from his life experience, from his perception of the geographical, historical and political environment he lives in - from below [ibid., 8].

The state exists for official purposes of identification, but local identity is that which emerges out of spontaneous conversation<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the broader universe is usually perceived through the lens of local and regional knowledge and experience. None of these identities is cast in stone; they are transformed with the passage of time (many 'time immemorial' customs and traditions, as E. P. Thompson [1991] has pointed out, are often traceable back one or two generations at most). Nonetheless, there is a persistence of belief in origins and cultural practices which may be diluted or even repressed for a time, yet which can re-emerge as circumstances change and new generations appear.

Gross cites peasants and craftspeople in the Italo-Slovene frontier region to illustrate his point, but parallel situations can be found in other societies. The separatist movement in Quebec was, ironically, revived as a modern urban force by a new generation after the *revolution tranquille* of the 1960s which aimed to modernise the province; ironically, because the early nationalists had believed that the embrace of urbanisation with its temptations and decadence would undermine the distinctive rural character of *québécois* society and so deform it as a nation. In fact, with the emergence of a secular, urban Quebec society, nationalism has helped to displace religion. Nor is Quebec the only province in Canada in which autonomist sentiments are felt; populism of both the left and the right in the West, with its resentment of

Ottawa's political and Toronto's economic power has had a long tradition. Canada may be exceptional among modern states in its degree of decentralisation, but other industrial societies also encounter regional resentment against central authority.

There is also a tendency to think of the consciousness of local identity, ethnic commitment, community association as archaic, a sort of romantic (or reactionary) reversion to a lost and often factitious and fictitious past. In the face of economic and cultural globalisation, the search for regional or local personality may appear anachronistic, unrelated to a concrete cosmopolitan world. Yet, it is in the realities of associations, knowledge and experience in everyday settings that the issue of identity finds its strongest *raison d'être*. The significance of this becomes clearer in historical context; studies by historians of popular culture like Peter Burke [1978] and Pieter Spierenburg [1992] illustrate the close links among daily community activities, work (markets, fairs and joint labour), celebration (carnival), the maintenance of social norms of conduct (charivari) and the moulding of local identity.

It is embodied, too, in E. P. Thompson's [1991] concept of 'common custom'. Here, he examines the lives of 'ordinary people' in town and countryside, investing them with a meaning and purpose often overlooked in more orthodox studies. In Christopher Hill's phrase, Thompson's objective is to 'turn the world upside down' so as to investigate with empathy the lives of those whose voices have been historically muted. It depicts the lives of people without condescension, caricature, romanticising or stereotyping as worthy of study. It does not avoid commentary, criticism or even irony and humour, but nevertheless shows respect and compassion (J.G. Herder's idea *einfihlung*) for its subjects in which the resilience and survival capacity of people - the practices of everyday life - are core. "I have been trying" he writes, "to recall customary consciousness in a larger sense, in which community was sustained by actual resources and usages" [Thompson, 1991, 182].

Similar local/regional resources and usages, argues Gross, have nourished popular culture and the ways in which identity has been formed over the years in the multicultural and multilingual border region on the Italo-Slovenian frontier.

The official political, economic and cultural designation of the Julian Region with Trieste (in Slovene, Trst) as its principal centre, is Italian. Yet the daily identities of the population are not just Italian, but local, regional and ethnic. They are complementary and situationally variable, drawn upon according to circumstance; there is a 'context of identity' [Gross, 1978, 10] in which Slovene-speakers can feel culturally *Italianissimo* while remaining Slavic. If this seems incongruous or even contradictory, it is well to remember that Slovene-speakers have endured a long history of incorporation into the designs of others. They have variously been members of the Austrian-dominated Holy Roman Empire, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire; they were divided between Italy and Germany and most were joined with Yugoslav Kingdom, then later Federal Republic - in other words, subjected to many forms of distant central authority.

Yet, at levels of significance to their daily lives, their identities continue to reflect the realities and practices of their immediate situations. It is true that they have emigrated in large numbers, voluntarily or by force of circumstance, and some have chosen not to be associated officially with their fellow Slavs in a formal state, because they saw their regional and local interests lying in other directions. Nor do all Slovene-dialect speakers necessarily aspire to membership of the official state of Slovenia. Those in the Valcanale/ Kanalska Dolina region are *sui generis*, descended from families once in the Carinthian province of Austria until the postwar frontier changes transformed them officially into citizens of Italy. They meet and

associate culturally with other Slovene-dialect speakers in Austria and Slovenia and they mix with Italian, Friulian and German speakers in their own region. But, as Robert Minnich has more recently pointed out, they define themselves in a way which is uniquely local - 'we speak our own language, we are Carinthian at heart and our fate is to live in Italy' (Minnich, 1996, 163) not a mention of official state nationality, whether Austrian, Slovenian or Italian, appears in this self-designation. And even within the new state of Slovenia, the sense of identification with a locality or a region features equally with that of the national identity among groups of interviewed university students [Armstrong, 1995].

This is a central theme in Gross's study; that people in the many local communities making up the cultural mosaic of the border zone do not identify primarily in terms of nation-state or even nationality except for official purposes. In spontaneous conversation, their sense of identity focusses upon regional or local activities and associations and when they look out to the broader universe it is from a local standpoint. Circumstances, acknowledges Gross, will mould identifications to reflect changing situations, but the initial sense of identity does not disappear, even if it is temporarily repressed - as has happened when Slavic identity was smothered by Italian fascism and later Nazism before and during World War II.

A persuasive aspect of his argument concerns the question of multiple identity. He explains that three identities characterise the inhabitants of the border region - local, regional and national; each is complementary and adopted according to circumstance, so leading to ever-changing 'contexts of identity'. In peacetime, the local context is strongest, so the conclusion can be drawn that the local represents the enduring norm, while outside interference - repressive authority, war, changing frontiers - forces a rethinking, if only for a period of time, about identification within and among the various communities.

With urbanisation and the growing concentration of the region's population in Trieste, Italian culture has penetrated more deeply than in the past, yet in 1978, as Gross was writing, many workers still lived in their villages but commuted to city jobs. The sense of local solidarity remained vigorous and a 1972 enquiry showed that more than four out of five people thought that the language, customs and traditions of the different ethnic groups should be conserved. Gross admits that the central state exerts an evident influence on identity formation; its impact is felt daily in production and employment and socially in welfare and support for education, science and culture. Through education, social service provision and the media the state undoubtedly manipulates local identification, communal bonds and perceptions. But, he insists, we should not forget or underestimate the resilience of local identity; furthermore, identities are plural and multiple and not monistic [14].

