Unsatisfied Nationalism: The Rise and Decline of the Breton Movement

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> *[T]he region is like a cold coal which remains dark and obscure in a blazing hearth.*
> – Honoré de Balzac[1]

> *Pep bro, pep giz (To each region its ways)*
> – Expression used by Breton speakers in La Feuillée[2]

The rise and decline of nationalist movements in Brittany, France, provide an interesting case study which elucidates and expands theories of nationalism and ethnic identity. Throughout its history, Brittany has revealed a persistent trend towards regional independence. Despite this, Breton nationalism remains an "unsatisfied nationalism".[3] Like other ethnic minorities in Western Europe, the Bretons are a nation without a state.

Brittany is situated in the far western corner of the French hexagon (see Appendix I), a geographical position which has traditionally isolated the Breton people from the rest of France. This contributed to the preservation of the Breton language[4], the strong adherence to the Catholic Church, and the distinctive customs in the region. Analysis of the genesis and development of Breton nationalism is therefore aided by acknowledging Brittany's status as a peripheral region largely separate from the rest of France in both geography and culture.[5]

The Breton movement first crystallised in the nineteenth century at a time when the region faced poverty and economic decline. Coinciding with the strict

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1 Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chouans* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1961), 39.

2 Ellen Badone, "Ethnicity, Folklore, and Local Identity in Rural Brittany", *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.100, No. 396 (April-June 1987), 161.

3 Hugh Seton-Watson, "Unsatisfied Nationalisms", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1971), 3.

4 The basic Breton language is part of the Cymric division of Celtic and is closely related to Welsh. There is no longer a standard Breton language, but instead four major dialects and numerous other variations. See for example, Jeffrey Ian Press, "The Situation of the Breton Language in Brittany", *Multilingua*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1992), 409.

5 David H. Fortier, "Brittany: 'Breiz Atao'", in Charles R. Foster (ed.), *Nations Without a State: Ethnic Minorities in Western Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 137.

measures of the Third Republic, particularly regarding the Breton language, nationalist sentiment soon emerged. The interruption of the two World Wars muted nationalist action which did not reappear in a significant form until the 1950s. Despite its widespread appeal, the nationalist movement never gained mass support and as concessions to the regions increased, Breton nationalism as a political movement declined.

Study of the rise of nationalism in Brittany has generated considerable debate. David Fortier sees the Breton problem in terms of economic neglect of the periphery by the centre but fails to recognise the importance of the suppression of the Breton language or the early efforts of the clergy in mobilising the movement. Here Caroline Ford argues that the populist clergy played a crucial role in mobilising Breton identity and mediating between centre and periphery.[6] By contrast, Breton writer Yannick Guin reduces Breton nationalism to class struggle at a national and international level.[7]

Perhaps most applicable to the Breton case however is Michael Hechter's thesis of internal colonialism.[8] In seeking to explain the social origins of ethnic solidarity, Hechter examines two models: the diffusion model and internal colonialism.[9] According to the first, national development is an evolutionary process whereby core and peripheral regions[10] become culturally homogenous as the economic, cultural and political foundations for separate ethnic identification disappear. In internal colonialism, the core dominates the periphery politically and exploits it materially. Within this paradigm, a cultural division of labour develops. As stratification is based on observable cultural differences, Hechter writes that the disadvantaged group will usually reassert its own culture. This may help it conceive

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6 Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Ford's impressive study finds that Breton's path to modernity was shaped by an active clergy who served as cultural mediators. There is a trend for historians to examine the Third Republic in terms of the essential dialectic which opposed Left and Right, anticlerical and clerical, republican and monarchist or conservative. Ford's study breaks from this and denotes a "third way" which ultimately played an important role in maintaining Breton identity.

7 Yannick Guin, *Histoire de la Bretagne de 1789 à Nos Jours* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1977), 9-10.

8 Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536- 1966* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

9 Despite the popularity of this concept in the 1970s, it was not, as Hechter points out, a new one. V.I. Lenin was thought to be the first to use this idea in an investigation of national development and Antonio Gramsci discussed the Italian *Mezzogiorno* in similar terms a few years after. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 8-9.

