CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL IDENTITIES COMPARED: THE CASES OF LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE

Carlos Escudé*

* Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE). E-mail: carlos.escude@aya.yale.edu


Resumen: Cuando cayó Roma, su imperio se segmentó en muchos sentidos, incluido el lingüístico. En las regiones romanizadas el latín vulgar evolucionó de manera diferente en cada poblado. En las regiones menos romanizadas renacieron las lenguas indígenas. Esto cambió con la introducción de la imprenta de caracteres móviles. Comenzó entonces un proceso inverso de amalgama de dialectos, que hizo posible el surgimiento de proto-nacionalidades lingüísticas. En cambio, cuando cayeron los imperios ibéricos la imprenta ya estaba establecida, de modo que en Iberoamérica no se generó una segmentación lingüística. Esta diferencia engendró una importante distancia cultural entre ambas regiones.

Palabras clave: Identidad nacional, América latina, Europa, Argentina, Inmigración.

Abstract: When Rome fell, its empire was segmented in many ways. In the Romanized regions, Vulgar Latin evolved differently in every town. In less Romanized regions, indigenous tongues were reborn. This process was reverted with the introduction of the printing press, which paved the way to an amalgam of dialects, leading to the emergence of linguistic proto-nationalities. Contrariwise, when the Iberian empires fell, the printing press was already established. Consequently, in Iberian America there was no linguistic segmentation. This fundamental difference engendered a crucial civilizational distance.

Keywords: National identity, Latin America, Europe, Argentina, Immigration.

1. ANALYTIC INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will study the analogies and differences between the processes of national identity formation in Latin America and Europe, delving when necessary into the remote past and always working our way back to the present.

However, because there is an ongoing debate about the notion of “identity” as an analytical tool in the social sciences, we shall begin with an operational definition of the concept. At the individual level, it describes a person’s self-representation as a discrete, separate entity. At the collective level, it refers to the self-inclusion of individuals in a shared, subjectively relevant “we,” capable of mobilizing loyalties and social action. Thus defined, the most important aspect of a collective identity is whom it includes and whom it excludes.

Of special significance among collective identities are those related to “race,” “ethnicity,” social class, religion, gender, and the state and its territory. In this paper we will limit our analysis to the latter, and in particular to the sub-national, “national” and supranational variants of the concept. Furthermore, we understand that:

1) Plural identities are always subjective and are not to be reified in social scientific analysis (even if they are in everyday life and in political practice);
2) All individuals have several layers of plural identities, and
3) Plural identities relevant for social action often lead:
   a) to non-instrumental modes of action,
   b) to a focus on self-understanding rather than self-interest,
   c) to a focus on particularity rather than universality, and
   d) “to designate sameness over persons and sameness over time”.

2. THE CONTRASTING HISTORICAL ROOTS OF EUROPEAN AND IBERIAN AMERICAN IDENTITIES

If we are to place the sense of national identity in the European and Latin American states in a comparative perspective, we must take a moment to look back to the process of state formation in both regions.

Following Anderson, in Europe the nation states we know today grew out of the linguistic proto-nationalities generated by the amalgamation of vernaculars, which was in turn engendered by the introduction of the printing press. The process through which some vernaculars acquired the status of print languages was, in part, haphazard: print capitalism arose in some cities, but not in others. The cities with successful printing firms became the seat of print languages. And print languages acquired the power of amalgamating vernaculars that were akin in their written form, although in their oral form they might not be understandable to each other’s speakers. People who could understand each other through the print, though often not orally, became aware of what they had in common, and of the fact that they were somehow different from other people whose tongue they did not understand.

This was perhaps the remote origin of national consciousness in Europe. As is common knowledge, nothing could be more different from the process through which national consciousness arose in Latin America, and especially in Spanish America, where language is not an element of differentiation between nationalities and states.

However, if we go back further in history we find more similarities between the two regions than are perceived upon first examination. Indeed, if we limit ourselves to what was formerly Romanized Europe, the printing press amalgamated vernaculars that were akin to one another because they had emerged from the independent evolution of the Latin tongue, in the politically, commercially and culturally segmented feudal system that followed the collapse of empire. Thus, throughout Romanized Europe we find a two phase process: 1) with the fall of Rome, a gradual but increasing language fragmentation, and 2) with the advent of the printing press, a reverse process of partial amalgamation through new lines of linguistic kinship.

In other words, originally, in Latin Europe the collapse of empire generated language-segmentation. But in Latin America, the collapse of empire did not produce language-segmentation, for the obvious reason that the printing press had long since been invented and was active throughout the region’s capital cities, producing books, magazines and newspapers that stabilized language.

