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REVIEW ARTICLES

ON LOCALNESS AND NATIONHOOD

by Alon Confino

GEORG KUNZ, *Verortete Geschichte: Regionales Geschichtsbewußtsein in den deutschen Historischen Vereinen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 138 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 413 pp. ISBN 3 525 35729 X. DM 78.00

JAMES RETALLACK (ed.), *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society, and Politics, 1830-1933*, Social History, Popular Culture and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), xxi + 392 pp. ISBN 0 472 11104 3. \$59.50

German History: The Journal of the German History Society, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1999). ISSN 0266 3554. *Special Issue: Saxon Signposts. Guest Editor: James Retallack*

The historiography of nationalism has been organized in the last two decades or so along a three-tiered explanatory model: from the global—often expressed in terms of modernity—via the national, down to the local. How has the local been treated, as an explanatory device of nationalism, in these three levels? The first level is that of theoretical studies, such as the path-breaking studies of Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, that attempt to explain nationalism as a global historical phenomenon, as a social and cultural result of modernity.¹ For Gellner, nationalism is a result of industrial social organization; for Anderson, of print capitalism and widespread literacy. As modernity spreads around the globe, it spreads nationalism as well, though how this is exactly done we are never told. For these and other theoretical studies are interested, understandably, in the macro. They mention individual national cases only by way of example and by focusing on official and élite nationalism. As a result, they are unin-

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983; revised and extended ed., 1991). Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1983).

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terested in the ways modernity shaped, as well as was shaped by, the local. In short, for them the local can never be explanatory in any significant way: it is only the background, the context, for the national idea.

The second level is that of research on nationalism in specific nations. Scholars have explored the symbolism and social engineering of nationalism and the relations between old and new pasts in the making of nations. They have analysed how people invented the nation through monuments, celebrations, museums, images, and other artifacts. But the dominant approach in these studies has viewed the locality only as a test case of a given territory where the nation fulfills itself. How the locality and the concept of localness altered, even forged, national belonging—this has been left largely unexplored. In short, in terms of the scale of explanation, these studies are not fundamentally different from the perspective of Anderson and Gellner: they are simply doing on the local level what Anderson and Gellner had done on a global level.

Studies of the third, local level only took the invention of the nation on to a narrower spatial category, namely the locality and the region. The aim has been to show the nationalization of the locality and the region, and how the nation penetrated the local level. In the most extreme interpretation, influenced by modernization theory, local identity was seen as obliterated by national identity. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, two distinguished historians, Jürgen Kocka and Eugen Weber, made this argument for Germany and for France respectively.² But also more sophisticated treatments of the relations between national and regional identities, influenced by cultural history, view regional identity as ultimately subordinate to national identity. The key word to express this idea is 'mediation'. Studies that view the relations between nationhood and localness in terms of mediation often reflect the important shift from functional and struc-

² Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1976). Jürgen Kocka, 'Probleme der politischen Integration der Deutschen 1867 bis 1945', in O. Büsch and J. J. Sheehan (eds), *Die Rolle der Nation in der deutschen Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 118-36. A similar approach is also evident in the multi-volume history of the Italian regions published by Einaudi. See Carl Levi, 'Introduction: Italian Regionalism in Context', in id. (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics* (Oxford, 1996), p. 5.

tural analysis of nationalism toward analysis in terms of negotiations and memory, with an emphasis on agency. These are important studies, but they none the less assume a hierarchy: the nation acts as a context within which the region can be intelligibly understood.³ An additional approach has attempted a different conceptualization. Instead of understanding local identity as part of national identity, and localness against the background of nationhood, it views local identity as a constituent of national identity and localness as a shaper of nationhood. Thus, local borderland between Spain and France in the Pyrenees shaped the making of these nations, while Germans created the idea and image of *Heimat*, or homeland, that could simultaneously represent the locality, region, and nation. In contrast to the view of local, regional, and national sentiments as overlapping, it viewed these sentiments as interchangeable.⁴

The studies under review offer new research and findings on the relation of the local to the national in modern German history. They present an opportunity to place recent research on Germany within the interpretative framework described above, as well as to reflect upon how is it good to think about the relations of the local to the national and also to the global.

I

In *Verortete Geschichte*, George Kunz, setting out to explore regional sensibilities of Historical Associations (*Historische Vereine*) in nineteenth-century Germany, explores the 'historical memory and "identity spaces" of non-academic bourgeois historical culture' between conservative-romantic and liberal-progressive attitudes (p. 12). Mainly a phenomenon of towns and cities, 260 associations were founded by 1918. Kunz explores five cases of historical associations: in Bayreuth (covering Upper Franconia), Bamberg, Jena (covering Thuringia), Mark Brandenburg, Barmen-Elberfeld, and Kiel (covering Schleswig-Holstein). Each association is described in a chapter, based on a range of printed sources, that focuses mainly on institutional history, publications, and membership.