10 In defining core and periphery Hechter writes: "Most modern states were initially composed of two or more distinct cultural groups. In the course of their development, effective bureaucratic administrations arose in certain regions of the territories later to become the modern States of Western Europe. It was in these core regions that strong central governments were first established. Each of these small areas had, to varying degrees, distinct cultural practices from those of outlying, peripheral, regions. These included differences in language, kinship structures, inheritance systems, modes of agricultural production, patterns of settlement, legal systems…religious beliefs, and, most generally, styles of life." Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 5.

of itself as a separate "nation" and cause some to seek independence from the exploitation and oppressiveness of the core, forming a nationalist movement.[11] The nature of the French government and its fear of disunity suggest that internal colonialism has particular resonance when examining the rise of Breton nationalism.
In comparison with other nations, France is often seen as less tolerant of regional and ethnic diversity.[12] Exploring this theme, J.E.S. Hayward for example claims that France is a state-nation rather than a nation-state, declaring:

> *France is a unitary state superimposed upon a multinational society, the authority of Paris having been established under the monarchy, expanded by the Napoleonic Empires and reinforced by the Republics over Alsaciens [sic], Basques, Bretons, Catalans, etc. Despite the incomparable assimilative power that France had shown over the centuries, the obsession with national unity betrays an uneasy sense that the peoples which make up France may have been swallowed but are not wholly digested.*[13]

The efforts of France to reassert its "Frenchness", particularly in its peripheral regions through the instruments of education and military service, support this idea. Strong regional identities are often perceived as a threat in the effort to maintain the fabric of La France une et indivisible.[14] This forms a recurring theme throughout the history of the Breton nationalism. Jacobin rule revoked the political rights of regional autonomy and suppressed the Breton language. Such measures increased under the mission civilisatrice of the Third Republic in its efforts to erase regional characteristics and forge a French national identity. By 1901, one writer noted that:

> *Steadily but surely, as French influence advances, peculiar customs are being abandoned. The Republican Government is employing all the means at its disposal to crush out or to undermine the religion of the people, and to secularise the education.*[15]

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[11] *Ibid.*, 10.

[12] Ronan Paddison, *The Fragmented State: The Political Geography of Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 83.

[13] J.E.S. Hayward, *Governing France: The One and Indivisible Republic*, 2nd ed. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 21.

[14] Michel Nicolas, "Le mouvement breton: Problématique et développement", Historiens-Géographes, Vol. 78, No. 318 (1988), 43. See also: Patricia Elton Mayo, *The Roots of Identity: Three National Movements in Contemporary European Politics* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), 9.

[15] S. Baring-Gould, *A Book of Brittany* (London: Methuen and Co., 1901), 82.

Such recurrent efforts to erase regional particularities draw further attention to France's centralising tendencies. Regional languages, seen as "remnants of the barbarism of past ages",[16] often suffered most as a result of this fear of regional identity. The French language operated as one of the principal instruments of centralisation in France.[17] Strict control over the use of regional languages was implemented after 1789, resounding in Jacobin declarations such as: "The unity of the Republic demands the unity of speech…Speech must be one, like the Republic" and, regarding regional language in Brittany, "Reaction…speaks Bas-Breton".[18] Such controls emerged again after 1890. As the idea developed that nationality was dependent on culture rather than consent, the Breton language was banned at various stages in schools and in the Church.[19]

Such centralising and oppressive tendencies served as a major factor in fostering nationalist movements in Brittany. Brittany's early history of independence provided a rich source inspiration for later nationalist movements. For five centuries, Brittany operated as an independent nation. This ended in 1532 when, with the marriage of Anne of Brittany (Duchesse de Bretagne) to the king of France, the Duchy of Brittany was incorporated into France. Even then however, Brittany maintained its own Parliament in Rennes and retained significant autonomy until 1789 and the centralisation that followed.

The Catholic Church played a particularly important role in mobilising national sentiment. This role was forged as far back as the seventeenth century when Père Maunoir of the Jesuit order entreated clergy to learn the local dialect. A strong link was gradually created between Breton and the Catholic faith, demonstrated by the oft-heard declaration, "Ar brezonez hag ar feiz, a zo breur ha c'choar e Breiz", (the Breton language and faith are brother and sister in Brittany).[20] The Church saw the fostering of localism as a means of ensuring its influence among the people against that of the State.[21] As E.J. Hobsbawm noted, "[D]efence of the old language signified defence of an entire society's old ways and traditions against the subversions of modernity".[22] This also supports Hechter's idea that in core-periphery relations certain

[16] Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France 1870-1914* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979), 72.

[17] Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* (London: Methuen, 1982), 48.

[18] Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen*, 72.

[19] D.L.L. Parry, "Nationalism and the State-Nation", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1993), 1009.

[20] Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village*, trans. June Guicharanaud (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 337.