Language provides a valuable illustration of this pluralism. Official statistics in 1978 allowed for four different language groups - Slovene, Friulian, Bisiaco and Italian. This acknowledged the region's diversity to some extent, but still failed to capture the array of linguistic combinations in the region. For example, Friulian contained fifteen different dialects and variants, one of which, Nimis, had Slavic connections. Furthermore, family members often spoke mixes of different languages and dialects - Slovene and Gorizian, Triestin and Italian, Bisiaco and Italian, Friulian, Bisiaco and Gorizian. In the mountain valley of Rezia, local people speak a Slovene dialect much less changed from medieval times than other dialects - and is the fascination of linguists worldwide. Such a diversity and overlapping of language and dialect groups indicate a near-kaleidoscopic range of cultures and subcultures. They are not necessarily ethnic divisions, thinks Gross, so much as diverse cultural identities within the same ethnic groups, so that

in terms of subjective identification, there are identifications other than the national, Italian one and ... the image of a culturally monolithic, homogeneous nationality may not necessarily correspond to the reality [ibid., 22].

People usually carry two or more identities - Friulian, Italian, Maranese, Venetian. If the entire Julian region is taken into account, layers of culture and identity are revealed which include:

1. 'from a wide distance', 'an elegant carpet of Italian culture covering the whole area'
2. a second layer, closer to the region of Venetian-Friulian and Slavic culture - a regional subculture
3. close to the single rural or urban communities, a third layer - the circle of the local, native group.

The outcome, writes Gross, is one of a great diversity of peoples and their cultures:

Viewed from the vantage point of a native, this borderland appears as a universe of tens of ethnic, microethnic and local native groups, all of which speak different dialects, in fact different primary languages. They often change at distances of 2 to 10 km while we travel from town to town and from village to village. So do the customs and even religious celebrations change [ibid., 30-31].

The disjunction between the administrative and political divisions drawn up from afar and the local overlapping of cultural and economic activities in this closely-integrated patchwork set of communities is revealing. The three-layer structure also pervades images and perceptions in different ways; the national layer is that projected by officialdom and the media in Rome; the regional springs from the Venetian centuries-long history of dominion; while the local identity continues in the ongoing activities and associations - social control, moral obligations and customs of each community:

here are the strongest social bonds - those of friendship, and neighbourhood, the local, native community appears vital, often vigorous, helpful [ibid., 33].

Two more points should be made before leaving Gross's account of twenty years ago. The first is that all three layers of identity have to be dealt with in everyday life as people traverse national and provincial channels and, indeed, cross local cultural boundaries to associate with those in other communities. Here the sociological concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* are in constant interplay, for the local communities form integral parts of the regional and national systems. Nevertheless, each possesses a distinct and recognisable character which is built on: 1) territoriality; 2) common symbolism; 3) primary language; 4) common religion; 5) kinship; 6) friendship and neighbourhood; 7) norms of conduct and mechanisms of local social control; 8) often interrelated institutions; 9) an economic subsystem rooted in the historical past. In other words, individuals and groups engage in the daily customs of *gemeinschaft* while observing the requirements of *gesellschaft*. Gross argues that the local identity is more significant because of daily cultural, social and economic intercourse than are national or even regional identities of being a citizen; yet, these, too, doubtless make their presence felt as policies change - or when Italy is launched upon international or World Cup football campaigns.

The second issue concerns the nature of relationships among the communities in this frontier patchwork of peoples. Following the vicissitudes and turbulence of frontier changes - from

benign autocracy to fascist authoritarianism, Nazi brutality and Partisan reprisals - the border region became formally democratic; this brought the possibility of fairer treatment for minorities. Two treaties between Yugoslavia and Italy in 1949 and 1955 ensured that the border would be relatively open for local people since frontier and agricultural permits were given to those with properties on or overlapping the frontier. Since 1945, the rhetoric of war and confrontation has diminished and with the lessening of border tensions appear possibilities for greater regional and inter-community harmony; this is,

an essential condition for symbiosis - a simple, peaceful neighbourhood of diverse ethnic groups - it is an introduction toward an active cooperation [ibid., 106].

With the more open social and political environment following the years of repression, then, changes have occurred in the nature of the relationships among the various ethnic and cultural communities. Gross's study indicates a relative absence of overt ethnic hostility; the outcome is not so much a relationship of great warmth or empathy as of "mutual respect and a kind of potential helpfulness" [ibid., 121], although one group, the *Meridionali*, migrating from the Italian South, seem to be generally disparaged. He lists the areas in which respectful relationships are sustained while at the same time past persecutions are pushed into a collective subconsciousness to diminish tensions (although the past has undoubtedly left lingering resentment). But, by the 1970s, discrimination in public employment was almost absent; religion was shared; more than four out of five felt that there were few motives for Slovene-Italian hostility; only one-third nationally discriminated in business deals; and most ethnic groups peacefully accepted each other as neighbours.

But this did not necessarily lead to very much mixing among the communities. Ethnic groups were usually self-segregated, few participated in mixed - especially Slovene-Italian - associations and Gross discovered that while there was a good neighbourhood sense, "there seems to be no intense tendency toward integration or amalgamation" [ibid., 123]. Local groups accepted the reality of everyday difficulties, but equally recognised that they had to be lived with, minimised or resolved. That there is the will to do this at a local level is evident from the history of the region; it is almost invariably when outside forces and influences enter the scene that the delicate yet resilient equilibrium among the many ethnic actors is unsettled and that hostile attitudes find an outlet for expression.<sup>10</sup>

What can we conclude from this? It seems that the further one enters into this multi-ethnic, pluralistic region with its divers languages, dialects and linguistic mixes, its many different customs and practices, the clearer it becomes that the foundations for tolerance and mutual acceptance of difference are laid at the local plane. Balance among different cultures is more likely to be upset by external actors with agendas formulated in centres distant from the needs, knowledge or wishes of local people. This, perhaps, runs counter to the conventional view that local cultural specificity is ensured by maintaining impermeable boundaries and the belief that territorial isolation is critical to the maintenance of cultural diversity among peoples (see F. Barth, 1969, 9). We might well assert the contrary case. Where history and geography have combined to throw culture-groups and ethnic communities together in close mosaics of settlement, it seems more logical to argue that some type of *modus vivendi* should be worked out among them. Negotiation and agreements then allow the groups to engage in mutually-beneficial economic and social interaction, at the same time maintaining cultural diversity and difference - and all under a pluralistic umbrella of a necessary and practical tolerance. This is not to romanticise the local so much as to acknowledge the logic of a (wary at times) 'let sleeping dogs lie' approach to life. That way appears to lie viable co-existence over the long term.

By the late 1970s Trieste was becoming, once again, a meeting point or bridge for Italy, Yugoslavia and Austria; the Slovene minority, Gross notes, were a vital part of this. Trieste is their city, too, and they contribute to the idea of peace and reconciliation between countries and cultural groups. The rivalries among nation-states inherent to their historical international relationships and rivalries have caused divisions and turbulence in frontier regions:

But nations, people and their problems continue. The Slavic nations were here and they are here in a territory shared by Italians, Slovenes, Friulians, Venetians and Bisiacs - whatever people feel they are. A new irredentism - Slavic or Italian - cannot offer any lasting or constructive answer. People who are diverse in culture and in language have to learn to live together because they have been and will be here for centuries and millennia [ibid.,132].

