

# Nation and State in Early Modern Europe

**Casey, James**

Univ. of East Anglia. Fac. of Arts and Humanities. School of History. UK-NR4 7TJ Norwich  
J.Casey@uea.ac.uk

BIBLID [ISBN: 978-84-8419-190-2 (2009); 53-69]

---

Artikulu honetan "nazio" eta "estatu" tradiziozko kontzeptuek Europa modernoan izan duten esanahia aztertuko da, eta arraza edo hizkuntza baino legea eta historia faktore erabakigarriagoak izan direla ondorioztatuko da. Horregatik, autogobernatutako "commonwealth" edo errepublikaren, eta horren leialtasun zina jasotzen duen "estatuaren" arteko harremanean datza "nazio-estatu" sortzeko gakoa. Esperientzia onenetan, "commonwealth" errepublikaren ideia jakin bat sustatzea eta eraikitzea lortu dute.

*Giltza-Hitzak: Nazioa. Estatu. Commonwealth. Absolutismoa. Pentsalari politikoak. Valentzia.*

Este artículo examina los conceptos tradicionales de «nación» y «estado» en la Europa moderna y trata sobre hasta que punto la ley y la historia han sido factores más determinantes que la raza o el idioma. Se considera que la clave del surgimiento de la «nación-estado» se encuentra en la relación entre la «commonwealth» (república) autogobernada y el «estado» al que jura lealtad. Las mejores experiencias logran promover y construir una determinada idea de «commonwealth».

*Palabras Clave: Nación. Estado. Commonwealth. Absolutismo. Pensadores políticos. Valencia.*

Cet article examine les concepts traditionnels de « Nation » et d'« État » dans l'Europe moderne, pour conclure que les lois et l'histoire ont été des facteurs bien plus déterminants que la race ou que la langue. La clé de l'apparition de la « Nation-État » réside ainsi dans la relation entre la « Commonwealth » (République) autogouvernée et l'« État » auquel elle a juré loyauté. Les meilleures expériences permettent de promouvoir et de construire une certaine idée de la « Commonwealth ».

*Mots Clé : Nation. État. Commonwealth. Absolutisme. Penseurs politiques. Valence.*

The Oxford colloquium and its proceedings published here bring to mind once again the difference that has existed in the past between the culture of a people and its forms of political expression, or in other words between a 'nation' and a 'state'. One only has to look at a map of Europe around 1500 to realise how politically fragmented the continent was at the time. Petty states like the Franche Comté, immortalised in the classic work of Lucien Febvre, kept their political autonomy, separated from neighbours with whom nevertheless they shared a common language and culture. This decentralisation of power fostered the 'vigorous talent for opposition and resistance' –freedom in every sense of the word– which was to characterise Europe in the age of the Renaissance. What would have happened to Luther had there not been over 300 politically autonomous jurisdictions in the Holy Roman Empire, given that the Emperor was committed to the suppression of the rebellious preacher? Nor was it a coincidence that Burckhardt began his famous study of the Renaissance with a look at the 'state as a work of art' – an invitation to political competition and creativity, which thereby freed space for other kinds of innovation<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, at both ends of the continent, we find a division by clans and lordships and settlements, in a colonial setting where ethnic and family groupings took on great importance. One thinks of Ireland before the definitive English conquest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or of the vast steppe frontiers of the Russian, Polish and Ottoman rulers<sup>2</sup>.

Against these tendencies towards dispersal of authority there was an opposite trend in the direction of agglomeration. The pioneering geographer Pedro de Medina had no hesitation in taking the whole of the Iberian peninsula as a unit of observation in 1548. He dedicated his treatise to the heir to the throne of Castile, the future Philip II, in order to give him an idea of the 'grandeur' of the land that he would be called upon to rule, even if this included Portugal, which was not yet part of the Spanish monarchy. 'Spain has been divided in many ways', Medina tells us, 'but for this survey it will be broken down into ten kingdoms and seven provinces'. For him Andalusia was a 'province', Granada a 'kingdom', while 'Lusitania' was a province which included the 'kingdom' of Portugal. Reverence for classical Roman 'provinces' is here combined with a realistic sense of the frontier wars of more recent times. Iberia could be looked at from other perspectives, Medina goes on, following the 'five main rivers' and their tributaries, and taking into account the mountain barriers. But he is less interested in this geographical angle of vision than in the rich patrimony of historical memory associated with the places he sets out to map. The sense of the living past –the grandeur of monuments and men and events– triumphs over any 'Braudelian' interest in man and the natural world<sup>3</sup>.

---

1. FEBVRE, Lucien. *Philippe II et la Franche Comté* (1912), new edition, Paris: Flammarion 1979; pp. 10-11.

2. FOSTER, R. F. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. P. 93; MACNEILL, W. H. *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500-1800*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1964.

3. MEDINA, Pedro de. *Libro de grandezas y cosas memorables de España* (1548), In: A. González Palencia (ed.). *Obras de Pedro de Medina*, Madrid, 1944.

We come across a similar perspective a century later, on the eve of the Scientific Revolution, in the well-known geography of the Peninsula by Rodrigo Méndez Silva. Here we are introduced to a series of regions, and of cities 'girt with stout walls', each with its own heritage of memory and monument, language and customs. The Basques, he tells us, speak 'the original tongue (or so they say), from Armenia and Chaldea, brought to Spain by Tubal'. In certain parts of the region they still wear 'the dress of those times'. But the Basques were also seen as part of the wider Spanish community founded by Tubal. They were good with paper and ink, 'occupying magistracies at court, posts of great responsibility'; and they were 'very skilled navigators' (had they not settled Ireland back in 250 A.D.?)<sup>4</sup>.