³ See the pioneering study by Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

⁴ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, 1989); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

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By paying attention to the changing context of each association, Kunz is able to describe different kinds of regional identity. In the case of Bayreuth and Bamberg, for example, local identities resisted the Bavarian monarchy's effort in the first half of the century to integrate new regions into the Bavarian state and identity. But the motivations of the two associations were different. Protestant Bayreuth, which was annexed to Bavaria in the Napoleonic wars, opposed the pressure mounting from Catholic Munich by linking with an idea of Prussian, national, Hohenzollern identity. Catholic Bamberg, in contrast, resented Munich's centralizing policies from a Catholic-conservative position that lamented the loss of sovereignty of the old princely diocese (*Fürstbistum*). In this case, regional identity was cultivated against the territorial state in the name of the locality's autonomy in the old German Reich. If in Franconia the associations defended themselves against the integrative forces of the territorial state, Mark Brandenburg's association, whose seat was in Berlin, wholly identified with Prussia. As the century progressed, the purported essence of the region—agrarian, conservative, and anti-urban—was equated with that of Prussia and Germany. Kunz's discussion of the test cases is illuminating. Local historical identity, argues Kunz persuasively, was determined by the relations between centre and periphery both among and within regions; a primary factor in the making of local identity was the relative centrality of a region within the post-1815 German Confederation and later the nation state. In this respect, Kunz correctly emphasizes the relations between associations and the state.

In the conclusion, Kunz attempts to organize the findings of the descriptive chapters along three 'analytic dimensions' (p. 323). The 'spatial dimension' considers the position of the local with respect to centre-periphery relations in the region and in the nation. The 'content-structural' dimension discusses an important finding, namely the change in historical interests and research during the nineteenth century from topics of church and dynastic history to topics covering culture, ethnicity, and folklore. After 1871, shows Kunz, there was a tendency to view the past in terms of Germanhood (*Deutschtum*). This change was closely linked to the transformation in social composition from clergy, civil servants, and aristocrats to the academically educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*), especially teachers.

Finally, the 'historical-political' dimension argues for three currents of local 'historical memory' (p. 336). The conservative current

fell back on remembering the old political territories of the Holy Roman Empire, while resisting the modernization policies of the nineteenth-century German states. This vision was carried by the conservative bourgeoisie who suffered from a 'mental lag' because the modernizing policies of the states 'could not develop fully in [their] world view' (p. 337). The governmental current focused on the political territory of the nineteenth century. Carried by civil servants and left-conservative bourgeoisie, this memory was not anti-modern but aimed at achieving legitimization of the actual political conditions. Finally, there was a liberal-progressive memory that cultivated the historical culture, ethnicity, and economy of the region. By 'progressive' Kunz does not mean an overall liberal, pluralistic world-view; rather, the term should be understood in relation to the conservative tendencies in German society (p. 339).

What was the meaning of the historical associations? Why did upper-class Germans cultivate regional historical interests at all? Kunz correctly views the associations as a manifestation of progress and conservatism; they reflected the accelerated social and political changes as well as the era of historicism and a search for traditions. But throughout the book Kunz emphasizes conservatism over progress. 'The cultivation of identity-produced regional and local memory resources in the historical associations is also a mental reaction to the crisis of orientation and norms that accompanied the *Bürgertum* with the loss of the security provided by the pre-industrial' world (p. 13). In Kunz's narrative, members of the associations experienced modern change—*Modernisierung* is the concept he uses—as unsettling and dislocating. The associations thus served a 'mental compensation function', whereby 'the social organization form of the association bridged an identity vacuum' created by the modern world (p. 13).

In 1998 James Retallack organized a conference on Saxony in German history. The impressive result is two edited collections that include 26 contributions, covering the period from 1830 to the Third Reich. This is a distinguished project that will be fundamental for Saxon history as well as worthwhile for German history. Retallack himself has generously contributed two essays and two introductions. The introductions engage many ideas and concepts. *Saxony in German History*, writes Retallack, presents three central themes. The first is the ways 'regions are discovered, constructed, forgotten, and

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remade in history'. Part one of the book explores this theme most directly; it will be discussed further below. The second theme 'can be reduced to an interpretative couplet that is as provocative as it is untenable: the SID thesis—"Saxony is different"—and its obvious antithesis, SIS: "Saxony is the same"' (p. 3). Retallack correctly views these two sides not as alternative polarities, but as relationships in tension. There was not something unique about modern Saxon history, but in certain respects it stood out as a pioneering state in modern German history. On the one hand, Saxony was Germany's first socialist state in 1903 (the SPD winning almost 60 per cent of the vote in the Reichstag election), its first anti-socialist state in 1930 (the Nazi party winning its first major electoral victory in the state elections), and its first post-socialist state in 1989. On the other hand, the essays in the volume show how any of these roles was determined by local Saxon peculiarities. The third theme rejects a Prusso-centric approach to German history. The essays 'deviate substantially from a view of Bismarck's national state as the sole, inevitable, or actual outcome of German unification' (p. 6). Moreover, not only was the unification of 1870-1 not inevitable, but 'a Prussianized Germany wasn't *in fact* the way things turned out either ... more attention to German histories (in the plural) is called for' (p. 6). Themes two and three are successfully explored in the volume, while the first theme proves, as we shall see, more problematic.