It will need further research to peel away the layers of generalisation and appreciate that state borders come and go, but local, regional and community daily life continues; and so do the inter-ethnic differences, associations and compromises necessary to ensure that life unfolds in an atmosphere of reasonable security.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty years on from Gross's 1978 account, the situation in the region has changed again with shifts in the political and economic status of nation-states and with the European Union now playing an ever more significant role in the lives of Europeans. Now, the frontiers between states are more porous and flexible and this cannot but affect the nature of border regions. Taking Feliks Gross's examination of the Italo-Slovene border region as a baseline for the present may give us a deeper understanding of issues with the help of historical comparisons over twenty years. The following section reviews current narratives on change and continuity in the frontier region.

## 2. The contemporary scene

Robert Minnich's doctoral thesis (1992) uncovers for us some realities of community life in the northern part of the border region. Minnich examines the lives of Slovene-dialect homesteaders in the once-Carinthian (Austria) village of Ukve or Ugovizza in the Kanalska dolina/Valcanale, now part of Italy's north-eastern frontier with Slovenia and Austria. He offers a narrative history which grows out of locally-lived experience as an alternative to the more sweeping and generalities about ethnicity and nationality. Writing more in the spirit of Weber, Gross and McGarry, cited earlier, he nevertheless weaves the mesh of his community study is still finer:

The histories of *peoples* and *nations* are profoundly uninformative about the basic and uniquely localized processes of social reproduction which have integrated the lives and communities of those autochthonous populations which only in the modern age have come to learn that they are properly members of grand imagined communities extending far beyond the confines of the immediate empirical social and cultural universe of their upbringing [Minnich, 1992, 45].

In contrast to the general overviews of nationality and identity, he argues that specific histories are "the product of adaptive processes", and not "history as an arbitrary and detached record of the past" [ibid., 46]. He will not discuss 'people' and 'nations' until the social personalities of a few individuals - Ukve's homesteaders in this case - are formed in terms of their immediate, everyday experience. This implies more than an examination of homesteaders carrying out

their modern version of transhumance farming activity as self-contained individuals; they are considered as individuals-in-community. Their daily experience includes family economic activity and social exchanges with other villagers; it also extends to cultural associations with other Slovene-dialect speakers across the international frontiers in traditional ceremonies, customs and inter-club competitions. Villagers deal, as they must, with state officialdom and they associate readily with other local ethnic groups, but their closest associations are with fellow Slovene-dialect speakers within the village and on the other side of the international frontiers.

Minnich sums up their self-identification by citing a fellow-celebrant at a fire brigade meeting: the Ukve villagers speak their own language, come originally from Carinthia and must live in Italy (for more detailed references and comment (see Minnich [1992] and Armstrong, [1998])). No identification is made by his respondent with reference to *belonging to any nation-state*: all the identity markers are local, regional - and transfrontier. He concludes that the Italian state, with its distant capital is a sort of superordinate, artificial and remote construct having only tangential significance for his central figures. Of course, it does touch on their daily lives, even if in the negative sense, for example, of failing to provide schooling in the local language or to conduct official business in any language but Italian. The Slovene dialect speakers, together with those who speak Friulian, German or even local Italian dialects, appear to exist at the margins of the state. The conditions exist, one senses, for a deepening feeling of border regional consciousness.

In another paper, a 'proto-biography' of a Slovenian dialect-speaker, Darinka Kravanja-Pirc, Minnich restates the theme - that social personalities must be studied in order to understand the meaning of identity at the local level. He has chosen the Soca district, now in Slovenia, but historically the victim of many frontier changes which have forced a series of formal state identities on his respondent. Over the decades, she has, in turn been a member of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Mussolini's Italy, the Nazi protectorate, Tito's Yugoslavia and now the new state of Slovenia - all without moving from her small community. It is not surprising, then, that while she seems ready to treat her new capital, Ljubljana, with a friendly neutrality, it is the immediate world of the Upper Soca valley as the social microcosm of family, friends and acquaintances which frames and gives meaning to her life:

It is here that she articulates continuity in her life experience; it is here that she grounds and expresses her sense of obligation and values, of being among other things a wife, a mother, an innkeeper, a bookstore clerk, a 'Slovene' and a citizen. The actors in her narrative are known individuals and not the institutions and organizations alluded to in my enquiry [Minnich, 1998, (citation from an earlier draft in 1996; no page number).

Here we find profiled the local and individual associations rather than those of the nation-state and the institutional; these are significant social markers with which a local figure of some consequence situates her identity and her life's values. This is not surprising; the turbulent history of the Soca district has seen international frontiers move to and fro across it in the wake of military campaigns (the slaughter of Italian troops at the battle of Caporetto/Kobarid took place in the Soca valley in 1917) and of remotely-negotiated international settlements. Throughout these disruptions and somersaults in formal civil allegiance, Darinka Kravanj-Pirc has held firmly to her associations as an active member of her community.

Minnich questions the assumption that the nation-state is the essential refuge for those seeking the strength of a secure identity and sense of belonging which being a citizen can bring. A.D. Smith's observation that the nation-state provides a milieu in which the individual-

as-citizen may find a sort of immortality, or B. Anderson's defining of the nation-state as an 'imagined community' are rendered ambiguous at best in frontier regions; moreover, they refer to only one of a multiplicity of identities, relationships and associations with which most of us live. The state, with its institutions and formal citizenship is clearly important in our lives; it provides us with education, health and welfare services and defines our official lives as periodic voters, constant taxpayers and resigned form-fillers. But most of our lives are conducted elsewhere in far more immediate associations and relationships. Our identities are multiple, even for those in well-defined nation-states; for minorities and for people living in peripheral and border areas, local and regional claims are likely to be still more intense.

Minnich believes that the local life he has described:

alerts us to a fundamental distinction between self-determination as a positive principle for achieving social order in one's immediate social universe of known persons and its utter failure as a principle for making states where those in power ruthlessly exploit the opportunity to impose upon anonymous individuals membership in an imagined ethnic nation [Minnich, 1998, (as in previous quote)].

This characterisation of what the state - and state nationalism - involves for its citizens takes us back the interpretations of the origin of national identity and nationalism proposed by modernist advocates. E.J.Hobsbawm [1983/1992 and 1990], we saw, considers the idea of the nation as a recent state fabrication with its inventions of ceremony and tradition as contrivances to ensure that the nation-state is maintained as a viable entity against external or domestic challenge. More instrumentally still, Ernest Gellner [1983,1987] reveals the nation-state as a civic and institutionally-reinforced official construct produced by a governing class. This coterie uses bureaucratic methods and modern technology to mould and manage the lives of those who are to be ruled in a legally-defined (and militarily-enforced when necessary) territory. In this situation, even the adoption of formal democratic practice - especially where representatives are remote administrators - will not resolve problems of alienation. Robert Minnich, looking from the local level, may well agree with the main lines of the modernists' case about the nation-state and its contrived nationalism and then draw his own implications from that. His response is to oppose the human identity with state nationalism by insisting upon the far deeper significance of local places for the individuals who inhabit them. Starting at this plane is, for him, the necessary basis for understanding the most important elements of self-identification in society.