Patriotism, and not just in Spain, could operate at different levels, through a sense of loyalty to one's local community, and above all to the memory of a past shared with others beyond that boundary. In his lament for the wars which were raging far and wide in his day, the poet Petrarch addressed himself to '*Italia mia*', confident that his pain would be shared equally by the inhabitants of Rome and of the Po Valley as by his fellow citizens of Florence. It is of 'Italy' that the poet thinks when he grows tender at the memory of his birth and upbringing, of the place where his ancestors were interred. Born in 1304, Petrarch was, of course, an exile from his native Florence. May this have contributed to his sharpened awareness of a wider fatherland? Certainly, like Pedro de Medina and Rodrigo Méndez Silva, he took for granted the landscape which might confer a certain unity (or division) on a people. In the case of Italy, 'Nature looks after us well, placing the Alpine shield between us and the Germanic fury'<sup>5</sup>.

The *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso the Wise –in great part a philosophical treatise on the condition of man as well as a legal code– set out for a thirteenth-century Castilian public the foundations of human sociability.

One of the great bonds which a man may have with another is that of being born in the same place, for just as the flesh (*natura*) gives us our ties of family, so nature (*naturaleza*) makes us one by long custom of loving friendship (*leal amor*).

When two men from the same town 'find themselves in another different town, they take pleasure in each other's company, and help each other out in whatever way they can'<sup>6</sup>. The local homeland, the *patria chica*, meant so much more to the men of an earlier age, where communication from one town to the next was so much slower than nowadays, where markets were essentially local – unless the itinerant merchants came with their wares at set times of the year on foot or on horseback. The whole trend over

---

4. *Población general de España*, Madrid: 1645; p. 235v.

5. *Canzonere*, 128.

6. *Las Siete Partidas del rey don Alfonso el Sabio*, facsimile edition in 3 vols., Madrid, 1972; 4/24, and 4/27/4.

the modern period has indeed been to break this local autonomy, with the standardisation of coinage, weights and measures. If in the Madrid of the nineteenth century one could still tell the Valencians, Galicians or Aragonese immigrants by their clothes and trades, that world was to come to an end by 1914<sup>7</sup>.

In his pioneering work of 1608 on the city of Granada, one of many municipal histories which were to follow suit in the years to come, Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza headed one of his chapters with the title, 'On the honour which comes from being born in a noble land'. For him, as for his near contemporary, the Valencian chronicler Gaspar Escolano in 1610, 'the predominating stellar configuration' greatly influenced the character and customs of the people. Related to the pattern of the stars was that of the climate: 'men born in fresh and temperate lands, with a clear sky and soft breezes, are easy-going and soft-spoken, but sharp-witted and very insightful'. And Escolano goes on to praise the cosmopolitan nature of Valencia, given its links to the sea. Not to be outdone, Bermúdez de Pedraza pointed to the advantages of returning the sick to the land of their birth, here the very air itself seemed to revive their drooping spirit<sup>8</sup>.

To return to the fatherland at least at the end of one's active life, and to leave one's bones among those of the ancestors, were ambitions of many at this time. Half a world away from his homeland, the great explorer Vasco da Gama thought of Portugal as the place where he wished to end his days –at least in the opinion of the ne-er-do-well poet Camoens. In his epic poem of the overseas discoveries, Camoens sets out his view of 'Spain' and of Portugal's place within it. Spain 'grows large with different nations'. Bound together by the waters of the Ocean sea, these nations –'all of such nobility and valour'– fight one another for supremacy. But the hand of destiny –or rather the conjunction of the zodiac– pushed forward the kings of Castile as the 'restorers of Spain and lords thereof'. The Portuguese occupied such a small and infertile country that their bid for autonomy, consolidated with divinely-inspired victory over the Moors at Oruro in 1140, attracted relatively little opposition. By 1385 the sense of difference was so rooted in men's minds that the failure of the ruling dynasty to produce an heir became a popular talking - point and no longer a vague historical memory. In Camoens's famous line, the decision had then to be taken: 'Who would renounce the faith, love, endeavour and style (*arte*) of being a Portuguese, and live to see his own kingdom made subject to another?'<sup>9</sup>.

---

7. Good insights are provided by BAREA, Arturo. *La Forja de un Rebelde* and MESONERO ROMANOS, Ramón. *El Antiguo Madrid* (1861), facsimile edition, Madrid: 1986. Also note here the observations of Unamuno on the decline of the small town with the coming of the railways, in his *Andanzas y visiones españolas* (Austral edition 1939).

8. *Antigüedad y excelencias de Granada*, Madrid, 1608; pp. 145v-148v.

9. *Os Lusíadas* (1573), new edition Porto Editora, Porto, n.d., canto IV.

The question of how to recognise a 'nation' really only became acute in the latter part of the early modern period, as new ways of defining man's relationship with God and his fellows came to be discussed. In the Americas the famous caste paintings, showing the various degrees of racial admixture to which special epithets were applied (coyote and zambo, as well as the more familiar mestizo or mulato) develop during the eighteenth century, at a time when racial inter-marriages or unions were increasing. Less than a racial element as such, the criterion of social status in this New World remained the traditional one of 'reason'. Were such and such a people 'men of reason' (*gente de razón*)? Would they fit into a society based on paperwork, historical memory, respect for a society wider than the clan? Not to belong to the world of rational discourse could be observed in the way people dressed (with the lowest not wearing clothes at all), the houses they lived in, the way they farmed the land and took thought to save money for the morrow. One of the bases of the colonial idea, developed already during the Middle Ages and applied in Ireland and Poland before being exported to the Americas, was that land was being wasted by the native inhabitants, who, for their own good, should be brought under some kind of external authority and learn from outsiders who were to be settled among them<sup>10</sup>.