The book is organized into clearly defined sections. Part two, 'Emancipation, the Public Sphere, and the German Bourgeoisie', discusses the interplay between the state (government, parliament) and bourgeois political forces in their struggle to shape the expanding public space and to determine questions of national unity and identity. In Part three, 'Authoritarianism, Democracy, and the "Dangerous Classes"', 'a common red thread ... is the sustained effort to join questions about the changing nature of politics—the relationships between parties and parliaments, between popular discontent and its organized articulation, and between state and society—with questions concerning regional and local identity' (p. 26-7). The overall topics here are coalition building, practices of civil liberties, and the deep divisions between socialists and non-socialists in Saxon's political culture in the German Empire. Part four, 'The New Left, the New Right, and Germany's Dying Middle', take the story to the First World War and its aftermath. The emphasis is on the attempts of the

liberal bourgeoisie to hold power during the war, the dissolution of the bourgeois party system in Weimar, and the rise of the Nazi movement. Finally, the special issue of *German History*, 'Saxon Signposts', attempts to introduce a more cultural approach to the project by exploring the 'self-fashioning' of Saxons, as more attention is directed 'to the intersection of political and cultural themes in a cosmopolitan-urban nexus' (pp. 458-9). Retallack's aim, citing Michel Foucault, is to capture the circulation of power by conducting an ascending analysis of power from the bottom up: from local *Bürgerstolz* to *Landespatriotismus* to the nationalist consensus (pp. 455, 463-4).

Overall, the main contribution of the project is to illuminate the links between national trends and Saxon politics and society. It provides solid and knowledgeable discussions of liberal, bourgeois, Social Democratic, and Nazi political cultures and social milieux. It is especially strong on the place of bourgeois liberals between an authoritarian state and a growing Social Democratic movement before 1918, and between left and new right thereafter. The picture that emerges is of liberals "on the move"—seizing unprecedented and often unanticipated opportunities as wealth is redistributed, cultural artifacts dispensed, and distant authorities challenged. But they are not always in the driver's seat' (*German History*, p. 461). While this is not a wholly new picture, the project does broaden our knowledge on the construction of the public sphere in Leipzig and Dresden, on the important role of the state, and on the relations among antagonistic political cultures. All the essays are of high quality. Retallack has assembled a very good group of young and senior scholars who show an excellent familiarity with Saxon archives, thus making available original work based on archives opened for sustained academic work only after 1990. Another strong point is the long historical period covered in the project, as well as the attention paid to the pre-1871 years, a period that has understandably lost some of its aura since the fall of the Wall.

One blue thread that runs through the volume is the issue of modernization. The weakness of the modernization theory, observes Retallack, has always been especially clear for scholars of local and regional histories, where the overarching, abstract narratives of industrialization, liberalism, democracy, and the bourgeoisie ignored the local conditions that were messy, spasmodic, and unpredictable—just like life itself. Several essays in the project demonstrate this very well. While rejecting the *telos* of modernization, Retallack

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still proposes to keep ‘the more convincing and heuristically useful *elements* of the modernization concept and dispense only with the prideful claim to explain how modernity—as a whole—“happened”?. These *elements* are the attempt to write a *histoire totale*, and the study of, among others, class formation, political renewal, and the failure of liberal democracy in Germany before 1945 (p. 19).

II

These are fine studies, each in its own focused domain. But what contributions do these studies make to articulating the relations between the local, regional, and national? While these works go so far in illuminating elements of local history, they are less successful in getting us the rest of the way by providing an original statement on localness and nationhood.

There is, first of all, an obvious discrepancy between the promises of the introductions and what is actually delivered in the books. Kunz’s introduction aims to place the work, with various degrees of success, within current work on the making of regional identity, collective memory, and notions of space. Yet there is little connection between these theoretical discussions and the six chapters describing the historical associations. These offer a straightforward discussion of the associations’ activities, publications, social composition, and historical topics. Like many a German dissertation, the study is based on an enormous amount of laudable archival research. However, the text is overburdened with details, facts, names of essays, statistics, and association members, while short on analysis, generalizations, and innovation that come from linking methods and theory with the sources.