At another level, that of the region, Milan Bufon is engaged in research into the same border zone which had earlier engaged Feliks Gross's interest. Bufon [1997] argues that the pivotal difference between state nationalism and regionalism is one of social and spatial scale. The former is 'an expression of social modernization' (cf. Gellner), while regionalism is an articulation of 'long-term local or regional structure'. His two principal areas of research interest are: 1) to study the ways in which regional and national (state) feelings are related and 2) to investigate the conditions of survival or revival of local culture and sentiments in modern states.

Living, himself, on the Italo-Slovene frontier gives a further dimension to his research and a third concern emerges as he looks into the formation of trans-border relationships and identities. "The Slovene example", he explains, "could reveal whether cross-border regionalism is also practicable and how it is stimulating social integration processes and inter-cultural contacts." Although the three issues are related, the connections seem rarely to have been researched in any depth; nevertheless, the subject is,

fundamental to an understanding of political and geographical structures or persistent patterns which currently have a deep influence on the construction of social space and spatial links at a local and regional level [Bufon, 1997, no page].

Questions arise here. In what ways do the region and the local place each create a sense of identity distinct from that of the nation-state? How far are they compatible? Is there any overlap? Where do they compete or conflict? What are the implications for current forms of democracy? If the primary area of self-identity for many people is to be encountered locally in neighbourhood associations, relationships and activities, how does this influence forms of regional and state identification? In what situations do identities undergo change? And, especially in border areas, what is the significance of the existing inter-state frontiers? Given the global and continental changes taking place as well, what is the future of the nation-state, itself? What sort of chemistry - if any - exists among the global, state, regional and local changes now under way?

The situation, then, is complicated by the changes at all these scales, for the context in which Bufon's interest in the conditions of viability for local culture is now global. The operations of financial markets, banks and transnational business penetrate and pervade virtually every nook and cranny of the planet. International economic and financial boundaries are crumbling in the face of concerted strategies of the Bretton Woods institutions as well as the OECD, APEC, NAFTA and the EU. The decisions of these international bodies, especially in combination with the urgings of transnational corporations can, almost at a nod, transform or even sweep away local productive activities and employment, destabilise the currencies on which those activities depend, deluge local markets with globally-sourced goods and services and swamp the local or regional community with a pastiche of commercialised cultural products.<sup>12</sup> In the face of such potency are there any positive elements which local and regional groupings might use to their own advantage? Are forms of autonomous action more feasible within these global movements? Might spaces open up for new varieties of cross-border regionalism to flourish?

Bufon's phrase, 'stimulating social integration processes and intercultural contacts' seems to imply more flexible, open and multicultural opportunities for people in border regions to express their distinct identities. Further, it opens up possibilities for more active contacts with other groups in frontier neighbourhoods - and to a greater extent than when they are citizens of a (unilingual) centralised nation-state. This is not to propose a return to some species of Holy Roman Empire with its plethora of duchies, palatinates and principalities each divided off by protective commercial and political frontiers. It might, though, provide an illustration of the ways in which a more decentralised Europe could encourage people to more closely identify with their localities and regions while acknowledging their status as citizens in a Europe of communities. Trans-frontier regions might, in fact, furnish valuable laboratories for such experiments.

If these are potentially viable areas for the study not only of identity but of the possible ways in which societies might evolve in this turbulent and unstable epoch of our history, then there is a need for complementary research which goes beyond conventional study of nation-states, nationalism and ethnicity. The light of scholarship might be shifted more to an appreciation of the positive aspects in the everyday lives of communities and their members. Research at the macro- (or even meso-) level can offer us sweeping overviews of human affairs, but tell us much less about the paradoxes and complexities faced by people in their daily activities and associations with each other and with external influences. Nor do they reveal very much of the

resilience and flexibility of people's responses to change and challenge: the capacity to negotiate, modify and resist. They emphasise the discontinuities and conflicts inherent to the traumas and dramas playing out in the state and global arenas. But, while our eyes are fixed at these levels, we lose sight of the underlying continuities and strengths engendered by everyday experience in local and regional places.

Milan Bufon [1993/1994] takes up some of these issues. He contrasts the political and economic lability among states with the cultural and social stability of local and regional association. He also contrasts the asymmetry of economic interchange with the more symmetrical cultural and social relationships and with the images peoples form of one another in a border area. But, it is the continuity bound up with local affinities and long-term connections which most stands out against the uncertainties created by external influences. And it is, perhaps, this sense of long historical association which gives the Italo-Slovenian frontier region the resilience to negotiate with and modify the caprices of distant centres of power. Nation-state building has tended to be disruptive of such anchored and enduring associations. Yet, despite state irruptions, the ongoing strengths of localities through their informal associations.

As with Gross, Bufon examines a range of expressions of identity. At one end are the local communities, the identities of which spring from the connections based on daily activities, interests and aspirations. They live with the formal state frontier - as, indeed, they must - but for everyday activities - trading, shopping, working, education, leisure - it is surmounted, converted, in Bufon's phrase, 'a zone of contact'. In fact, the state governments have made concessions to the local communities, as occurred with negotiations between the Belgrade and Rome in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, relationships between states also impinge upon the local cultural landscape; with the cold war wariness, there was, for years, a truncation of exchanges among the ethnic and linguistic groups on either side of the border.

In another unpublished paper Milan Bufon [Bufon, n.d.] offers an observation almost identical to that of Gross two decades earlier: namely, that officialdom - the census takers again - generally fails to capture the complex and nuanced ways in which identity is formed on the frontier. The emphasis in census forms on linguistic practice alone is an insufficient and perhaps distracting measure of ethnic representation in the Italo-Slovene border region. Ethnic self-identification is, he argues, marked by 'momentariness'. Among the many groups making up the region's continuum, movements across the formal linguistic boundaries are fluid and unceasing; members of neighbourhoods, kinship groups and families slip constantly between cultural identities in ways which can only be the despair of any official concerned for orderly and neat categories. As Gross found earlier, administrative documents (and mindsets) seem ill-equipped to deal with the complexities and porous nature of ethnicity where identity slippage occurs from one moment to the next. Change here is neither linear nor unidirectional and talk of loss of identity may often be premature:

Assimilation processes are not, therefore, an irreversible, 'one way' process, but are accompanied by de-assimilation events of greater or lesser importance. Ethnically mixed areas are consequently changing from a two-dimensional social space into a 'fractal' one in which several forms of ethnic interaction are possible and may coexist [Bufon, n.d.].