While we today are likely to pay more attention to language and ethnicity as the mark of a nation, the early modern world was more attuned to arguments drawn from law (including religion) and history. It was the *fueros* (liberties in the general sense, applied to individuals and corporations) which regulated a society and conferred on it rights of self-government. The 'commonwealth' (*república*) was this amalgamation of 'private' law (*privilege*), which provided a framework or constitution for its activities. The system was essentially self-running, and when adjustments were needed, they were effected in negotiation with the Prince, who represented the *estado*, which was conceived of as essentially the reserve powers of a monarch. European kings claimed to be placed on their thrones by God, but their margin for manoeuvre was actually rather small, since the Church upheld the notion of 'sovereignty' as residing with God, not with the king. This could be a recipe for rebellion, and it was not perhaps until the classical order imposed by the monarchy of Louis XIV (1643-1715), effectively excluding the Church from the direction of political affairs, that it made sense to say, as Louis is alleged to have done: 'L'état, c'est moi'.

The Valencian jurist Tomás Cerdán de Tallada, devoted the first chapter of his important thesis of 1604 to the question: 'What kind of thing is a state?'. He renounced the attempt to define a 'commonwealth', but assumed that these organic entities had grown up over the years, incorporating (as in the case of the kingdom of Valencia, for example) several different climatic zones and two or three linguistic groupings (Arabic, Catalan, Aragonese). As

---

10. BARTLETT, Robert. *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, London: Penguin Books, 1994; pp. 202-3 and pp. 238-9. Cf. ELLIOTT, J. H. *Empires of the Atlantic World; Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*, Yale University Press, 2006.

these organic communities came to be grouped together under a dynastic ruler, 'they began to form a state'. A good example of this process was to be found in the Spanish monarchy itself, which

by means of marriages and inheritance and legal anomalies, and through acquired rights, wars and conquests, which the Holy See allowed the kings of Spain to undertake for good causes...has incorporated in the person of our lord and king such a variety of kingdoms, provinces, lordships and urban commonwealths<sup>11</sup>.

The power of the king was to be like that of a husband over his wife. 'Between the king and the commonwealth', Cerdán tells us, 'a moral and political marriage is arranged, and this is why the king is obliged to keep the laws which in the Cortes (parliament), by common consent of the ruler and his people, he has conceded to his vassals'. One hears the voice of a Valencian nobleman behind the rhetoric, anxious to safeguard the customs of his native land. But Cerdán was also a graduate in Roman law and a magistrate serving the crown in the royal supreme court (*Audiencia*) of Valencia, and he agreed that the ruler must have absolute power (*poder absoluto*) of setting aside the letter of the law in emergencies. Also, there needed to be some coordination of policy among the various kingdoms, so the monarch must assemble a Council of State in Madrid, representative of the various regions, so that he knew about local conditions, and so that people could see his desire to take them all into his confidence<sup>12</sup>.

The monarchy must, therefore, aim for a certain rationalisation and centralisation of authority. But just as Pilate sent Christ back to be judged by the Jewish authorities, so the last word should be left to local representatives. 'Outsiders don't know the customs and quality of the land and its inhabitants...and they cannot know much about its inner workings'. And he went on: 'If they do not have a good grasp of the nuances of a language (*idioma de la lengua*), and the exact meaning of words and how people use them in speaking, how can they resolve what needs doing?'. Outside magistrates are liable to turn into tyrants, since they lack reverence (*pietas*) for the old ways. And, in an interesting aside, he doubted whether native sons would be any more corrupt, favouring their friends, than outsiders, who would acquire their own clique of sycophants all too quickly<sup>13</sup>.

The counsels of Cerdán de Tallada echo those of another great Valencian thinker, Fadrique Furió Ceriol. Furió left home when he was about twenty years old, in 1549. With less of a grasp on the Spanish situation than Cerdán, he was by contrast more cosmopolitan, more European, given his long experience of the religious and political conflicts in the Netherlands. For him the Spanish Monarchy was a European institution, and its ministers must be 'not only Castilians or Aragonese, but also Sicilians, Neapolitans,

---

11. *Veriloquium en reglas de estado*, Valencia, 1604; p. 2.

12. *Ibíd.*; p. 59.

13. *Ibíd.*; pp. 42-44.

Milanese and Burgundians'. Each province was welcome to keep its own laws and government, but there must be coordination in several spheres. First of all, in finance; then in what Furió called '*el mantenimiento*' and which we might translate as 'economic policy' (involving the need to 'conciliate those countries whose trade we cannot do without'). Then came the administration of justice (which would require a hard look at local customs to see if they were more a cause than a remedy of litigation), and the delicate business of knowing whom to promote to office and honour<sup>14</sup>. The list of seven areas of responsibility for the monarch reminds us of the potentially vast power of the 'state', if it chose to exercise it. But the danger here was the resistance liable to be put up by the '*república*' or commonwealth, with its own very clear idea of the limitations on royal power.

Creating a state would not be easy. Furió was aware of the need to respect the differing traditions of the component provinces. Above all, the king must consult representatives from each of the provinces. Otherwise, he tells us,

the people grow resentful at seeing themselves kept out of the centre of government and power, seeing none of their own appointed to the Council; from which they conclude (not without reason) that the Prince holds them to be of little account.

And he emphasised:

we all have a keener insight into the customs, temperament, ambitions, good points and bad, family backgrounds... abuses and advantages of the country where we were born and brought up than of other places<sup>15</sup>.

So, how did the process of defining what was and what was not included in a 'Spanish' monarchy, and what the relationship would be between the component parts of that 'state', actually take place? The philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, in a famous essay of 1921, whose title we might translate as 'Spain without a backbone', made the point that nations do not necessarily become states by some organic evolution over time. Rather, states were the fruit of aggression, of the incorporation by moral and sometimes physical force of small units caught up in a whirlwind of expansion led by their bigger neighbours. At certain stages in history, certain political entities had the capacity for moral and political leadership, which dragged others into their wake in a common programme of expansion. Castile had this capacity in the days of the Empire and of the Counter Reformation; but now in the twentieth century she seemed to have lost that creative, impulsive quality which had stood her in such good stead in the past. Castile made the country known as

---

14. *Concejo y consejeros del Príncipe* (1559), ed. Adolfo de Castro, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol. 136, Madrid, 1855; pp. 321-3; MÉCHOULAN, Henri. *Raison et altérité chez Fadrique Furió Ceriol*, Paris: Mouton, 1973.