In the Saxony project, Retallack points out that ‘juxtaposing region and nation uncovers a complex, shifting, malleable relationship that has waited too long to be problematized and rethought by scholars’ (p. 7). But this remains mostly unfulfilled. By placing Saxony’s liberalism, political culture, state policies, and party configuration within the course of German history, the project is illuminating in many significant ways. Yet it does not uncover a complex, shifting relationship between region and nation, and most of the essays are about Saxony *per se*. Retallack’s introductions include concepts and terms that certainly belong to the *Zeitgeist* of historical writings. He is attentive to culture, *the* leading interpretative term in the

last generation: 'Culture, indeed, may provide the best key to explain why scholarly attention has recently shifted away from the kind of regional history that privileged structure and typology, toward one that increasingly emphasizes agency, perception, experience, mentalities, and language' (p. 22). But there is, in fact, very little of these new approaches and methods in the Saxony project. It remains fundamentally a project in political culture, rather than a project emphasizing culture along Retallack's own description.

In a sense, the two studies point to a bigger problem in the humanities, namely, the dissonance between a rhetoric that emphasizes experience, agency, and shifting relationships, which is hegemonic among professionals and the wider public, and the actual execution of a historical study based on linking the concepts of this rhetoric with methods and sources. At times, this hegemonic rhetoric is reiterated more than practised; at times, it is now repeated with little critical thought. In making the point about culture, agency, and experience, Retallack is, of course, well within the mainstream of much academic research. And yet, the methodological choice is not between determinism and contingency, but between degrees of contingency. It is not between complex shifting relations and simple fixed relations, but between degrees of complexity and possibilities of action. It is not between using language and mentalities as analytical tools or denouncing them, but between the useful ways of applying them. And it is not between descending or ascending analysis of power, but between the ways local, regional, national, and global powers interact. In all these questions the problem of the studies under review stem from their conceptualization of the relationship between the local, regional, and national.

III

For studies that deal with the local, this is a fundamental issue. What are the relationships between the local, regional, and national proposed in these projects? Both works offer a fruitful, viable approach, which is, within its limitations, a productive one. But they remain within the current categories and concepts (and at times behind them), and do not attempt to problematize these categories, to experiment, or go beyond them.

Kunz, as we have seen, views local and regional identities as compatible with, not opposed to, the nation. And he is sensitive to the dif-

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ferent placements of the local and the regional within the territorial as well as within the nation-state. But the limits of his approach is expressed in the idea that the region should be understood as “a nation in miniature” (*Nation im kleinen*) or as an integrative component part of the greater, national, or territorial state. The region renders their abstract level ‘understandable and physically comprehensible through the transmission of their identity to the “small space”’ (p. 23). This is certainly true, but does not go far enough. Viewing the relations between localness and nationhood in these terms means, in theoretical terms, positing a distinction whereby the meaning of localness is subordinated to nationhood. Kunz in fact uses the term subnational to describe the region (p. 330, for example). The local is not so much a shaper of nationalism, as a repository of national belonging created elsewhere. It can only ‘transmit’ and make ‘understandable’ the bigger, more important identity, created on the state or national level. Consequently, Kunz is not so much interested in the meeting point between nationhood and localness, but rather in the influence of the first on the second. One analytical result of this approach is that local identity becomes important for the national plot only once the nation penetrates the locality, and only once local identity becomes a vehicle to mediate the national idea. The narrative results of this approach are clear in the book. We have descriptions of various regionalisms in six cases, but they are separated from each other. We do not get an idea of a whole, of a set of relationships and mutual influences among the regionalisms and between them and German nationhood.

In *Saxony in German History*, the section ‘Writing Local and Regional History Today’ is the best in the book. What emerges from these essays is a rejection of the dichotomy between the region as a ‘lost world’, parochial and provincial, and the nation as progressive and modern. As Thomas Kuhne points out, ‘the current predicament of regional studies lies in the fact that they rarely reflect on the constructed quality of the region itself’ (pp. 53, 58). Celia Applegate illuminatingly reminds us of the ‘experience below, beyond, and outside whatever we construe to be national experience’ (p. 33). Her imaginative essay shows how the literary works of Gustav Freytag and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl ‘mediated’ the nation to readers in Germany. A new frontier for local and regional study is articulated by Helmut Smith. In an excellent, erudite essay, drawing on anthropology, and on

works in American, Italian, and German history, Smith shows the elasticity of local and regional boundaries by focusing on local histories of the working classes and on analysis of ethnic and political boundaries that shape regional identities. Smith not only rejects teleological narratives that view the national as superseding the local, or acknowledges that lines of differentiations between the local and national (and also the ethnic, religious, and other identities) are commingled and hybrid, but he also shows how to do it. Ultimately he sees the fundamental problem in 'how to pose questions, and at what level of scale' (p. 76).