When based on an either-or frame of enquiry, official surveys provide only an incomplete measure of the multiple ways in which members of border communities, in particular, identify themselves; the formal grid is inappropriate to the many-sided reality of daily life.

This also appears to be the case in two other border studies involving Slovene-dialect speakers. Jernej Zupancic [1993] demonstrates the inadequacy of merely using language to define ethnicity among Slovene-dialect speakers in Carinthia, Austria, when there exists a much wider array of methods. Further, and paralleling Bufon's argument, ethnic assimilation is far from being a one-way street. Studying Slovene-speaking community, he explains its experience over a century within Austria by dividing its history into three broad phases - agrarian, industrial and tertiary activities. During the agrarian-based period, assimilation levels were quite low, then they increased as industrialisation and urban growth took hold. But, in the most recent phase, as service sector activity has expanded among an increasingly white collar class, the pace of assimilation has slowed. In fact, in the two major centres of Carinthia, the use of the Slovene dialect among a predominantly middle class minority Slovenian population has expanded. Those of the Slovenian minority occupying professional positions in the service sector are economically successful and, with their rising social status, they have created new cultural institutions. One of the more influential of these, the Slovenian Gymnasium in Klagenfurt (in Slovenian, Celovec) has,

developed a social structure which is capable of integrating in contemporary economic, political and cultural trends, and thus co-shaping the spatial structures. All this enables them [the Slovenian minority] to preserve their national identity in a mobile and predominantly tertiary society [Zupancic, 1993, 234].

The studies by Bufon and Gross, as we have seen, also contrast the essential continuities of the local scale with the discontinuities characteristic of inter-state relationships. This distinction is also suggested in yet another of Slovenia's border regions - this time with the neighbouring state of Hungary. Rudolf Roo [1991], describing the relative local harmony achieved, argues that continuity and an acceptance of difference, for the most part, marks the relationships between the Slovenian and the Hungarian minorities. Both are becoming bilingual with schools on either side of the border promoting both languages. Urbanisation has had a two-edged effect; it has encouraged some mobility among the populations and stimulated the growth of educated middle classes concerned about their own culture and identity. So, while the language of the host state is used in public communication, their own continues in daily usage within the communities, among friends and families. That some frictions exist is natural, but most people surveyed support the idea and practice of mixed marriages and feel that different ethnic groups can live together within the same nation-state without prejudice to their own interests [Roo, 1991, no page given].

The responses which Roo has elicited are from people who live within the formal jurisdiction of one state, accepting its laws and civic practices, rights and duties as full citizens. But, they also cross over the frontier and keep up their cultural contacts with the other country, receiving radio and television services in their own language - so providing "a telling indication of their sense of belonging to two communities simultaneously" [ibid.]. Roo sees this as confirming minority linguistic and cultural identities. Whether it also suggests the emergence of a distinct border region culture as Milan Bufon and his colleagues are discovering on the Italo-Slovenian frontier, is not stated. It seems evident, though, that the members of different ethnic communities, living in shared places, in geographical contiguity, will tend to find means of coexisting. This does not imply in any romantic sense that they will live without tensions and misunderstandings, but it does suggest that human beings will negotiate and compromise to ensure that a tolerable and practical *modus vivendi* is established which allows them a comfortable level of social association. Everyday sustenance seems to demands no less.

Yet, we cannot assume homogeneity within communities, for each contains its own complexities and contradictions. Milan Bufon demonstrates this in a recent paper [Bufon, 1998] about the Slovenian-speaking minority and its relationships with a succession of Italian governments. The city of Trieste has been the principal magnet for the Slovenian-speakers, attracting half their regional population in Italy. Another twenty percent live in the secondary (and divided) centre of Gorizia, while less than a third are spread throughout the rest of the borderland [ibid]. Trieste has, therefore, become the urban arena in which Rome's state strategies have made their impact upon the local Slovene community. Although Feliks Gross might, in the 1970s, contrast the discriminatory and assimilationist policies of fascism with the greater tolerance of postwar Italian democracy, injustices have still not been rooted out. Some concessions have been made in the cities of Trieste and Gorizia, but these have not been extended to the rural areas further north in Udine. Little provision has been made here by the state for education and other social services in any language but Italian and local communities must finance their own schooling in other languages.

The Slovenian minority in Trieste has achieved more, in part, through cultural and political organisations set up to promote group interests. Yet success has been limited by the split between the right-wing Catholic SSO, and the more left wing Slovenian Cultural and Economic Unity organisation, SKGZ. The latter has been the principal representative of minority interests and since the 1980s, has extended its activities across the cultural spectrum, creating newspapers, libraries, music and theatre. On the economic front, the SKGZ has encouraged farmers, small producers, business and banking. It has also played a part in stimulating trade across the border although the business dimension has since become more autonomous - and less effective - in recent years. The Slovenian minority and its organisations are also sensitive to the international changes and seem ready to take advantage of the special position they occupy as an active group on a frontier whose formal barriers are crumbling. The European Union and the creation of a common market, free trade and a common currency are giving ever more significance to such multilingual, multicultural transition zones. And the probable accession of Slovenia to the Union in the next few years will reinforce this. The European reality, Bufon writes, quoting local organisers, "induces us to eliminate the dividing role of the borders and make international relations stronger" [Bufon, 1998, 4].

Yet the road ahead is far from straightforward. While the Slovenian minority in Italy has supported Slovenian independence, there remains a certain ambivalence; misgivings focus upon economic and political weaknesses which will limit Slovenia's ability to confront stronger neighbours on frontier issues. The growth of Slovenian nationalism and the renewal of political activity by the church are also causes for concern [ibid.]. The other difficulties faced by the minority - and which strike deeply within the body of the community itself - are of two kinds. First, both the SKGZ and the SSO compete to represent the ethnic minority so this 'binary' system or representation has "contributed to a further splintering of the already fragmented social life of the minority" [ibid., 6]. The divisions leads to a second difficulty; neither organisation has effectively tapped the potential for members of the minority to express their ethnic identity. Research by Bufon and his colleagues suggests that,

a 'sense of Slovenity' is latent among one third of the families in the ethnically mixed borderland and that about one fifth of the population...somehow identifies or feels bonded to the Slovenian minority. To put this in absolute figures, it means about a hundred thousand people; whereas only about 40% of the 'expected' minority body declares explicitly that they are Slovenians. Both minority pivotal organisations have not shown enough interest ...[in] nationally less committed members of the minority, and

have left them to the 'black hole' of assimilation or at best accepted them after they had already concluded on their own the process of de-assimilation [Bufon, 1998, 6].