15. *Ibid.*; p. 334.

Spain; but by her weakness, culturally, economically, politically, she seemed no longer to have anything to offer to the regions of the Iberian peninsula which were less inclined to accept an artificial Castilian hegemony<sup>16</sup>.

Ortega's idea can be traced in the lengthy prologue to the monumental history of Spain edited by Ramón Menéndez Pidal from 1947 onwards. Here the Spaniards were portrayed as both a nation and a state, but a nation which kept on denying its own existence. He quoted the French seventeenth-century traveller Bartolomé Joly to register the surprising degree of rivalry among the regions: 'their usual entertainment is to find something bad to say about one another'<sup>17</sup>. There was something of this in the letter which Estefania de Requesens wrote to her mother about their beloved child and grandchild, 'Lluiset', the future don Luis de Requesens, entrusted by Philip II in the 1570s with the forlorn assignment of bringing peace to The Netherlands. As a page at court in 1534, he had ample opportunity to experience the searing effects of national prejudice. 'He says...that he wants to be Catalan', reported his mother, married to a great Castilian noble of the Zúñiga family, 'for he defends the country against the other pages of Prince Philip, who speak ill of Catalonia'<sup>18</sup>. When he came to make his will in September 1573, the old loyalties of childhood still shone through, as he provided that a third of the places in his new educational foundation in the University of Alcalá should be reserved for Catalans<sup>19</sup>.

For Menéndez Pidal there was a certain contradiction in the meaning of the word 'Spaniard'. The traveller in Latin America, he tells us, will be surprised to find associations called 'Galician', 'Asturian' or 'Catalan', and will come away with the impression that a Spanish identity hardly exists. But it would be more correct to say that a 'Spanish' culture runs through all of them. True, the *patria chica* has played a great role in Spanish history, but it lacks many of the structural features we might expect of nationhood. In the first place, geographical determinism can be ruled out. As Menéndez Pidal points out, the cultural divisions of the Peninsula do not correspond to barriers erected by the hand of nature: they do not respect the line of the mountains or the rivers. The fragmentation of political authority during the Middle Ages, which created the autonomous kingdoms of Castile, Navarre, Aragon, did not stem from or correspond to cultural influences, since all these realms were –with the exception of Portugal– 'bilingual'. Though each pursued its own strategy of aggrandisement, they all invoked the sacred memory of 'Spain' at one time or another in the wars of reconquest against

---

16. *España Invertebrada*, Madrid, 1921.

17. MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, Ramón. *Los Españoles en la Historia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1971, Madrid: Espasa Calpe; p. 113.

18. SIMON i TARRÉS, Antoni. *Construccions polítiques i identitats nacionals: Catalunya i els orígens de l'estat modern espanyol*, Barcelona: 2005, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2005; p. 243.

19. MATILLA TASCÓN, A. (ed.), *Testamentos de 43 personajes del Madrid de los Austrias*, Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1983; p. 25.

the Moor. This common allegiance was underpinned by cultural borrowings, with themes from the Castilian ballads about the Cid and other heroes taken up and reworked by Catalan-language poets<sup>20</sup>.

For Menéndez Pidal, the various peoples of the Peninsula became 'Spanish' by a certain historical process which drew on elements they held in common. The process was not uniform nor irreversible, but depended on the vagaries of history. Rather than pleading for an innate 'Spanish' identity, Menéndez Pidal regarded this as something which had to be worked out over time. Much like Ortega, he thought Castile was at the heart of the movement. In this he differed from another great historian, his junior in years but in some senses the founder of the modern historiographical tradition in Spain: Jaume Vicens Vives (1910-60). Vicens was a Catalan, living through one of the most fraught periods of Spanish history: the Civil War of 1936-9 and then the subsequent Franco regime, which looked askance at anything which might foster Catalan separatism. In 1954 Vicens published his seminal work on the evolution of Catalonia, setting out his controversial view that Catalonia was a nation defined less by character and temperament than by historical process. It made no sense to read Catalan history backwards – to invest the medieval struggles of towns and nobility against the crown with the romantic air of nineteenth-century individualism and liberal principles.

Need we remind ourselves that the Catalans of the Middle Ages were neither liberals nor democrats...? They were men of their time, who resolved their problems in accord with a strictly medieval outlook based on the idea of privilege and privileged classes<sup>21</sup>.

The famous revolt of 1640, breaking out at the same time as that which was to give Portugal her independence and traditionally seen as a defence of Catalan identity was now reinterpreted by Vicens in accordance with the 'facts' of what actually happened: a peasant uprising against the billeting of troops, which dragged the elite in its wake into a confrontation with the Monarchy. Similarly, the tragic events of 11 September 1714, when Bourbon troops stormed into rebel Barcelona, could be seen less as a manifestation of Castilian or Spanish oppression than as a confused civil war in which the nobility had already abandoned the popular cause. The subsequent rise of a more centralised Spanish government and economy was something of which the Catalan nobility and businessmen took full advantage<sup>22</sup>.

Contrary to the perspective of Ortega y Gasset, Vicens saw the history of Spain not so much as the expansion of Castile and more the adjustment of relationships over time between neighbours. The question was not one of

---

20. *Los Españoles en la historia*; p. 151

21. *Noticia de Catalunya* (1954), new edition, Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1962; p. 108.

22. *Noticia de Catalunya*; p. 203. Cf. ARRIETA, Jon. 'Conversaciones con Ernest Lluch acerca del austracismo', in: Eliseo Serrano (ed.), *Felipe V y su tiempo*, Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2004; pp. 235-256.

nationalism in the abstract, but of the hammering out of political solutions to specific challenges. And the first and greatest of these challenges was the growing power of the modern state – the ‘leviathan’ of which Thomas Hobbes wrote in the seventeenth century, and which Vicens re-baptised as the minotaur (truly a more sinister beast, not always perceptible to those making their way through the labyrinth of day-to-day politics).