[21] L.A. Timm, "Modernisation and Language Shift: The Case of Brittany", *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (1973), 288.

[22] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 119.

élites may attempt to maximise their power by acting as brokers between the two groups.[23] Yet this role was vital for the mobilisation of Breton nationalism. Caroline Ford argued that an active clergy who appropriated what was "good" from modern civilisation while discarding what was incompatible with the Church shaped the Breton road to modernity.[24] In doing so the clergy both preserved the Breton language and helped carve out a role for Brittany by mediating between the centre and periphery.

Throughout the nineteenth century a small group of patriotic liberals had also struggled to keep alive a consciousness of an indigenous Breton culture and language.[25] The first Breton dictionary was published in 1821, leading to a proliferation of poetry, novels and history written in the Breton language.[26] In the romantic tradition of the early nineteenth century, a collection of folk tales by La Villemarqué, Baraz-Briez (The Bards of Brittany) was published, signifying a unique Breton literary tradition.[27] Breton historians emphasised the centuries of political independence that ended in 1532 and resurrected the memory of national heroes such as Cadoudal.[28] Historic events, translated into myths of protest against the tyranny of the state, helped create an imagined Breton community, keeping alive the Breton nation and mobilising it against the centralist French state.

Ironically, the appeal of this Breton identity seemed directed at the small aristocratic, land-owning class whose conversion to French culture and language was evident by the early nineteenth century. By contrast, the peasants of Brittany, drawing on the raised income that followed from agricultural modernisation, developed a conspicuous Breton culture.[29] In Basse-Bretagne, the western half of the province, costly and intricately designed costumes of a distinct Breton style appeared, most notably the tall coiffes worn by women. Each district elaborated its special costumes, traditional music, and dances. At the turn of the century, when the culture of the peasantry was dying out in other areas of France, it reached new heights in Brittany.[30]

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[23] Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 41.

[24] Caroline Ford, review of *Religion et cultures en Bretagne (1850-1950)* by Michel Lagrée. In *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 1995), 174.

[25] Fortier, "Brittany", 141.

[26] James Minahan, *Nations Without States: A Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 85.

[27] Fortier, "Brittany", 141.

[28] Genera Cadoudal was executed on Napoleon's orders in 1804 and is considered the first martyr to Breton nationalism. Minahan, *Nations Without States*, 85. See also: Henri Waquet and Régis de Saint-Jouan, *Histoire de la Bretagne*, "Que Sais-Je" No. 147 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 112.

[29] Fortier, "Brittany", 141.

[30] *Ibid*.

Breton ethnic identity therefore operated on two levels, both drawn on by nationalists protesting economic injustices and cultural oppression at the turn of the century.

This suggests an instrumentalist view of ethnic nationalism. The intellectual élite, rather than Breton peasants themselves, played the principal role in mobilising national sentiment. Here the ethnic and national unit provided a convenient site for generating mass support in the struggle for wealth. This supports the idea of Anthony D. Smith that, "[G]iven a world of scarce resources but high levels of communication, ethnic symbols and boundaries are able to evoke greater commitment and easier modes of co-ordination of different sectional interests under a single banner."[31] Breton culture thus provided a rallying point for protests about economic inequalities in Brittany.

Brittany's underdeveloped economy has long added to its disconnection from the rest of France. Until the late nineteenth century, when agricultural revolution brought radical changes in technology, the Breton peasant economy existed at a subsistence level supplemented only by the fishing industry. The region was considered a rural backwater, "remote in time and space from the economic changes that had begun fifty years earlier to transform the peasantry in France".[32] The French government did little to address this, again perpetuating Hechter's model of internal colonialism.

Farmers' syndicates, established by local élites in an effort to control the peasants' contact with the state, brought about the agricultural transformation of Brittany in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.[33] The effects of this were largely negative and failed to improve the economy of the region. The Breton peninsula, particularly the isolated western département of Finistère, exhibited high birth rates longer than anywhere else in France.[34] Increased productivity led to a surge in population growth which was out of proportion to available land, eventually creating a rural exodus.

The turn of the century brought massive population movement out of Brittany, bringing more Bretons into contact with modernising influences.[35] The inability of the Breton economy to keep pace with population growth was increasingly evident and was exacerbated by the decline of the fishing industry. By the beginning of World War One, fleets had dwindled, ports were at a standstill and unemployment was

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[31] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 9.

[32] *Ibid*., 137.

[33] Hudson Meadwell, "Forms of Cultural Mobilization in Québec and Brittany, 1870-1914", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (July 1983), 405-406.