Moreover, when Rome fell, the linguistic Latinization of vast portions of Europe was far more advanced than was the linguistic Latinization of Iberian America when Napoleon created the preconditions for its independence. But such was the power of the printing press, that in Iberian America, Latinization continued after the fall of empire, quite the contrary of what happened in Europe. And contrariwise to what occurred in Roman provinces that were not fully Romanized, such as Germania and Britannia, in Iberian America the fall of empire did not lead to a return of indigenous tongues.

Indeed, with the notable exception of Bolivia, the states born in the early 19th Century continued with the linguistic and religious tasks that had been begun by their metropolis in the 16th Century. The local elites that struggled for independence were thoroughly Hispanicized and Lusitanized. They resided in cities spanning from Monterey (California) to Buenos Aires, which in Halperin Donghi’s words were like

---

“islands surrounded by an indigenous ocean.”

That heterogeneous ocean was not in any way Latinized, and its diverse peoples would remain the absolute-others to the Latinized urban dwellers until the Conquest was completed. This final stage of the Conquest was not achieved by the original Conquistadors, but by the new independent states.

While the task remained incomplete, the commonality among the Hispanicized urban islands was paramount, to the point that, both culturally and legally, a person from Bogotá was a stranger but not a foreigner in Lima. In Spanish-America, founding fathers were interchangeable:

- Caracas-born Andrés Bello was the originator of the first stable Chilean foreign policy, and today the institute that educates Chile’s diplomats bears the name of the illustrious Venezuelan.

- Manuel Blanco Encalada, the first Chilean executive to bear the title of “President of the Republic of Chile,” was born in Buenos Aires.

- Cornélio Saavedra, the president of the first autonomous government of Buenos Aires (Primera Junta), was born in present-day Bolivia.

- Ignacio Álvarez Thomas, born in Peru, headed the executive power in Buenos Aires as interim supreme director (1815-16), yet died a Peruvian citizen.

- Ignacio Warnes, born in Buenos Aires, founded the short-lived petty republic of Santa Cruz, in present-day Bolivia, while one of his sisters, Manuela, married future Chilean president José Joaquín Prieto, and a second sister married Juan Francisco García de Zuñiga, the wealthiest man in present-day Uruguay.

- During their exiles, Argentine presidents-to-be Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre were public officials in Chile and Bolivia. Indeed, Mitre was the founder of the Bolivian military academy.4

These cases are not very different from those of the Iberians Trajan, Hadrian and Theodosius I as emperors of Rome, or even before them, of the Iberian Seneca, the empire’s virtual dictator during Nero’s childhood. In many senses, the Roman Empire was to Latin Europe what the Iberian empires were to Latin America. The most important difference, which is related to Wallerstein’s concept of world-time, lies in the absence, when Rome fell, of a technological artifice like the printing press, which prevented the segmentation of language. In terms of what its societies share with one another, Latin America appears to be what Latin Europe would have been if the printing press had been available when the Roman Empire fell.

This is of the utmost importance if we are to understand Iberian America. The relative weakness of a national consciousness within its individual societies is causally associated to the relative strength of pan-Latin American commonalities (which are even stronger, of course, if we limit our analysis to Spanish America). Vice-versa, the relative strength of a national consciousness within some European states is causally associated to the relative weakness of the common links uniting European societies. And the origin of this difference lies, partly at least, in European language segmentation vis-à-vis Iberian American linguistic kinship and Spanish American linguistic unity.

Indeed, the comparison between the 505 kilometers that separate two Spanish cities with distinctively different Latin tongues such as Madrid and Barcelona, vis-à-vis the 10.766 kilometers that separate two Castilian-speaking Spanish American cities like Tijuana and Ushuaia, is impressive enough to make the point. A Chilean and a Madrileño understand each other as if they belonged to the same society, but such is not the case of a Madrileño untrained in Catalan vis-à-vis a Catalanian villager who is not bilingual. And the 7827 kilometers that separate worlds as different as Washington DC and Moscow are a significantly shorter distance than the 10.055 kilometers separat-

---


ing Ciudad Juárez, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, from Punta Arenas, the Chilean port in the Strait of Magellan.

Indeed, from this point of view, Latin American integration is far more solid than anything imaginable in the “Old World.” The distance spanning from Tijuana to Ushuaia is slightly greater than that between Lisbon and Shanghai. We would inhabit an entirely different (and infinitely safer) planet if the same language were spoken from Portugal to China.

Spanish America (and to some extent, all of Iberian America) enjoys an unparalleled commonality for such an extended contiguous region. Originally it reached far beyond language, to include religion, social structure, literature, architecture and way of life. In the face of the economic and political centrifugal forces that made it impossible for Spanish America to remain united once the imperial grip was destroyed by Napoleon Bonaparte, this commonality made nation-building more difficult for the incipient states.