These insights are not followed in the project. The problem of scale is not posed, and the challenge of destabilizing identities is not taken. It is a question of methodology. Retallack argues that 'demonstrating the way in which [national social, political, and economic] trends were accelerated, retarded, or redirected by regional factors is arguably where Saxon historians are contributing most to a rethinking of general explanations based on national patterns' (p. 11). But this relation always views the local within the context of the national instead of viewing it as a shaper of nationhood. An important exception is Siegfried Weichlein's illuminating essay on the interplay of political cultures in Saxony and Germany. The general point can be illustrated by using the analogy in which the relations between nationhood and localness are viewed in terms of the relations between text and context. Nationalism (and regionalism of the territorial state, as in the case of Bavaria and Bamberg) often functions much like a necessary context which describes and analyses the general conditions within which a particular local reality evolves. The national plot functions as a foundation story that, while complex and multifaceted, still provides a single context within which, and in relation to which, people make choices about local identity. But a whole set of possibilities is opened up when we reject this separation between localness and nationhood, and with it the historian's common approach to place and explain the text in relation to a context. To reject the separation of localness and nationhood assumes that historical actors participate in various processes at the same time, that localness and nationhood simultaneously and reciprocally interact. This serves as a reminder of what is declared more often than practised, namely, the multiplicity of social experiences and representations, in part contradictory and ambiguous, in terms of which people construct the world and their actions.

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Consequently, one result of the local-national relations posed by Kunz and Retallack is that the identities described in their books become, in spite of best intentions, quite homogenous and predictable. Smith warns in his essay against 'narratives that are principally concerned with the making of unified social identities' and that subordinate 'the history of conflict and coexistence among groups in a region to the study of the social bases of high politics' (pp. 69, 73). This observation seems to characterize well many of the identities in the books under review: for Kunz memories are divided into conservative, governmental, and liberal, while in the Saxony project most of the identities are defined by a political party, a class, or an ideology (such as Liberalism). All these identities certainly existed, but they do seem to fit too neatly into pre-existing social and political formations. Identities—indeed, culture—thus become prisoners of political and social reductionism and functionalism.

What do we learn from the books under review, then, about local identities? We get a clear sense of how associations' members wrote about the history of the region, or of the political and social battle-fronts in Saxony, but there is very little sense of the emotions and sentiments that made localness. One often forgets in these studies the sense of tenderness and (often pathetic, though genuine) self-importance with which we all consider our identities. Let me give an example that links, following the topics prevalent in the Saxony project, the state, the *Landtag* (local parliament), and politics. In December 1875 Bismarck proposed to transfer local railroads to the Reich's authority. According to the 1871 constitution of the German Reich, as is well known, several states, such as Württemberg, kept an autonomous railroad administration. Now Bismarck wished the Reich to absorb this important transport sector. The suggestion was starkly opposed in Württemberg, and in 1876 the *Landtag* debated the issue. Now, trains are not the first objects that come to mind when we think of identity, and while they are no doubt important, we do not often associate them with a sense of belonging either. But in the debate, grown-up men, who valued practicality and derided frivolity, men who took themselves very seriously, spoke in the Württemberg *Landtag* about trains in precisely such a language of possession. On the face of it, this was an economic debate over an attempt to rationalize a fragmented railroad system into a single, more efficient agency. But in reality it was about localness and nationhood.

Member of the *Landtag*, Schmid, articulated in these words the stakes of the debate: 'A pain will pierce the heart of the land when it has to cede its railways, this child of attentive care, like the pain that pierces the chest of a father who must forever bid farewell to his child. Gentlemen, I do not need to explain myself further.'⁵ Schmid's proposal to the *Landtag* to support the general Reich railway legislation (*Reichseisenbahngesetz*), but to reject Bismarck's proposal, was approved by a majority of eighty votes to six. His words expressed a widely shared sentiment among members of the *Landtag*, namely that while the national idea and the nation-state were a necessary political reality, local identity remained a mainstay of German identity. Reading the proceedings of the *Landtag* debate in March 1876, one is struck by the ways in which a rather technical discussion on a legal and economic transport issue was transformed into a defence of the integrity of local identity in the age of the nation-state. While Kunz and Retallack are well aware, as I have pointed out, of the profoundness of local identity, their studies rarely capture it beyond the realm of the political or of the published essay.

How did Saxons become Saxon? What was Saxonness for Saxons? Retallack interestingly remarks that by 1900 radical nationalism was more entrenched than any 'distinguishing sense of "Saxonness"' (p. 10). One would like to know how Saxonness declined, if it ever existed. And if it did not exist, then why did Saxons (and historians) talk so much about it? Moreover, more often than not Saxony—its identities, borders, and spaces—appears, in effect, as a given. This is, in many respects, the history of a region enclosed within a fixed territory whose cleavages are political and social, but not cultural, or cross-regional. More fundamentally, if we talk of Saxon identity, or of any identity for that matter, we by definition assume that people believe they share common denominators that prevail over the existing gender, class, political, and other divisions in society. In sharing an identity (Saxon or German) people displace their inner conflicts into an imagined space, beyond the recognizable here and now, into the past and the future. What, then, were the common denominators that united liberals, Social Democrats, and the authoritarian state in sharing a sense of Saxon belonging?