The effort to maintain a specific identity in the face of opposition or indifference from the host state authorities has not been easy and is one which can be undermined by sectarian and divisive tactics by community bodies supposedly trying to achieve minority recognition. This is a matter for concern because the wellbeing of the Slovenian minority is very much affected by the variable policies emanating from Rome. Under Berlusconi's right-wing alliance, Italy adopted an irredentist line, trying to increase its influence in Istria and it put obstacles in the way of the Slovenian application for membership in the EU. During the centre-left administration of Prodi, however, there has been a belated move towards legislative acceptance of the Slovenians as a formal minority. This will mark a significant change, for:

[N]o protection act in this sense has ever passed [comparable with] the act...that protects the German and Ladin minorities in South Tyrol, or even the act that protects the Italian minority in Slovenian and Croatian Istra [Bufon, 1998, 5].

Despite this, the Slovenian ethnic minority has the potential to play its part in helping to establish the identity of the emerging region along the border as the European Union moves towards continental unity. In this ferment of change, what is the role of frontier zones with their cultural mosaics of communities at once distinct and yet connected? What is needed for these ethnic and linguistic groups to transcend the variability and discontinuities of nation-state strategies as the integration of nation-states into a continental union proceeds apace? Bufon asks the question:

to what extent is the minority itself only an object of the bilateral and international agreements, and to what extent is it the subject of regional and social development on the borderland and an active part of the international integration? [ibid.].

Despite some internal disagreements, he detects a growing sense of 'Europeanness' emerging in border regions; Less and less merely seen as the edges of nation-state systems, they have their own dynamic as transition zones between states. And the further European integration proceeds, the more challenging are the prospects. With Slovenia eventually a member of the European Union, formal frontiers will cease to exist and the borderland will become a zone of free passage among the communities and the two states; commerce will move more easily, people will attend cultural activities and children will go to schools on either side of what was once a barrier to their movement. Bufon believes that Trieste, as the centre representing this regional continuum with its cultural heterogeneity, will become not only more sensitive to the existence of the Slovenian-dialect speakers in its midst, but also aware of the advantages they can bring to the cultural mosaic. Interest in Slovenian culture will grow along with a sensitivity to the Slavic world within a broader sense of Europeanness. The Slovenian community will play its part, in turn, to promote integration for it has a 'natural' role in mediation. And so, Trieste, 'the most Italian town of Italy', will "become again a bit more Slovenian and therewith much more European and open towards international relations and multicultural existence" [ibid. 8].

He suggests concrete ways for common inter-ethnic social and cultural initiatives - a shared TV station, for instance - so that the minorities on both sides of the existing border can play an active role in shaping changes now under way in Italo-Slovenian relationships. They might also join in international projects, including the forging of links with other minorities in Central Europe and along the Baltic-Adriatic belt. As with Feliks Gross, who described the gradual

reduction of tensions in a one-time genocide area, Milan Bufon expresses the hope that the region, “will turn from an area of latent conflicts into an area of true international coexistence and co-operation” [ibid.].

This is an optimistic note but not yet quite a concluding one. A final observation might be made on the potential for local communities to play a decisive part in decisions affecting themselves. In his **Nations before Nationalism** [1982], John Armstrong makes the following comment:

Generally,...a lower class (especially in sedentary agricultural societies) cannot constitute a group as persistently conscious of its identity as an ethnic collectivity. The principal reason is that the incomplete lower-class occupational pyramid does not provide an elite with the communications and bargaining skills needed to legitimize boundary mechanisms of the class, thereby ensuring its distinct identity with a large polity. Lacking the high culture capacities a counter-elite would provide, an underclass has difficulty resisting manipulation by the elites that guard the myths and symbols common to the society as a whole [Armstrong, 1982, 6].

He acknowledges that this (peasant) incapacity is a matter of degree rather than an absolute and that language differences have made the “maintenance of a latent but persistently strong identity easier” [ibid., 7]. But the situation changes only when articulate elites emerge from the masses previously distinguishable only by peculiar folklore and linguistic patterns restricted to intimate and small-group discussion.

Even hedged around with qualifications, this statement needs questioning on one main ground: that it implies a one-way assimilation of 'lesser groups' into the superior culture and a surrender of their distinctiveness to the uniform customs handed down from on high. Yet, as historians of popular culture and writers in the field of international development show, time and again, cultural transitions do not occur in this linear and unidirectional fashion. Nor can we assume that the power of communicating and negotiation derive only from formal legal and administrative protocols. Even in societies such as the United States and Britain where local customs have been manipulated by commercialism, there are still ongoing differences, however pervasive the manipulation, because the messages of ruling groups are never swallowed wholly and uncritically. Michel de Certeau [1984] has shown how the intentions of the powerful are negotiated and manipulated in turn by those for whom they are intended. The influences are never just one-way; messages are transmuted and adapted to accord with the situations, aspirations and intentions of the receivers, so the best-laid plans are often misinterpreted or diverted, wilfully or unconsciously.

Further, other factors suggest that the positive impacts of outsiders on local groups may be limited if the lesser culture is not taken account of. Over the years, international cooperation projects have been made necessary largely because village and neighbourhood communities have been assailed by outsiders, their land and other resources expropriated by absentee owners and they have suffered decades of injustice both legally- sanctioned as well as illegal. The knowledge and experience of outside advisers has been useful because they enjoy some influence as intermediaries with the world of authority. But their support is of limited value if the capacities, knowledge and experience of the local community are not engaged [see Armstrong, 1991; Armstrong 1997; Kelly and Armstrong, 1996]. The outsiders must dialogue with and listen to the opinions and aspirations of distinct sectors of the community. If we think in terms of the 'lower classes', 'underclasses' or 'the masses' as standardised units, we are very likely to miss the enormous variety and depth of knowledge and experience which an approach based upon dialogue and participation can bring. To the extent that academic

research eschews direct engagement, it will deny itself that knowledge. The benefits of removed scholarly objectivity or technical expertise may be forfeited when the values, beliefs, knowledge and daily practices of people in local communities remain untapped.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, the evidence from Bufon, Minnich and Zupancic suggests that there is an underlying sense of self which usually escapes formal definition. The individuals who form the core of Minnich's studies are strong in their convictions about their identity; it is tied to the relationships associated with mutual support, celebration and work. The peasant community of Carinthia, according to Zupancic, sustained its existence as Slovenian-dialect speakers; if the sense of identity was diluted by the migration to the cities and work in factories (and an assimilationist and repressive strategy under the Nazis), the emergence of a more articulate urban middle class is, once again, asserting, the claims of an identifiable ethnicity among the Slovenian-speakers of Carinthia. But, it is doing so by drawing upon the enduring cultural practices of many generations whom John Armstrong would describe as an 'underclass'.