Indeed, in Latin America, the “other” was not quite the other, and hence the self was not quite the self. For this reason, taxation and the levy of men lacked the legitimacy they often acquire when a strong sense of identity is at play. Hence, in the absence of language as a source of differentiation, other elements were emphasized by the new states, in order to consolidate a perception of otherness without which, as Barth has noted, there can be no real consciousness of self.\(^5\)

Summarizing, in Spanish America language was not segmented and did not become a source of differentiation because the printing press was already in place when the Spanish Empire collapsed. Indeed, both the interchangeability of Spanish America’s founding fathers (from approximately 1810 to 1860), and the region’s unique linguistic contiguity, bear witness to the significance of Benedict Anderson’s oft-resisted hypothesis about the relevance of print capitalism in the generation of linguistic proto-nationalities and associated phenomena.

3. MYTHS ASSOCIATED TO IBERIAN AMERICAN IDENTITIES

Notwithstanding the commonalities, diverging economic and political interests led to the political fragmentation of this huge territory. Elites felt that “nation-states” had to be built even in the absence of the sharp linguistic and cultural differentiation that made such entities less artificial in the European context. Nation-building required the construction of a new identity specific to each incipient state. It was not aided by preexisting ethnic or cultural differences of significance, such as race, religion or language. It was a top-down process analogous to some phenomena described by Gellner.\(^6\) Local elites, whose political and economic interests made it advisable to break up the huge empire, used the nascent educational systems, the military, and other means, to construct artificial differences between a virtuous “we” and a vicious “other” that usually spoke “our” language but was nonetheless intrinsically alien.

The extent of commonality made it imperative to construct a malevolent “other,” and this was partly achieved through the idea that one’s country had lost territories to ambitious and immoral neighbors whose mission in history seemed to be to deprive one’s country of its rightful inheritance. The resulting myths of territorial losses common to Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay and Venezuela, are extremely interesting.

Argentine, Chilean, Paraguayan and Peruvian school textbooks, for example, attribute to their respective Colonial and post-Colonial jurisdictions vast territories that overlap each other almost completely. Many Peruvian and Paraguayan textbooks attribute all of Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia (both coasts included) to the “original” territory that their respective states “should” have inherited. If we consider that the Chilean textbooks regret the loss of what is now Argentine Patagonia and the Argentine half of Tierra del Fuego, and that the Argentine texts regret the loss of the Chilean half of Tierra del Fuego (and oftentimes, of all Chile south of the Bio-Bio river), we find that there are four countries whose school textbooks regret the “loss” of a part or all of these austral territories.


Contemporary national identities compared

Carlos Escudé

Historia Actual Online, 37 (2), 2015: 101-115

Peruvian territorial “losses”

Paraguayan territorial “losses”

Chilean territorial “losses”

Argentine territorial “losses”

Bolivian territorial “losses”
Indeed, some Paraguayan textbooks speak of the “ten dismemberments” their territory was subject to through its history. They claim that, in Colonial times, Paraguay was bathed by an ocean that was called the Sea of Paraguay at least as often as it was called Atlantic, and that the jurisdiction itself was known in Spain as the “Giant Province of the Indies” (Provincia Gigante de Indias). Similarly, in landlocked Bolivia there are official primary and secondary school textbooks with titles like The Bolivian Sea (El Mar Boliviano).

Turning to the school maps depicting the “Old Presidency of Quito” (Antigua Presidencia de Quito), we find that they convey an image of an Ecuador that in Colonial times reached the Atlantic Ocean. According to their message, Ecuador has been deprived of its rightful inheritance of most of the Amazon. Peru, however, is depicted as their foremost adversary.

Finally, the case of Uruguay is no less illuminating. Generating a “national” identity for a state whose people are so similar to those of the Argentine Pampas, even in the musicality of their language and the frequency of Italian surnames, demanded a special educational effort bent on denigrating the people on the other side of the Río de la Plata. Its textbooks repeatedly teach that the Portuguese invasion of 1816 was the product of the “perfidious” nature of Porteños. Students are taught that Uruguay was meant to be a large state territorially, and that its relatively small size is due to the machinations of its Buenos Aires neighbors. The map below shows what the Uruguayan state “should have been,” were it not for this factor.

What makes the existential angst of the Uruguays so special is that, to this day, the country’s official name is “República Oriental del Uruguay,” which refers to its being on the eastern banks of the Uruguay and Río de la Plata rivers... in other words, of being eastwards of Buenos Aires. Its very name carries the connotation of a much loathed junior siblinghood.