The menace took shape in the so-called ‘military revolution’ of the early modern period. The increased costs of warfare required a reformulation of the traditional relationship between the ‘state’ and the ‘commonwealth’. According to the political philosophy of the time the *república* owed the king assistance with his needs, but on a clearly limited and defined contractual basis, hammered out in parliamentary debate. What was becoming evident by the reign of Philip IV (1621-65) was that this formula was no longer working, that (as Olivares, the chief minister, pointed out in his great memorial of 1625) it was easier to negotiate a military alliance with a foreign country than to get troops from one’s own people. The problem was both that there were too many fragmented commonwealths or kingdoms or provinces to deal with within the Spanish monarchy, but also that too many of these were well-protected by their traditional *fueros* and privileges against royal exactions. The so-called ‘Union of Arms’ which Olivares proposed in 1625 was meant to establish once and for all that the subject had a duty to contribute to the defence of the monarchy as a whole. Indeed since 1575 the argument for increasing taxes in Castile had been that the conditions of war had changed, that the ‘kingdom’ owed an obligation to vote the required taxes since these were being employed for the defence of the kingdom’s trade and shipping, not for the benefit of the Prince. There was clearly some justification for this changing emphasis since, effectively, the state was now taking more of a hand in the regulation of the economy in this new ‘age of mercantilism’. As the Count of Gondomar put it in one of his letters from his London embassy to Philip III, warfare was no longer a matter of valour but of money<sup>23</sup>. Anyway, the ‘leviathan’ that was the seventeenth-century state was usurping many responsibilities of local communities, pursuing vagabondage and ‘idleness’ on an increasing scale.

For Olivares military cooperation between the various parts of Spain would require an effort to overcome ‘the dryness and coldness of feeling’ which characterised their relations. This would involve, among other things, encouraging the nobility to seek service and promotion outside their native kingdoms. Instead of being count of Barcelona, king of Valencia, lord of Vizcaya, Philip IV must aim to become nothing less than ‘king of Spain’, father of all his vassals equally. But instead of proving an inducement to accept the Union of Arms, this ‘union of hearts’ was commonly perceived as a threat to do away with local privileges. The fear throughout the Crown of Aragon in 1640, commented the Viceroy of Valencia, don Fernando de Borja, was that ‘Your Majesty will have no other laws but those of Castile’. The Council of Aragon might dismiss these fears, ‘since they are so far from the

---

23. *Cartas del conde de Gondomar*.

truth and with no foundation whatever', but clearly the path to the creation of a Spanish 'nation' was going to be a difficult one<sup>24</sup>.

The problem was in part one of cultural differences, visible in a very different concept of politics and of the rights of the individual. When Philip II sent an army into Aragon in 1591 to seize Antonio Pérez as a criminal of state, he brushed aside the legal trammels on such action. With due caution yet with firmness, the Aragonese chronicler Lupericio Leonardo de Argensola censored the royal action. 'Some nations', he wrote (and his readers could see that he had Castile in mind), 'place such a high price on correction that they give the judge a free hand so that nothing is left unpunished... They put their faith in the executioner's axe, the gallows, shackles, stocks and chains'. But other nations 'hold all these things in horror. They fear the abuse of power, and like Aristotle hold that men without the restraint of law are like wild beasts. So they prefer that many guilty persons go free rather than that an innocent suffer'. And with his native Aragon in mind, he spoke of the tradition of 'tying the hands of the magistrate so that he does no wrong, in the same way as we tie those of the accused for the wrong he did'. The laws of Aragon were designed to 'limit the power of men, to encourage gentleness and reform, and so they are called *fueros*, liberties, observances, practices and customs of the Kingdom of Aragon'. They gave Aragon its political identity and required to be administered by native sons<sup>25</sup>.

Machiavelli had written that it was easier to integrate different provinces within a monarchy when their customs were much the same, and he cited the successful absorption of Brittany and Normandy by the Kings of France. By contrast, one of the most significant barriers to union in the early modern period was differences of cultures, and particularly of religion. The magistrate and writer Mateo López Bravo paid particular attention to this point in his treatise of 1616, expanded later under Olivares. López Bravo was clear enough in his own mind that national identities of this sort were fundamentally artificial creations. Mankind was a natural community, 'divided by laws which stem from ambition and avarice, for really the only difference between one man and another is a matter of individual vice and virtue'<sup>26</sup>. This idea echoed that advanced half a century earlier by Fadrique Furió Ceriol:

There are only two countries in the world: the land of the good and that of the bad. All good people, whether they are Jews, Moors, Gentiles, Christians or of some other sect, come from the same country, the same family and household, and the same applies to bad people<sup>27</sup>.

---

24. Archivo de la Corona de Aragón, Consejo de Aragón, leg. 658, don Fernando de Borja al rey, y consulta, 14 de agosto 1640.

25. *Información de los sucesos del reino de Aragón en los años de 1590 y 1591*, written in 1604, edited by Xavier Gil Pujol, Zaragoza, 1991: pp. 66-71

26. *Del Rey y de la razón de gobernar*, ed. Henri Méchoulan, Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1977; pp. 205-206.

27. *Del Concejo y de los consejeros del Príncipe*; p. 329.

Religious fanaticism, however, was capable of throwing up barriers between peoples. According to López Bravo, 'men who dream up new ways of understanding or worshipping God fill the fickle minds of the people with sedition'. Such rabble-rousers were generally 'men of no account', who preached new ways 'either to put food in their stomachs, or to win a reputation for themselves, or to win the sweets of power'. The long wars in Flanders seemed to illustrate the danger of mixing religion and politics, but also the impossibility of separating the two given the ambition of men. It was in the interest of the monarch, therefore, to maintain ritual and festivals, even if these seemed childish, in order to establish a cultural bridgehead between himself and his subjects.