On the Slovenian frontier with Hungary, minority groups have worked out an acceptable *modus vivendi* with each other and with the institutions of state while maintaining their own means of ethnic self-identification. In the Italo-Slovenian border region described by Gross and Bufon, it is not evident that a 'lower class' has failed to remain 'persistently conscious of its identity'. At times, multi-lingual practice has shrunk and the assimilation of names and language has been imposed by autocratic regimes in Rome. Yet, as Bufon points out, assimilation is not a one-way street and periodic resurgences of interest in ethnic identity, occur, especially in Trieste area. Moreover, formal institutions, while crystallising the cultural achievements of the minority at times, have not necessarily proven themselves more resilient or more competent than the 'lower classes' in sustaining their customs, language and culture. One negative quality of the counter-elites not mentioned by Armstrong is their capacity for corrosive sectarian power-seeking.

It seems to be this durability among 'ordinary people' (Armstrong's 'lower class') which supplies the building blocks for cultural and ethnic renewal. This has been true throughout history; the historians of popular culture have described the current of popular activities as the 'lesser tradition' which runs alongside the 'greater tradition' - or the 'plebeian culture' in contrast to the 'patrician'. Throughout the modern era, the two diverged as the upper class withdrew from its earlier cultural interaction with the ordinary people. Yet, the two traditions have often come together as cultural borrowings occurred in literature (nursery rhymes, Herder's anthologies, Grimms' and Anderson's folk tales); painting (Bruegel's peasants and Millet's workers); and music (folk music adapted by Brahms, Smetana, Dvorak, Kodaly, Bruch, Grainger and many others). Moreover, as A.D. Smith and other writers have shown, political activists have built their own nationalist edifices from these same sources using the vernacular languages and symbols of the 'lower classes'. And it is usually to the peasant communities, persisting and surviving across the years, resisting the depredations of war and exploitation, that they have turned.<sup>14</sup>

Although this parallel stream of cultural activity it is not formally organised in ways easily recognisable to outsiders, it nevertheless endures in everyday associations and mutual exchanges. The strength of such cultural ties, the cement which binds people, is that of daily practice, connections and relationships. The everyday acts of working together, sharing tasks and responsibilities, enjoying leisure, depending upon one another to sustain human existence - or, indeed, competing and disagreeing - create the cornerstones of common identity. From these arise the mythologies, symbols and customs which come to epitomise the group connections in the individual and collective imagination.<sup>15</sup> Outsiders, peering from a distance,

naturally, perhaps, recognise the formal symbols more readily than the less-heralded informal daily associations and practices from which they spring. To change our perceptions we need to peel back the layers which veil the realities of other lives - and engage in dialogue to deepen our understanding of them.

### Conclusion

The border region running along the Italo-Slovenian international frontier has endured conquest, injustice and conflict between nation-states over the years. It has been described by one of our authors as 'a genocide area'. Yet its future, where change is encompassed within the frames of knowledge, experience and wishes of the local communities, has the potential for a more thriving stability. The underlying resilience of the diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups springs from their need to sustain viable working relationships with each other. For reasons of simple survival, they have had to over the years. The same sort of strengths, values and aspirations of the region's mix of peoples, then, should be at the heart of any development strategies adopted, for instance, by the European Union - although the present tendencies in that organisation appear to be heading more to a Maastricht and Central Bank formula of bureaucratic centralisation.<sup>16</sup> The multilingual capacities and multicultural environments found within the mosaic of communities on the Italo-Slovene frontier, for all their limitations, also seem to have much to offer to their respective nation-states precisely because the inhabitants of this frontier zone have had, over the centuries, to work out a *modus vivendi* which gives viability to and defines their society.

The existence of these communities challenges the nation-state's more homogeneous definition of what makes a society distinctive. In fact, the many-faceted nature of border regions has a great deal to teach those in government about tolerance and mutual acceptance. Furthermore such inter-group associations are not tantamount to the cultural amorphousness of characterless melting pots - at least, not in the region we have been studying. In the matter of identity, there are few either-or outcomes. The evidence suggests that it is possible to associate, work and even occasionally socialise with others without a surrender of distinctive culture, customs and language.

Further, it is common for people to speak two or three or more languages or dialects and to maintain multiple identities appropriate to different times, places and circumstances. We would be deluded - or romantic - to believe that no difficulties exist in such associations, but it is also reasonable to suppose that having to live in close contact with others will encourage a sense of tolerance; it will help engender a sense of flexibility, a capacity for adaptation to different customs (with the proviso that they are not imposed on others). Self-identification will, then, come to reflect the willingness and ability to modify attitudes, actions and aspirations. But it will also reflect a determination to hold onto one's sense of difference of self or of community on other occasions. The two are not incompatible.

The situationally-adapting multiple identity captures the sense of differentiated and complex everyday existence and is distinct from the notions of national (state) identity current especially in certain media accounts of nationalism and identity. To enter into the debate on nationalism without heeding regional and local voices is to accept the primacy of the dialogues of power, of the rhetoric of ruling cliques. Yet, beneath the surface of the hegemonic definitions of state and bureaucratic authority, local and regional identities continue to reassert themselves. As the writers in the pages above have discovered in their researches, although severely disrupted by external oppression, expulsion, attempted assimilation or even genocide, the diverse communities and ethnic groups show an ability and determination to reclaim their

personas and time and again to reinstate themselves as members of an enduring region. Each restating of identity differs from those of former times - the communities are in constant evolution and cannot retake a past which no longer exists. But the voices of the region continue to articulate local realities, reflecting the unfolding attitudes, actions and aspirations of those who live there; those who associate with each other and have, perforce, to negotiate difference and come to the everyday reconciliations and agreements necessary for viable cadences of life.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In calling for a more overt and specific acknowledgment in social science writing of the 'where' of human activities, usually too much taken for granted, Peter Taylor notes how the state becomes the assumed location by default:

The embedded statist that constrains most social science and history causes the where of social change to be treated as given - human activities are bounded by the territory of the state and trajectories are sought for the 'society', 'economy', 'culture' and the polity contained therein. Problematizing this statism opens up ontological questions for too long neglected [1997, 425].

<sup>2</sup> The many interpretations of this vote suggest somewhat more ambiguous attitudes among those who vote for 'sovereignty-association'; this seems to mean sovereignty in some areas - politics and culture especially - while associating with the Canadian state in the sharing of currency, fiscal and monetary policy. What are the implications of this equivocal response, especially as both communities are now being increasingly encompassed by the continental system of the North American Free Trade Association? National independence seems a rather encircled notion when the levers of fiscal and monetary power are increasingly corroded by the global financial system. But this is applicable to most modern states, of course.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these diverse expressions of difference within state boundaries have, until recent years, been overlooked or minimised; Eugen Weber [1979] speaks of "regional diversities that have attracted little notice in generalizations made from an urban point of view" [10].

<sup>4</sup> In fact, his own state provides perhaps the best and earliest example of such a adroit construction The Tudors employed not only their own considerable abilities and cunning, but also those of talented officials - Cromwell, Essex, the Cecil family - and newly-created institutions of state to assert their independence from the Catholic church in Rome. The ideological support for their dynasty was, in turn, provided by court musicians and poets who idealised Elizabeth as the 'faery queen' or 'Ariadne' and by that great propagandist, William Shakespeare. Succeeding generations of royalty and ruling classes carried on the state-building through the centuries, incorporating the Celtic margins, modernising/centralising society and economy and creating a world empire as they went. In the case of France, Weber [1979, 113] argues that the centralist Revolution did not replace existing community and social structures, but actually dismantled them as part of its invention of a new state and a new ideology.