Notwithstanding, what is really remarkable is not each of these individual cases, but rather their sum total. If all of the territories that the Spanish-speaking countries of South America allegedly lost were added up, we would obtain a total of at least twice the size of the entire Continent. This anthropological oddity is the product of a process of construction of differences without which specific “national” identities could not exist, due to the no less remarkable commonalities shared by these countries.

The political consequences of these artificially-generated perceptions project themselves to the present day. Argentina’s 1982 war over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands was essentially a conflict in which an identity-related issue was brought to the forefront of affairs by a military government anxious to recover popular support. Similarly, territorial disputes make the relations between Peru, Bolivia and Chile chronically difficult, having led to the ousting of a recent Bolivian president dedicated to better commercial relations with Chile. Pragmatism is deemed unpatriotic when it implies concessions...
in identity-related issues.⁸

But the phenomenon is not limited to these myths. In some Spanish American societies, the construction of imaginary losses led to the construction of imaginary sovereignties. Latin American magic realism, a literary style, seems to emerge not only from esthetic explorations but also from the deeper roots of local culture. Alejo Carpentier, one of its pioneers, stated eloquently that his “most important problem was destroying the line of demarcation that separates what seems real from what seems fantastic.”⁹ This feat seems to have been accomplished not only by literary genii like Carpentier or Gabriel García Márquez, but also by some foreign ministries.

Front cover of a popular Peruvian tabloid that reflects the present-day impact on politics and public opinion of artificially-constructed “national” differences (El Men, Lima, 4 January 2006)

---


⁹ Interview in Primera Plana magazine, Buenos Aires, 20-26 June 1967 (Year 5, Nº 234), pp. 52-55.
Indeed, until the signature of the Brasilia Agreement between Ecuador and Peru in 1998, Ecuador included the Peruvian city of Iquitos as its own on its maps, by force of law. And Argentina and Chile continue to indoctrinate their school children with images of their countries which include an imaginary austral empire that they will never own. Both states include their Antarctic claims, which overlap with each other’s and with Britain’s, in the maps their children study and in the figures they are made to memorize regarding their respective areas.

To this, Argentina adds the Falkland/Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. Its textbooks and road signs often claim that its southern city of Ushuaia is approximately the middle point between its northernmost extreme bordering Bolivia and its southernmost border in the South Pole. Chile does likewise with its city of Punta Arenas.

In this respect, both countries encourage their populations to inhabit a world of fiction. While international sources attribute to Argentina a surface of 2,792,810 Km², Argentine textbooks, as well as the website of the Presidency of the Argentine Nation, say that it has a surface of 3,761.274 Km². In the words of the presidential website, this territory lies “in the American continent, the Antarctic continent and the austral islands”.

Likewise, while international sources attribute to Chile 755,838 Km², Chilean textbooks say that the country possesses 2,006.096 Km², without consideration of its territorial sea, its Exclusive Economic Zone and the corresponding continental shelf. The textbooks go on to describe Chile as a “tricontinental country,” because it occupies territory in South America, Oceania (Easter Island) and Antarctica. “Chile es un país tricontinental” is a slogan with which its children are indoctrinated. Until at least 2010, this content was also in the presidential website of Chile, but it has recently been removed. Classroom indoctrination, however, has not changed.

This territorial identity is usually but not always reinforced with high military spending. This was the case for Argentina before the demise of its last dictatorship, and continues to be the case for Chile. According to the latter’s Constitution, ten per cent of the earnings of the national copper company CODELCO must be used for the purchase of military equipment. In addition to this, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2006 Chile invested 4.9 billion dollars in its armed forces. Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela spend similarly disproportionate amounts of money on their military establishments, thus taking away scarce resources from socio-economic development.

4. IBERIAN AMERICA AS A ZONE OF PEACE

But these monies are not normally used for war. Indeed, in their entire history, Argentina and Chile have never waged a war against each other, and the sole war between Argentina and

---

Brazil took place in 1825-28. Be it noted that this was long before German and Italian unification, and that from 1870 to the present, two similarly contiguous neighbors such as France and Germany have waged three wars against one another, two of which have been the most destructive in human history. Unlike other regions of the world, in Iberian America military prowess seems more a source of national self-esteem than a means to be used forcibly against other states. It tends to be one of the instruments through which the weak identities of its states are reinforced.

Indeed, as both Centeno and Kacowicz have noted, despite its reputation to the contrary, South America is a zone of peace unparalleled worldwide. No interstate conflagration remotely comparable to the great European wars has ever taken place in the region. This comes out clearly in the statistics generated by Small and Singer. During the approximately two hundred years of Iberian American independence, the European and North American states have had four times as many enlisted men and killed dozens of millions more than the Latin American states. Although in intra-regional terms North America has been more peaceful, it exports violence massively. And domestically, South America has never witnessed conflicts comparable to the Spanish Civil War, the ethnic cleansings of the former Yugoslavia, Pol Pot’s slaughters in Cambodia, or the massacres perpetrated in Rwanda by Hutus and Tutsis, not to mention the Jewish Holocaust led by Hitler in Europe. Without the slightest apologetic intention, it must be noted that the doings of such loathsome dictators as Videla and Pinochet are next to nothing in comparison to the accomplishments of their peers in Europe, Asia and Africa in the 20th Century.

5. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS IMMUNIZATION AGAINST INTRA-EUROPEAN WAR

In Latin America, the absence of massive interstate war has made regional integration less urgent. Contrariwise, in Europe, the depravities of the great wars generated a powerful motivation for integration. It was so powerful that, as government doctrine, it first emerged in the United States in the aftermath of World War II. Indeed, not only the economic integration but also the “political unification of Europe” became an official goal of U.S. policy, publicly endorsed by John Foster Dulles, George Marshall and Dean Acheson. Unification, which was sought by the Americans before it was considered officially by the Europeans, was intended to eliminate the possibility that a third world war be unleashed as a consequence of European rivalries.

Europeans took on the challenge, despite the cultural barriers emerging from their strong sense of national identity. The project was consolidated because of its economic successes, and also because it served other political interests: in some cases, it became a way of bypassing conflicts between subnational and national identities; in others, it enhanced national self-esteem; nesting it in the grander European context.

---

11 Brazilian textbooks add another war, which led to the overthrow of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the dictatorial governor of the province of Buenos Aires, in 1852. The Argentine mini-states of Entre Rios and Corrientes coalesced with Brazil to wage war on the Argentine mini-state of Buenos Aires.

12 See the illustration from the Peruvian tabloid El Men.


Soon enough, the European Communities became the model for Latin American integration projects. During decades, Europe, a region with less commonalities and a very old history of intra-regional hatreds and massive violence, was far more successful in achieving integration than Iberian America, a region that was comparatively much more peaceful, and whose countries shared many more cultural elements with each other than did the European ones.

This does not mean, however, that an European sense of identity superseded the old national identities. As has been shown by numerous empirical studies, the issue of support for the European Union is different from that of European national identity. Although support for the EU is high in most members, only 12.7% of European citizens firmly identified with Europe in 2007. And ever since the 2008 crisis, Euroscepticism has soared. According to a survey conducted by TNS on behalf of the European Commission, positive images of the EU have fallen from 52% in 2007 to 31% in 2012. Conversely, while in 2007 only 14% of the sample reported a negative image of the EU, in 2012 this had risen to 28%. According to the same poll, in 2007 the EU enjoyed more trust than national governments, while in 2012 it enjoyed only slightly more trust.

On the other hand, empirical studies show that the people most likely to consider themselves Europeans are socio-economically more privileged than those who only identify themselves with individual states, probably because they have more opportunities to travel, speak second languages and interact with like-minded people from other European countries. Paradoxically, the “same” happens in the Latin American countries that have historically received an important influx of immigrants from overseas: the more privileged and educated they are, the more likely they are to consider themselves... Europeans!

6. THE FAILURE OF IDENTITY INTEGRATION

If economic integration has meant little in the way of generating a European sense of identity, Latin American integration efforts have advanced even less in the production of an Iberian American identity. There may be a partial exception to this among left-of-center nationalists and populists who harbor an ideologically-based identification with the region. For such people, it may be politically-correct and even imperative to proclaim “we are Latin Americans.” But this does not mean that their loyalties have been transferred from their states to their region.

The relative weakness of an Iberian American sense of identity comes out clearly when we compare the answers of Latin Americans and Spaniards to the question “how akin do you feel to the Latin American region?” According to the 2003 Latinobarometer, 58% of Argentines, 55% of Chileans, 54% of Mexicans and 42% of Brazilians said that they felt “very much” or “somewhat” akin to Latin America. The mean among Latin American states was 52%, with 23% answering that they feel “very much” and 28% that they feel “somewhat” akin to their own region. In order to compare, in 2004, Madrid’s Real Instituto El Cano posed the same question to the Spanish population, finding that 61% of Spaniards say they feel “very much” (29%) and “somewhat” (32%) akin to Latin America.

In other words, the Spaniards feel more affinity with Latin America than do the Latin Americans.


18 Fligstein, op. cit., p. 125.


among themselves. This not only reveals a Spanish-Latin American commonality, but also the limited affinity that the citizens of the Latin American countries feel towards the region as such. In order to gauge the odd comparison, it is interesting to note that, according to the same poll, when Spaniards confronted the question “From your perspective as a European, who do you sympathize with most, the United States or Latin America?”, as many as 83% answered “Latin America.”