This raises the important question of the integration of outlying provinces into a multi-national state through the medium of culture. It had been one of the strengths of the Inca empire that the sons of the chiefs of conquered tribes were sent to the imperial capital, Cuzco, in order to learn the language and ways of their new masters. Reflecting in 1570 on the disturbances in The Netherlands, the humanist Benito Arias Montano gave his opinion that

after the matter of religion there is nothing which so joins the mind of men of different nations in friendship and sociability, and so disposes them to a quiet acceptance and imitation of the customs of their rulers than unity and conformity of language<sup>28</sup>.

We can see the process at work in Spain, as Castilian became the standard 'Spanish' tongue, carried by the printing press (though Latin at first was more the beneficiary of this new means of rapid communication), but above all by the triumphs of Castilian-language accounts of the New Worlds beyond Europe, by the magnificent spiritual and imaginative literature of the Golden Age. The diary kept by the Valencian noble Bernardo Catalá de Valeriola (1568-c.1607) gives an interesting insight into the role of the court and of the ambition for imperial office in weaning provincial elites gradually and un-self-consciously away from the use of their native tongue as they mixed more with their fellow-elites from other parts of the monarchy<sup>29</sup>. Conquered territories might find the pace of integration accelerated. The Intendant of Roussillon, taken by the French crown in 1659, reported to Paris in 1672 the advantages of encouraging the use of French rather than the local Catalan tongue<sup>30</sup>. Schools were set up where the children learned to read and write in French, and eventually French became compulsory for the drawing up of notarial documents and parish records. More drastic seems to have been the

---

28. Quoted in SIMON i TARRÉS, Antoni. *Construccions polítiques*; p. 193.

29. *Autobiografía y Justas poéticas*, ed. por Salvador Carreres Zacarés. Valencia: Acció Bi-bliogràfica 1929. Cf. SANCHIS GUARNER, Manuel. *Els Valencians i la llengua autòctona durant els segles XVI, XVII i XVIII*, Valencia: Editorial de la Universidad, 2001, and FUSTER, Joan. *La Decadència al País Valencià*, Barcelona: Curial, 1976.

30. SHALINS, Peter. *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; p. 118.

prohibition on the public use of Catalan or Valencian in the territories of the Crown of Aragon after these were forcibly brought to acknowledge the authority of the Castilian king, Philip V, in the civil war known as the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714).

It would seem that the new age of absolutism had little time for provincial idiosyncrasies. The model of the monarchy of Louis XIV appeared to set the tone for Europe: the magnificence of the court at Versailles, but above all the rational exploitation of the resources of a federal kingdom by a bureaucracy and a massive, well-disciplined army. The question of how 'rational' or 'centralised' this regime –and others like it– really was has exercised the minds of historians since Alexis de Tocqueville in 1856. For de Tocqueville, of course, the regime had become very centralised indeed and the Revolution of 1789 merely completed the process. But the question arises as to the nature of the chain of communication and obedience between centre and periphery as the provinces lost their autonomy. The forging of the absolutist monarchy in France took place in the seventeenth century amid a welter of regional uprisings which have been variously interpreted as class conflicts (protests of the peasantry against high taxes) and 'regionalist' movements which bonded lord and peasant together against interference from Paris<sup>31</sup>. What seems reasonably clear is that ultimately the ancien régime came to depend on a tacit accord between the ruling families at the local level and the apparatus of state to share the fruits of power and honour. The court culture of Versailles broke down the barriers between the crown and the regions – though it aggravated the problem of finding acceptable intermediaries between the two as the great families gradually lost their provincial roots and culture. The call for democracy –in the sense of representative government– in 1789 was in large part a response to this phenomenon<sup>32</sup>.

The situation in France was perhaps extreme. More often the states of Europe still resembled the ramshackle structure inherited from the Middle Ages. In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, despite the religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century, the old provincial divisions persisted as living entities – not quite nations (by a modern definition, at least), not quite states, but a mixture of both. The nearest analogy would be to think of them as the *republics* or commonwealths of old, which had preceded the concept of state power. The noble families kept alive a historical memory, though they might have little real tradition in the area. One thinks of the Czech lords, imposed on the kingdom of Bohemia by the Habsburgs after their victory at the White Mountain in 1620. Despite the fostering of German as a co-

---

31. The old controversy between the Marxist interpretation of PORCHNEV, Boris. *Les soulèvements populaires en France au XVIIe siècle*, Paris: SEVPEN, 1963, and the 'regionalist' emphasis of MOUSNIER, Roland. *Fureurs paysannes: les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle: France, Russie, Chine*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967, is far from settled.

32. For the social foundations of the seventeenth-century state, BEIK, William. *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. I have relied heavily on de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, for my interpretation of the eighteenth-century development.

official language and the influx of adventurers from many parts of Europe to take over land and power from the ancient Czech families who had rebelled against the monarchy, the parliamentary assemblies or estates of the realm quickly re-established the concept of an ancient kingdom of Bohemia, with pride in the old legends, language and traditions. Emperors Ferdinand III and Leopold I were happy to listen to sermons preached to them in Czech and even to make the occasional attempt at saying a few words in that language.

The desire for continuity with the medieval past gave the Kingdom of Bohemia, now purged of its Protestant tendencies, its notably hybrid character of a 'loyal' but 'autonomous' province within the Habsburg Monarchy – a legacy which would be transmitted to later generations as the framework of a fully-fledged 'nation state'. Hungary provided yet another illustration of this familiar theme. Here the ruling elite was more distant from the Habsburg court, both physically and in terms of religion and language. The successive revolts of the Magyars against Vienna during the seventeenth century eventually played themselves out in the Peace of Szatmár (1711), which gave Hungary effective political autonomy. The compromise between Habsburg 'absolutism' and Hungarian liberties worked essentially through those social pressures which were creating an elite of great aristocratic families, like the Esterhazy, whose closeness to the Viennese court, to the Catholic faith and to their own clients and retainers helped soothe the restless spirit of the Magyar gentry<sup>33</sup>.