⁵ *Verhandlungen der Württembergischen Kammer der Abgeordneten*, vol. 117, 30 Mar. 1876, p. 1,060.

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Different kinds of topics and methods may yield other results, for example, exploring landscape, geography, and travelling. Members of historical associations did not only write essays, they also walked the region in order to experience it at first hand. 'Lernt Sachsen [or Württemberg or Germany] kennen!' was a familiar slogan that encouraged locals to search for their historical roots and essential group characteristics in the physical traits of their region. How was Saxon nature linked to emotions and a sense of belonging? Thinking of Saxony in terms of scale of observation is also important to place it spatially and geographically. It comes naturally to us these days to consider Saxony along a west-east dichotomy as 'belonging' in eastern Germany. But this is a recent development determined by post-1945 history. A leading geographical imagination in the nineteenth century placed Saxony along a German north-south division, or within the more amorphous idea of *Mitteleuropa*. How did a Saxon spatial imagination evolve in a period when Saxony's territory changed often (as when the northern part of the kingdom was transferred to Prussia at the Congress of Vienna)? Borders are privileged sites for the making of identities, and they suggest ways to define concepts of collective identity, of culture and ethnicity.⁶ This topic is especially pertinent given that Saxony was a developed industrial state, which meant an intense pace of migration, mobility, and communication within the region and across regions. Focusing on everyday life, the family, and the workplace can tell us how people, some new to the region, came to embrace a sense of Saxonness as their own. In this fast changing, modern world, how was the local and regional spatially constructed?⁷ How was a sense of Saxonness inscribed on to, for example, certain material objects and consumer goods?⁸ How, in other words, was the local linked to the modern? It is this topic, therefore, to which we now have to turn.

⁶ See the excellent study by Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley, 1999).

⁷ Arjun Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', in id., *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), pp. 178-99 raises some interesting ideas.

⁸ Caitlin Murdock, 'Böhmisches Bier und Sächsisches Textil. Die sächsisch-böhmische Grenze als Konsumregion, 1900-1933', *Comparativ*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2001), pp. 66-76.

IV

Both projects are preoccupied with the issue of modernization. Kunz begins his study by rejecting the teleology of modernization theory that subsumes the region under the hegemony of the nation. This is certainly a good point, but reading through the book one wonders how successful Kunz has been in avoiding this teleology. The narrative that emerges from the book is that of a development from pre-modern to modern society that is not fixed, for Kunz allows for the commingling of conservative and progressive ideas. But it does have a certain pre-ordained movement, whose fundamental characteristic is that people experience the modern only as a crisis. The meaning of the historical association is ultimately reduced to filling an 'identity vacuum' (p. 13) created in the process of modernization. A subtle hierarchy thus emerges of modernization as an overarching process that begets nationhood and localness. This hierarchy assumes a level of analysis and explanation: local identity, and by extension nationhood, is a reaction to modernization. From this point, the teleology of modernization is not far away.

Kunz seems to be working within the interpretative framework set by Hans-Ulrich Wehler. In his *magnum opus*, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Wehler presents a comprehensive argument about nationalism as arising from, and as a response to, Europe's modernization processes and crises.⁹ Among them are the decline of traditional political authority and the rise of the secular state, as well as the end of the society of orders, and the rise of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ Elsewhere he articulated his view with great clarity: nationalism arose as a result of 'a kind of social-psychic vacuum' which existed in Europe following the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. This historical void emerged among intellectuals who felt 'a marked need for a new orientation and a new identity'.¹¹ Kunz's argument is basically the

⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 3 vols (Munich, 1987-95).

¹⁰ Ibid. i. pp. 506-7. See Jonathan Sperber, 'Master Narratives of Nineteenth Century German History', *Central European History*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 69-91.

¹¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Der deutsche Nationalismus bis 1871', in id. (ed.), *Scheidewege der deutschen Geschichte: Von der Reformation bis zur Wende, 1517-1989* (Munich, 1995), p. 121. See also the illuminating essay by Heinz-

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same. I do not know what is meant by 'social-psychic vacuum' (Wehler) and 'identity vacuum' (Kunz), but history is not a natural science. The absence of matter, which is one definition of 'vacuum', is never an option in history because people always think, act, and communicate with the world around them. And to view vacuum, following the *American Heritage Dictionary*, as the 'state of being sealed off from external or environmental influences' is not helpful either. An atom may be sealed in such a way, and continue to act like an atom, but not people. If people are sealed in such a way, they cease to form a society; and when this is the case, then the term human history also loses its meaning.