In conclusion, it seems clear that, on the one hand, neither of the two regions has advanced much in the generation of a regional identity capable of competing with the national ones. On the other hand, it is also clear that their progress towards regional integration is conditioned by very different path dependences. The Spanish American states were carved out of what was once a pan-Hispanic American proto-nationality. The one Luso American state, Brazil, also sprang from an Iberian empire, having been part of the same dynastic unit as Spanish America during the reigns of Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV of Spain. Indeed, even in the Brazilian case, the commonality of origin is remarkable. These countries shared so many things that, in order for the individual states to be viable, their commonality had to be destroyed. But thanks to the printing press, it could not be fully destroyed. As a consequence, domestically weak states were born which, in comparison to other world regions, seldom went to war with one another. Notwithstanding, the original proto-nationality was lost, and blocs such as MERCOSUR or UNASUR do not seem about to bring it back to life.

7. SOME EUROPEAN CASES

Europe stands in stark contrast. No such commonality existed there. States were domestically strong. They could collect taxes and levy men as would have been unthinkable in Iberian America.22 They were deadly enemies among themselves and, for the most part, their peoples did not perceive a common origin. On the contrary, their trajectories were very complex and distinctly different from each other. Indeed, each was unique to the point that most have a locally-originated language of their own. And oftentimes, language-differentiation led to ethnic obsessions, which sometimes led to holocaustic war, as in 1939-45.

These ethnic obsessions swept the nation-states of Europe during centuries. In Poland, for example, during the 1930s, an ethnic model of nationhood tended to exclude the “significant others” that have also populated Polish territory since times immemorial: Jews, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, etc.23 This model (which combined the Polish tongue with the Latin Mass as a synthesis of nationhood) clashed with the symmetrical but incomparably more aggressive ethnic obsession of Nazi Germany. Together with Soviet Russia, the latter was responsible for the extermination of approximately one third of Poland’s educated elites, half of which were Jews.24

Even in a country such as Italy, which never harbored Germany’s ethnic aggressiveness, ethnicity fragments its perceptions of national identity to this day. Since national unification, the “significant other” par excellence has been “the South,” i.e., a product of its own fragmented self. In this context, the European Union is both a resource for national identity and a centrifugal force that opens new levels of governance accessible to regions, over and beyond the “nation-state.”25

Finally, the case of Spain is intriguing. The “motherland” of the Spanish American republics, Spain was the seat of the first global empire in history as well as one of the first states consolidated in Europe. With the exception of minor modifications (Rousillon, Gibraltar), it acquired its present territorial makeup as early as the 16th Century. Yet despite ancient myths

such as the *Reconquista*, collective identities remained basically at the local level until the realm was shaken by a terrible crisis: Napoleon’s invasion and the subsequent War of Independence against the French.

Although a sense of national identity then emerged, it gradually became associated with the Conservative right. After the death of dictator Francisco Franco, *españolismo* (Spanishness) was vilified and old regional tensions became more acute, especially in the Basque and Catalonia regions.

Spain’s admission to the European Communities in 1985, however, provided a partial and temporary bypass for this problem. Perhaps for this reason, in the Eurobarometer of Autumn 2000 Spain ranked first among EU member states in terms of the percentage of people who said they felt “European.” Until the ongoing Catalanonian sovereignty crisis worsened, the EU was a partial antidote for Spain’s version of the separatist syndrome that has already led to the disappearance of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Belgium is also a case in which the strong tensions generated by linguistic and cultural differences have until now been mitigated by EU membership. If this ceases to be the case, EU membership could smooth the process of state breakup.

In Latin America, without the benefit of an antidote, Bolivia presents intriguing analogies to these four cases. Indeed, the surge of indigenismo, which has pitted the impoverished highlands against the wealthier lowlands, has threatened to break the country into at least two states. The new Constitution, sanctioned in January 2009, attempts to erase half a millennium of Hispanization, recognizing thirty-seven official languages: Spanish plus thirty-six indigenous tongues. It also establishes “judicial pluralism,” putting the common laws of the many indigenous cultures on an equal footing with the positive law of the Bolivian state. Although similar ethnic tensions exist in Ecuador and in the Mexican state of Chiapas, they are incomparably less relevant than what takes place presently in Bolivia. And interestingly, it is analogous to the legal establishment of Sharia law courts in some Western European countries.

Reportedly, the United Kingdom already has 85 such courts, legally accepted by the High Court.

Are we to conclude that Bolivia is the most European of Latin American states? Stranger phenomena have been uncovered by science.