Here and in other parts of Europe the recent emphasis of the historiography of state formation has been on the gradual emergence of 'absolute monarchy' as a social and cultural compromise between local elites and the crown. If we were to compare the French and Austro-Hungarian experiences, the thing which strikes one is the greater degree of integration of the provinces of France, and this at a socio-economic level. It was not really until the nineteenth century that the Danube became the great highway linking the various parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. Before then it was relatively inaccessible to the landed proprietors, who preferred to live by the labour of their serfs rather than the marketing of their grain or cattle. Hence, the failure of the attempts of Joseph II to abolish serfdom there in the 1780s. The creation of the integrated 'nation state' seemed to depend not only on a flourishing court culture but also on a certain degree of market capitalism.

This impression is driven home by considering the English experience, where one of the strongest states in Europe began to emerge, drawing admittedly on its Norman and Angevin administrative roots, but clearly becoming by the end of the seventeenth century a formidably well-coordinated polity. In formal terms there was great devolution of power, even after the accession of James I in 1603 brought together the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland. And we are reminded of the relative absence of a full-time

---

33. EVANS, R.J.W. *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550-1700*, Oxford: University Press, 1979; pp. 214-5 and 257-61.

bureaucracy, as the gentry took responsibility for most matters of administration and petty justice at the level of the county. The world of these 'Justices of the Peace' was that of their region, and they regarded askance attempts to impose greater uniformity from London in matters of religion or social welfare. The challenge facing England was much the same as that on the continent: the advent of the 'leviathan', the fiscal state, created by the military revolution (though the Scots and the Irish offered only a feeble challenge to ancient ways of fighting wars). The question of taxation was bound up with that of a lack of confidence between the Stuart kings and their parliaments (largely representative of the gentry) over such matters as religion and foreign policy. Disputes over the intervention of the central government in the counties escalated in the familiar way. The Civil War of 1642-9 was a complex movement, envenomed by deep religious convictions (Puritan England, Calvinist Scotland, Catholic Ireland). Despite the support of Charles I for a traditional Christian commonwealth which would limit enclosures of common land and exploitation of the poor, he notably failed to wean the majority of the common people away from support for their parliamentary leaders. Though the war was not a bourgeois revolution, it did mark a critical turning-point in the English concept of the state, the commonwealth and the economy. The decisive, long-term failure of a strong monarchy left all real power in the hands of a gentry, freed from interference by government and free to refuse taxes except on its own terms<sup>34</sup>.

The loose-limbed English state became an inviting partner for others to join. In 1707 the Scottish parliament legislated itself out of existence, placing the country fully under the rule of London. The motive appears to have been a desire to take advantage of the economic protection which this new 'British' state could provide. Though the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland' would have to wait for another century, when in 1800 the Irish parliament also legislated for its own abolition and incorporation into the Westminster parliament, the integration of the British state was already beginning to look like a formidable achievement. The contrast with Spain in that very same year of 1707, which saw the invasion of the kingdoms of Valencia and Aragon by Castilian armies and the abolition of the separate laws and privileges of these territories, highlighted a stark difference between a state like England which drew itself together by 'attraction' and one like Spain which had to act against centrifugal tendencies. But why the contrast?

It would appear that the British state could count on a greater degree of confidence and trust between rulers and ruled, between centre and periphery. The study of one community may help shed light on a wider process. The focus of the study in question is the county of Durham - remote, poor, dominated until the middle of the sixteenth century by the old feudal dynasties like the Percy from castles which faced north to the Scottish frontier. It was typical Catholic country, until the 'Revolt of the North' in 1569 on behalf

---

34. Very stimulating and thought-provoking here is BRADDICK, Michael J. *State Formation in Early Modern England 1550-1700*, Cambridge: University Press, 2000.

of the old faith compelled Elizabeth I to get rid of her over-mighty and rebellious lieutenants, these feudal magnates like the Percy. Emerging from under their shadow there grew up a new 'middle class' of entrepreneurs, capable of exploiting the rich coal deposits of the area, which increasingly were in demand in London. Serving this new-found commercial class and helping to run government locally there developed an educated local elite, a product of the boom in schooling in the region. Comparing Durham at the outbreak of the Civil War with the region as it emerged from the Middle Ages, the author is clear about the multiplication of opportunities for the individual, of avenues of access between the local and the wider world<sup>35</sup>. It was the end, effectively, of the reign of the *caciques*, the local chieftains who had monopolised these avenues of power in the past. It was this gradual coming together of local communities at quite a basic level of work and travel which underlies the strength of the new sense of a British identity noted by other authors around this time. Festivals celebrating the Protestant Isle and its safe delivery from overseas menace in 1588 or 1605, and the flag-waving by 'Britons' in the eighteenth century, all suggest a 'fatherland' very different from medieval times<sup>36</sup>.

It was not a world immediately recognisable to a Spaniard of the time. In his great work on the court city of Madrid (1623), the chronicler Gil González Dávila sketched the features of a cosmopolitan world capital. He commented on 'the variety of nations which flock to this court, which feel at home here and look upon it as a substitute for their own place of origin since they can find here in equal measure health, pleasure, lively spirits, even tempers, honour and opportunity'. The influence of the city reached out to distant shores: Madrid was 'the very fount of a Christian commonwealth, the guide to how people ought to behave, the seat of prudence and wisdom'. The court did not admit 'excess or waste, but rather lived with admirable restraint, using its virtue and modesty to teach the other cities of the empire the means required to make a success of this life'<sup>37</sup>.

No doubt Madrid was beginning to develop into a real capital around this time, and particularly in the years after 1623 as Olivares and Philip IV strained every nerve to promote the arts as a form of political propaganda. Yet the writings of the period would suggest the continued importance of other centres of cultural activity: the monasteries, the vice-regal courts of Valencia or Naples, the aristocratic confraternities like that of Seville which offered spiritual direction to the local elites and served as a focus of artistic patronage. Of course, the populations were caught up from time to time in celebrations of royal births or military triumphs, but the calendar of festival

---

35. JAMES, Mervyn. *Family, Lineage and Civil Society: A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region 1500-1640*, Cambridge: University Press, 1974.