The result of viewing vacuum in history is that the most common explanatory method in Kunz's book is to deduce mental beliefs of presumed crisis from abstract terms of the social sciences (modernization, urbanization, and the like). At times this argument is stated without proof, as a higher truth that needs no elaboration. But the terms are not connected to the actual material on the life and actions of the members of the associations; it is simply assumed that modernization is experienced as crisis. Indeed, one can argue that the material presented by Kunz—of dedicated Germans hard at work to make sense of their local, regional, and national identity—does not support his interpretation of an identity vacuum and of a perennial crisis. It is in this context that Kunz provides an interpretation of the *Heimat* idea as predominantly imbued with anti-modern, anti-urban, and *völkisch* ideas. This is certainly a viable and respectable argument, but it would have helped had Kunz provided some evidence for this interpretation, and had he engaged with the studies that have revised this interpretation in the last decade.¹² Be that as it may, to

Gerhard Haupt and Charlotte Tacke, 'Die Kultur des Nationalen. Sozial- und Kulturgeschichtliche Ansätze bei der Erforschung des europäischen Nationalismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', in Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler (eds), *Kulturgeschichte Heute* (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 255-83, esp. 261.

¹² For some recent interpretations of the *Heimat* idea that reject a simple correlation between *Heimat* and anti-modernism see: Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*; Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1998); William Rollins, *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904-1918* (Ann Arbor, 1997). Siegfried

explain the basic motivations of nationalism (by Wehler) and localism (by Kunz) in terms of identity vacuum and anti-modernism makes nationalism and localism epiphenomena of modernization and its presumed mental crisis. This seems to me a step in the direction of teleology.

Moreover, Kunz's view of modernization assumes a developmental model of historical time and explanation. According to this model, as the scale of observation grows larger, so does the explanatory significance; modernization can explain localness, but localness can never shape modernization, only reflect it. The model imposes a fundamental structural unity of historical process, space, and time that makes it possible to identify as anachronistic, or as having a compensatory function, certain elements that presumably do not fit. But historical time is not a totality; it is comprised rather of a multitude of social times and identities, which converge as well as contradict each other. One kind of interpretative problem in Wehler and in Kunz is to view the nation and the region not simply as new, but as springing out of nowhere, out of a vacuum. It thus can be described only in negative terms of disorientation and crisis. I wonder how *Landtag* member Schmid fits into this context? Far from being disoriented, he seems to me to have a clear idea of who he is, where he comes from, and how his local roots fit within the national.

Retallack, as we have seen, also criticizes the *telos* embedded in modernization theory. To my mind, Christop Nonn is on the mark when he views the debate about whether Saxony became more modern as 'rather moot when one takes into account the renowned slipperiness of the term "modern"' (p. 320). I should add that I find the active interest in modernization unhelpful and somewhat outdated. It has very little to tell us about the making of Saxon identity and its links to the nation. And we do not necessarily need a modernization model in order to explore, as Retallack suggests, class formation and political renewal. The contributions of these studies are independent of this concept.

Weichlein, 'Das Spannungsfeld von nationaler und regionaler Identität', in Werner Bramke (ed.), *Politische Kultur in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (Leipzig, 1999), pp. 241-52; Katharina Weigand (ed.), *Heimat: Konstanten und Wandel im 19./20. Jahrhundert. Vorstellungen und Wirklichkeiten* (Munich, 1997); Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*; and the thoughtful overview by Rolf Petri, 'Deutsche Heimat 1850-1950', *Comparativ*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2001), 77-127.

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But the idea of the modern, however slippery, may be useful in locating the local within the global. I now move to discuss the modern. ('Modernization' and 'modern' are at times used interchangeably in the Saxony project, although they are not the same thing.) The perception of being Saxon was, of course, relational; it depended on the observation point, at what level of scale people positioned themselves not only in the region, or in Germany, but in Europe, and indeed the world. The era of nationhood, which figures so prominently in these books, was also the era of imperialism, of European hegemony in a shrinking world. And what has been one of the founding beliefs in enabling European global domination? The *telos* of the modern, of course: the idea that human history moves along a developmental model of unitary historical time and explanation, in which Europe is the first occurrence of capitalism, modernity, and the Enlightenment.¹³ Historicism, so important to the historical associations, was fundamental to this belief. It is therefore not enough to criticize the *telos* of modernization theory. One needs to go beyond this point by showing how the belief in historicism and modernity shaped local-global relations in which small Saxony, by virtue of being in Europe, became the centre, while huge Asia and Africa turned provincial.