8. REMINISCENCES OF THE FUTURE?

Such comparisons can shed light on present-day identity-related problems that are certain to be aggravated in the near future. For instance, how will European societies react to the continued rise of their Muslim populations, to their cultural pressures, to the ensuing curtailment of Western individual freedoms, and to the increasingly serious challenges these phenomena will pose to traditional European identities? What will be the reaction of the increasingly powerful, anti-immigrant political parties of the Right, to the gradual replacement of Europe by what Gisèle Littman called Eurabia?

If we look at Latin America, we can identify at least one historical process that took place at the beginning of the 20th Century, which is somewhat analogous to what is happening in Europe today. I refer to the xenophobic reaction of Argentine elites to the flood of European immigrants that reached its shores from 1880 to 1914.

Indeed, while all the Spanish American states shared the problem of engendering specific “national” identities after Independence, only a few underwent a second identity crisis due to a sudden change in their ethnic profiles, decades after Independence. The most notable case is Argentina.

The change in its ethnic profile and the subsequent identity crisis took place as a consequence of immigration policies promoted by the state itself, as is the case with the Muslim population explosion in Western Europe today. Argentine authorities encouraged Europeans to migrate to Argentina because they perceived the country to be too sparsely populated for accelerated economic growth. Similarly, after World War II, European authorities opened the doors for Muslims to flow into Western Europe because cheap labor was deemed important for reconstruction. Both in late-19th Century Argentina and in mid-20th Century Western Europe,

---

26 Llobera op. cit., pp. 159-177
political elites encouraged mass immigration, and decades later decried its identity-related consequences.

In Europe the process is still evolving and its denouement cannot be foretold. But although there are differences between the two cases, such as the emergence of an explosive religious cleavage in present-day Europe, what happened in Argentina in the early 20th Century can give us interesting insights about Europe’s future.

In the South American state, the identity crisis resulting from mass immigration led to increasing cultural authoritarianism through the generation of a positivistic educational program established in 1908 and dubbed “patriotic education” by its founder, José María Ramos Mejía. This was an ambitious, avant-garde cultural-engineering project aimed at “Argentinizing” the children of immigrants and, through them, integrating also their foreign parents. “Well taught” children were supposed to become the informal teachers of their own parents and siblings. Although such a policy may not seem easily transferrable to present-day European states, the jingoism and authoritarianism that came together with it may find parallels in the future of Europe.

The sense of invasion in Argentina stemmed from the fact that, by the first decade of the 20th Century, more than 30% of the country’s population and approximately 50% of the population of the city of Buenos Aires was foreign-born. This situation will soon be found in some European countries cities vis-à-vis the Muslim population, be it local- or foreign-born. The Argentine elite’s reaction to this alleged evil that the ruling class had brought onto itself can be illustrated by the 1928 words of Guillermo Correa, an aged member of the Consejo Nacional de Educación, who resentfully asserted that already by 1895, 58% of the urban property in the Federal Capital belonged to foreigners or their children, and that thirty years afterwards that figure had increased to almost 80%.

For people like Correa this was dangerous. The fact that this wealth had been legitimately earned by immigrants who had cooperated with the generation of much more wealth than they had earned for themselves, and that the structure of rural property presented a very different profile that was clearly favorable to the traditional elites, is irrelevant insofar as what concerns us here is the perception of an invasion and a threat, which is very much what is happening in Western Europe today.

This was the cause and motivation of the policy of patriotic education in early 20th Century Argentina. Although it was to an extent analogous to the contemporary thrust to “Americanize” immigrants generated in the United States, the Argentine case was more extreme due to a greater centralization of the educational machine and to the prevalence of a collectivist ideology which had very little respect for pluralism. It was closer to the European fascisms of the 1930s and 1940s, which in the 21st Century is not so dissimilar to the ideology of the French National Front and other right-wing parties elsewhere.

Indeed, in the early 20th Century, Argentina looked at Central Europe when facing its immigration-generated identity crisis. Argentine officials were sometimes inspired by the German “blood and soil” nationalism of the day. Blood and soil philosophy was attractive for Argentine authorities because it contributed to consolidate identity, albeit in an authoritarian and militaristic way.

Indeed, the general inspector of the Consejo Nacional de Educación, for example, was eloquent when he wrote in 1910:

"Germany has taken a great advantage from the teaching of history from a national and patriotic perspective, because it understood that the primary reason for the teaching of history is to give life to national feeling and


to the love of the Fatherland, with the objective of achieving national unity through the cultivation of patriotism (...). The German state takes hold of the child as soon as he begins to talk and never lets go of him; it orders him to educate himself in the most noteworthy events of German history, on the sacrifices imposed by the Fatherland, the respect due to law and the obligation to defend it with his blood and with his life.\(^\text{29}\)

In a similar vein, Enrique de Vedia, an influential member of the Consejo and Rector of the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, exhorted:

"Let us make (...) out of every school-age child a frenetic idolater of the Argentine Republic, teaching them --for it is true-- that no country on Earth has a history with a nobler crest, nor more altruistic aims, nor more liberal institutions, nor healthier cults, nor a more generous role, nor a more splendid future. In this endeavor let us incur in every excess, without fears or pusillanimity.\(^\text{30}\)

On the other hand, the presence of massive foreign immigration was constantly invoked in the ideological justifications of patriotic education. The existence of a “collective ideal” that had to be nurtured was a part of the conceptual arsenal of this discourse. Decades went by, but the essence of patriotic education did not change until the 1980s, when defeat in the Falkland/Malvinas War generated a greater sense of reality. During World War II, for example, José C. Astolfi, an educator of great influence in whole generations of Argentine students through his massively-read history textbooks, wrote in an article published by the Consejo’s official journal:

"Mysticism, from the greek mystis, is the acknowledgement of human limitations for the understanding of the Mystery (...). The mystique of teaching goes together with the mystique of nationalism, a feeling that is neither new nor exotic among us (...). This mystique of nationalism must be lit in the schools. We are an immigration country (...). Despite the admirable force of assimilation of our milieu, some foreign groups are unwilling to dissolve themselves into a common mass. Such an opposition engenders an undeniable danger [my emphasis].\(^\text{31}\)

Just as Argentine authorities sought inspiration in Germany’s illiberal policies when facing their immigration-related identity crisis, Europe’s future reaction to its present immigration-related identity crisis may echo Argentina’s early 20\(^{th}\) Century policies. The difference, of course, lies in the fact that Europe’s future motto is likely to be “religion, blood and soil,” while in the early 20\(^{th}\) Century, Argentina’s educational policy was positivistic and somewhat anti-religious.

But going Christian is not necessarily in Europe’s future, and here again we find possible parallels with Argentina. For the Argentine positivist ideologues of the early 20\(^{th}\) Century, patriotism was supposed to become a sort of religion of state, replacing traditional religion at least in the classroom. In this they were inspired by late 18\(^{th}\) Century French Jacobines, and this example from the Latin American past is also a possible denouement for Europe’s present-day identity crisis.

Indeed, in those bygone days Argentine authorities understood that the Fatherland should be given the place normally given to God. A quaint example is the “May Prayer,” published by the general inspector of the Consejo, who explicitly compared it with the Christian “Our Father” and ordered that it be memorized by school children:

"San Martín, Moreno, Belgrano, Rivadavia, illustrious fathers of the Argentine Republic who dwelleth in the glorious regions of historical immortality, founders of the Liberty and Independence of the Fatherland, glorified be thy memory for the present and future generations!\(^\text{32}\)"

\(^{29}\) Monitor de la educación común, 31 March 1910. The Monitor was the official journal of the Consejo Nacional de Educación. See also Escudé 1990, op. cit., p. 34.


\(^{31}\) Monitor, June 1940, and Escudé 1990, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

\(^{32}\) Monitor, 30 June 1910, and Escudé 1990, op. cit., p. 36.
CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, nothing can be so different from the way Latin American and European “national” identities are structured, yet there are remarkable historical analogies in their parallel, path-dependent geneses. Both are related to the fall of empires: the Roman Empire in the European case; the Iberian empires in the Latin American case. And both have been strongly influenced by a technological development that revolutionized the world: the printing-press.

The printing press did not exist when Rome fell, and this led to the segmentation of vernaculars. When the printing press came into existence, vernaculars were amalgamated in a somewhat haphazard way. The dialects of cities that had a printing press became literary tongues, and linguistic proto-nationalities emerged which had little in common with previous groupings of peoples.

But in Iberian America the fall of empire took place once the printing press was solidly established. After independence, the Iberian languages were not segmented but continued to expand their dominance, giving rise to what is by far the planet’s largest contiguous linguistic area. There was political segmentation, however, and the incipient states had to destroy part of their commonalities in order to engender specific identities that would make taxation and war against a neighbor more legitimate.

Thus, the very meaning of “national identity” in Latin America and in Europe is different. Because overarching commonalities remain in place, national identities are weak in Latin America, especially in Spanish America. Contrariwise, they are strong in Europe, where such commonalities are lacking due mainly to linguistic segmentation.

Notwithstanding, analogies are present to this day. Once Spanish American states overcame their post-Independence identity crisis, a second identity crisis befall the states that received massive European immigration. The most significant of such cases is Argentina, whose early 20th Century xenophobic reaction to European immigration parallels 21st Century European right-wing reactions to the increasing presence of Muslim populations in their territories.

Thus, these apparently opposing processes of identity formation continue to mirror each other in paradoxical and unexpected ways. Indeed, the examination of Argentina’s early 20th Century could provide insights regarding the future of Europe.