36. CRESSY, David. *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England*, London: Weidenfeld, 1989; COLLEY, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, London: Pimlico Books, 2003.

37. *Teatro de las grandezas de la villa de Madrid*, Madrid, 1623; pp. 3-5.

was fundamentally religious and local. An interesting example is the commemoration in Valencia in 1638 of the reconquest of the city from the Moor, which, in the pages of the local chronicler and secretary of the aristocratic estate Marcos Antoni Ortí, appears to arouse more excitement than the victory achieved that same autumn over the French invaders at Fuenterrabía. Clearly the union of minds and hearts at which Olivares was aiming had still some way to go. The contrast with the England of the time, unified in its celebration of the providential delivery of the 'Protestant Isle' from its enemies, could hardly be more stark. The 'bells and bonfires', of which David Cressy writes, kept seventeenth-century Englishmen aware of their collective identity in a way which it would be difficult to match in Spain. Even the figure of the Cid or of Saint James the 'Moor slayer' were not truly 'national', since they had only an indirect resonance in a Catalonia or Valencia which looked to Saint George. Nor even in Castile can it be said they were really 'popular' figures compared with local saints and heroes.

Undoubtedly there was less integration of the different regions of Spain at the economic level than would be the case, say, with their English equivalents. The words of the Count of Gondomar from his embassy in London, condemning the poor state of the Spanish inns and the general difficulty of travel in the Peninsula are perhaps eloquent enough testimony of a situation which still captured the attention of travellers in the Romantic period. But in addition to all this there was the fundamental culture of a Catholic people who were reluctant to accept the modern concept of an omnipotent and invasive 'state'. Stressing the need for flexibility of government, which must be adjusted to the character and needs of the local community, the statesman and bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza wrote in 1665:

Only God can create kingdoms, each with its own temperament, one different from another; so the laws and forms of government must vary too. In all of Biscay you will hardly find an orange, nor a chestnut in Valencia; yet Valencia has any number of oranges, Biscay all the chestnuts you want. This was God's will, that one country should depend thus on another so that mankind would become more sociable<sup>38</sup>.

If the oranges and chestnuts were an expression of the divine will, the question of peaceful exchange was eventually to prove as elusive as the plans of Olivares for a union of hearts and minds. Was it not ultimately the problem of adjusting regional goals one to another which was to become the critical factor in the on-going development of a Spanish state and beyond that of Spain as a nation?

---

38. Quoted in SIMON i TARRÉS, Antoni. *Construccions polítiques*; p. 291.



Start studying Early Modern Europe: Reformation, Nation-States, Science Rev & Renaissance. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. New ideas were more easily spread throughout northern and western Europe because of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press. Gutenberg's press replaced methods that had been introduced by the Chinese-block printing. Gutenberg's press used metal type, setting into motion the age of modern printing. His press made possible the printing of more books and at a much lower cost. This is significant because it encouraged education and led to the rise of a more informed public. The early modern state was a coercive machinery designed to make war and to extract resources from society. Yet at the end of the eighteenth century, this machinery came to be radically transformed. Or rather, the "state" was combined with a "nation" forming a compound noun "the nation-state" which was organised differently and pursued different goals. Already in 1792, confrontation began between the revolutionary French nation and the kings of the rest of Europe. The wars were to go on for close to 25 years, most ferociously during the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century named after the French general, Napoleon Bonaparte, who made himself emperor of France. Second, "is nation-state a modern or an ancient idea?" Scholars continue to debate a number of possible hypotheses. Most commonly, the idea of a nation-state was and is associated with the rise of the modern system of states, often called the "Westphalian system" in reference to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). The origins and early history of nation-states are disputed. Two major theoretical questions have been debated. First, "Which came first, the nation or the nation-state?" Nation-states typically have a more centralized and uniform public administration than their imperial predecessors because they are smaller and less diverse. After the 19th-century triumph of the nation-state in Europe, regional identity was usually subordinate to national identity. The modern state implies the establishment of an integrated territory of the State with a unified central control. The people are to be loyal to the central authority, a king or parliament. Hierarchical division of authority of the feudal order has to be dispensed with. People are imbued with the spirit of nationalism. The growth of nation-states in modern era is attributable directly to the emergence of commercialism and industrialism in the womb of feudalism. Although the development of the nation-states is attributable to a variety of factors, yet the emergence of Industrial Capitalism is th

The early modern state was a coercive machinery designed to make war and to extract resources from society. Yet at the end of the eighteenth century, this machinery came to be radically transformed. Or rather, the "state" was combined with a "nation" forming a compound noun "the nation-state" which was organised differently and pursued different goals. A nation, in contrast to a state, constitutes a community of people joined by a shared identity and by common social practices. Communities of various kinds have always existed but they now became, for the first time, a political concern. As a new breed of nationalist leaders came to argue, the nation should take over the state and make use of its institutional structures to further the nation's ends. Early modern Europe is the period of European history between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, roughly the late 15th century to the late 18th century. Historians variously mark the beginning of the early modern period with the invention of moveable type printing in the 1450s, the Fall of Constantinople and end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453, the end of the Wars of the Roses in 1487, the beginning of the High Renaissance in Italy in the 1490s, the end of the... Early Modern Europe. This article deals with the history of Europe between c. 1450 CE " the time of the Italian Renaissance " to 1789, the outbreak of the French Revolution. This is traditionally regarded as the early modern phase of European history, and was certainly a critical period for world history. The other state was Russia. Although practicing the Orthodox Christian faith and therefore, in religious matters, within the orbit of Constantinople, the Russians had since the 13th century been politically " and to some extent culturally " a part of the Asiatic empire of the Mongols. The end of the early modern phase of European history is usually regarded as being the outbreak of the French Revolution.