<sup>5</sup> In Slovenia, according to I. Svetlik [1992], the Alliance of Communists was losing legitimacy through the 1980s as the economic crisis deepened; from 1986 to 1990 the ruling party gradually moved towards a market economy and political pluralism. Unemployment in the Republic of Slovenia increased from 2.2 per cent in 1984 to 7.1 per cent in 1991, the growth in real wages fell from 0.4 per cent in the period 1971-80 to -3.8 per cent in 1986-90 [11]. Socially, he writes, standards of living were only slightly affected, with widening ownership of material possessions - but work-related exhaustion and chronic tiredness indicators were up [12-14]. The working class had been most adversely affected and it was likely that market influences would affect social welfare provision, so creating a post-communist welfare gap.

<sup>6</sup> The question of scale in the claims for special status and specific identity constitutes a thorny problem in my own place of residence, the province of Quebec. A majority of francophones insists that the Quebec nation has a distinct identity and culturally and historically their claim is a strong one. At that level, the separation of Quebec from Canada seems straightforward. But, at other scales of self-identification within Quebec, significant minorities dispute the sovereigntist's arguments. Anglophones, other ethnic minorities and native groups fiercely resist Quebec's secession from Canada, claiming a primary link with the federal state (although native groups such as the Inuit, Cree, Montagnais and Naskapi might avow a still more primary loyalty to their own nations).

<sup>7</sup> Although this criticism has not gone quite so far as that levied by R.J. Evans [1997] against those historians who suffer from 'a self-regarding obsession'. If, indeed, they consider themselves more important than their subjects and

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refer more to each other than the past, “then inflated self-importance, solipsism and pretentiousness can be the only results. A return to scholarly humility is surely called for here” [201]. The tradition in geography of 'getting one's boots muddy', or the invitation of both the historian E. P. Thompson and the international development practitioner, R. Chambers to listen and heed what is being said by the other participants in the exchange seem a valid cure for academic introversion.

<sup>8</sup>This subject, itself, is the centre of a voluminous debate stemming from the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin in the 1930s. The twin concepts of dialogical enquiry and of chronotopes (the linking of time and space) in which locality and chronology are interdependent means that events are not solely connected through time, but also because they exist in specific landscapes which become focal in the creation of meaning. We are provided with the means, then, to go beyond the generalisations of broadscale chronologies to a deeper understanding of the specifics of historical events occurring in particular places. This celebration of diversity and difference is further extended by Bakhtin's concept of dialogism or creative understanding in research - similar to Johan Gottfried Herder's eighteenth century *einfihlung* or empathy for distinct cultures and human subjects [ Bakhtin 1984; Berlin, 1990; Folch-Serra, M. 1990; Herder, 1968; Hirschkop and Shepherd, 1989; Hitchcock, 1993; Morson and Emerson, 1990].

<sup>9</sup> Warren Connor [1994, 221] makes a comment similar in sense to Gross's; European immigrants with education or from large cities usually gave a nation-state self-definition, whereas peasants and those from small localities identified themselves less, for example, Croats, and more as Dalmatians, Istrians or Slavonians - all from their local regions and localities.

<sup>10</sup>There is no guarantee that even a democratic regime can prevent this from happening although its impact may be less harsh. For example, an irredentist regime in Rome under a leader such as Berlusconi and the pretensions of the Northern League nationalists aiming to create their own independent state of Padania both have the potential to exacerbate tensions within the region.

<sup>11</sup> Some cultures may be better at this than others. John Clarke [1977] describes the long-term rivalries and feuds which dogged the histories of inter-village relationships in certain parts of England from one generation to the next. The annual ceremonies of marking out boundaries - 'beating the Bounds' - and preventing incursions onto village lands from neighbouring villages in many cases led to physical conflict and bloodshed in defence of the communal heritage on a quite regular basis [30]. And Eugen Weber's [1979] chapter, “Alone with one's fellows” is full of similar examples of inter-village antagonism.

<sup>12</sup> The governing circles of nation-states, themselves, are contributing to the erosion of the state's economic and financial power with their participation in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) which if passed would open economies to the almost untrammelled intervention of global corporate investment and intervention even in the spheres of culture and social welfare (see *Le Monde* interview with French Culture Minister, Catherine Trautmann, [ *Le Monde/Guardian* Weekly, 1 March 1998, 18]).

<sup>13</sup>An excellent example of this is given by Eugen Weber [1979] in referring to an outsider's view of rural people in nineteenth century France:

'Mistrust,' wrote a priest at the close of the century, 'is the outstanding trait of the peasant's character. The peasant does not trust anyone, not even himself'. This was both true and false. It was true that rural defenses remained high and the rural mentality a distinctly separate one. But the observation reflects, too, a natural vexation at being unable to penetrate the closed world of the village society, and the kind of judgment this invariably evoked from those condemned to watch it from the outside [49].

It may have also reflected historically-justified scepticism about the good intentions of outsiders.

<sup>14</sup> This stubborn resistance is celebrated by a writer such as John Berger who has lived in alpine village communities and bases his trilogy **Pig Earth; Europa, Europa** and **Lilac and Flag** on his experiences there. Karl Marx, on the other hand, was much less impressed by the capacity of the peasantry for survival and in his

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**Eighteenth Brumaire** described the class as a sack of potatoes, indeterminate, amorphous, without ideas, will or unified perspective. Perhaps they lacked the perspective required for revolutionary uprising which Marx saw as central to **his** project, yet E. Weber [1979, 10-11] describes the revolutionary fervour of many French peasants after the fall of the Bastille in 1789. Beyond that, rural dwellers, over the centuries, had demonstrated other enduring qualities which seem to have eluded the distant gaze of the great urban revolutionary.

<sup>15</sup> Giambattista Vico, the eighteenth century philosopher, compares the mythology which arises out of the domestic, economic and political life of 'primitive and imaginative' communities with the codes of law and morality of the more 'reflective' mind (see R.G. Collingwood, [1946/1993, 70]). Vico, like Johann Gottfried Herder, a fellow eighteenth century thinker, demonstrated a great belief in the creative power of the human mind and of its original expression in a diversity of communities throughout history.

<sup>16</sup> In a brief article in **Le Monde Diplomatique**, Bernard Cassen [1998] asks whether the strength of community and nation might serve as a bulwark against 'la barbarie de la mondialisation'; whether, indeed, some form of European solidarity could act in that manner, the European Union perhaps - "mais certainement pas celle de Maastricht et de la Banque centrale" [Cassen, 1998, 9].