A step in the right direction is the essay by Glenn Penny on the Leipzig *Museum für Völkerkunde* (Museum of Ethnology), founded in 1868, and collecting artifacts from around the world. Even if Penny's argument is not entirely convincing, his approach is salutary, for he looks at the interplay between local, national, and cosmopolitan identities in the motivation for founding and running the museum. He argues that in making the museum promoters ignored national identity, while 'fashioning the local and regional self remained the [promoters'] central preoccupation', as well as contributing to Leipzig's international prestige (*German History*, p. 504). Only once imperialism had started in earnest, did the quest of ethnology become a reflection of national identity (pp. 499-500). Perhaps. But it seems to me that Penny's desire to criticize historians who argued for a national context to the making of local identities caused him to miss an opportunity to articulate a more helpful relationship. Our point of

¹³ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000) pp. 7-12.

departure should be that the local, regional, national, and global are linked, that they co-exist, but with tension, instead of viewing them as separate entities. Drawing a separation between the national on the one hand, and the local and regional on the other, reproduces the hierarchy of the old historiography that saw the local and national as overlapping but unconnected. Assuming a local/regional phase of ethnography succeeded by a national/colonial one is akin to reproducing a local space autonomous of, or prior to, the nation. Arguably, such spaces or identities do not exist in the modern era; the question is not whether the local and national are connected, but how.

Any attempt to describe or recover such local autonomous spaces would reinscribe those practices of the cultural and the historical that constitute nationalism by nineteenth-century nationals. The very idea of ethnography was based on the notion of a developmental model of history, where Western, and by extension German, culture epitomized the modern. This model changed the scale of observation: in the German national context, Berlin was the centre and Saxony the periphery; but in a global context Saxony and its cosmopolitan ethnographers in the museum were in the centre of world history. How did the belief in the modern influence the local sense of belonging of the academically educated bourgeoisie, who carried the national idea and the ethnographic practice? How was the local a shaper of the national, and indeed, by way of imperialism, of the global?

V

The idea of a region and its relation to the centre has recently been analysed by associating it with Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. This has been the case in the historiographies of Italy with respect to the south and of Russia with respect to the regions of Central Asia and Siberia, while Maria Todorova has written a book on Balkanism.¹⁴ In Germany, this approach will not be successful. Saxony was

¹⁴ On the influence of Orientalism on Russian historiography see the special issue of *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Fall, 2000) and Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca and London, 2001). On Italian historiography, see John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (London, 1999) and Jane Schneider (ed.), *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford, 1998). On Balkanism, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997).

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not an Other in the same way that Khazan was to Moscow or Sicily to Rome. And Saxonism does not really carry the meaning of Balkanism or the Italian south. But perhaps this association will help us to conceive of a new history of regionalism in modern German history. I do not know exactly what to call it, but *Heimatism* may be a good suggestion. This history should explore the dialectical process of local, regional, national, and global identities. These identities did not contradict each other, as they corroborated one another in relations of tension. They did not set in motion relations of opposition but of ambiguity. They complemented, defined, as well as set the limits of one another. Each defined itself in terms of the others, but, since ours is the era of nationalism, the national was the standard against which all others were defined. *Heimatism* as discourse and practice (in associations, nature, and architecture preservation, travelling, museums, but also as used by the state and as a political and economic force) in the last 200 years should tell us about the qualities of each identity and also about the spaces in between, about the boundaries beyond which one discourse was perceived as transgressing the other.

About localism, regionalism, and nationalism we can know only one thing for certain: they will continue to surprise and turn our prognostications to foolhardy prophecies. The recent history of unified Germany is a case in point, when a new regional identity has been added to traditional ones: eastern Germany as defined by the borders of East Germany. East Germans' attraction to the West was so undeniable in 1989 that many thought they would shed their past and traditions as they adopt Western democracy and consumption. This, I believe, will not happen, or at least not exactly as this swift narrative has it. A comparison with the first unification may be helpful. In 1871, a multitude of sovereign regional states (Bavaria, Baden, etc.) dissolved willingly (with some misgivings) into the nation-state dominated by Prussia, just as in 1990 a sovereign state, East Germany, dissolved willingly (with some misgivings) into the nation-state dominated by West Germany. In a sense, there was more reason to expect a strong regional identity in East Germany after 1990 than in, say, Baden after 1871. Before 1871 Baden and Prussia shared similar social, economic, and political systems; yet regional identity flourished in Baden after 1871. West and East Germany were divided by diametrically opposed systems. Why, then, have so many been

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surprised by the transformation of an eastern German regional identity that seeks to flourish, oppose, and shape national identity in post-1990 Germany, but always within the framework of a united German nation-state. Contemporaries put it best. In 1886 King Charles I of Württemberg instructed the Prussian ambassador to Stuttgart that the conduct expected from the new Prussian Commander of the Württemberg Army was to respect the identity of the land and its people 'since we are Swabians and we want to remain Swabians'. One hundred and ten years later, in 1996, a villager in Kella stated proudly: 'We *are* Osis, and we want to remain Osis!'¹⁵ This, I believe, is one new frontier of German regional history, although I readily submit that my prognostication may turn into a foolish prophecy.

¹⁵ George Kleine, *Der württembergische Minister-Präsident Frhr. Hermann von Mittnacht (1825-1909)* (Stuttgart, 1969), p. 17. Berdahl, *Where the World Ended*, p. 232 (italics in the original).

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