[34] Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen*, 178.

[35] Meadwell, "Forms of Cultural Mobilization", 407.

widespread. The gradual decline in the economy, combined with a growing realisation of Brittany's peripheral position with regard to the centre of economic and political control in Paris, created a favourable climate for nationalist groups.
Against a background of increasing socioeconomic dislocation, political disaffection with a centralised bureaucracy in Paris emerged. The crises facing Brittany, peculiar to the region's special problems, were not being addressed by the national government. This lack of action caused several groups to call for regional autonomy. The movement of protest took on a nationalist platform with the formation in 1898 of the Union Régionaliste Bretonne (URB). Formed by local élites, it combined economic demands with national sentiments and heralded the first wave of Breton nationalism.

The ideology of the URB wove together the concept of cultural revival with a program of economic and political reform. It called for the teaching of Breton in the school system, a recognition of former Breton rights by increased regional representation at the parliamentary level, greater effort and expenditure to develop national resources, and the alleviation of the economic crises in ports and farms. Although these demands were ignored, the URB established a precedent for future nationalist associations. From this point on, the goal of establishing greater economic equality was linked with the recreation of a past identity viewed as a golden age of autonomy.[36]

In the period of economic crisis before World War One, the nationalist movement expanded rapidly with a proliferation of associations and publications designed to foster a distinctive "Breton consciousness". In 1905, Abbé Perrot founded a Catholic association called Bleun Brug (Heath Flower), dedicated to the revival of the language and culture. A separatist faction emerged in 1911 with the establishment of Strollad Broadel Breiz. In contrast with the URB's conservative and pacifist program, its basic tenet was the complete severance of ties with France and the creation of a sovereign nation. Speaking of French "oppression" since Brittany's annexation in 1532, it cited the loss of language, customs, and civil and religious traditions that constituted the former national patrimony.[37] While the militancy of this party was eclipsed by the outbreak of war, it established a pattern of political action for the future.

Although Brittany remained loyal to Paris throughout the First World War, regional particularism and the urge for independence remained.[38] A petition presented at the Peace Conference in 1919 used the Wilsonian principle of self-determination to

[36] Fortier, "Brittany", 141-142.

[37] *Ibid*., 142.

[38] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 43.

articulate the demands of Breton separatists.[39] New periodicals dedicated to the revival of the nationalist movement were established, notably the influential Breiz Atao (Brittany Forever). In 1927 the nationalist party Le Parti Autonomiste Breton (PAB) was formed but soon divided over issues of separatism and nationhood versus federalism.[40] In 1931, separatists formed the Parti National Breton (PNB). Neither the PAB nor the PNB gained enough popular support to carry through a successful electoral campaign. From an early stage, the Breton nationalist movement failed to achieve stable political organisation and leadership, a feature which would become characteristic of Breton nationalism.

The need to awaken Brittany and France to the urgency of the Breton problem fuelled political action throughout the 1930s. Gwenn Ha Du ("White and Black" after the Breton flag), a secret association modelled after the Irish Sinn Fein, attempted to achieve this through a series of violent demonstrations against the central government. Its most notable act was on the 400th anniversary of Brittany's union with France in 1932 when a statue in Rennes commemorating the union was bombed. During the following years the association performed numerous acts of terrorism which both awakened France to the Breton cause and reinforced the French government's negative attitude towards Breton nationalism and its demands. The extremist stance of Gwenn Ha Du was criticised by some, leading to the creation in 1936 of the Front Breton which formulated reforms under a regional scheme. Neither approach met with any measure of conciliation from the government, again demonstrating how a lack of solid political organisation weakened the effectiveness of the Breton cause.

After the invasion of France and its fall in 1940, some Breton nationalists looked to Germany for support. Under pressure from the Vichy government, the German administration rejected demands for complete autonomy, although moderate concessions were made in the form of cultural and linguistic rights. These concessions served to antagonise both the Vichy government, which saw these gains as part of a secessionist plot, and the French Resistance, which linked these measures with collaboration. In September1943 the Resistance began a campaign against nationalist Bretons, peaking with the murder of Abbé Perrot.[41]

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[39] The petition called for national sovereignty in the name of Brittany's former independence. It was signed by 800 *notables*, including deputies, senators, general councillors and the five Breton bishops.

Fortier, "Brittany", 143.

[40] The concept of a European federation was gaining adherents among other national minority groups. Some Breton nationalists saw distinct advantages both in the structure of federation and in allying the new party with similar political organisations representing minority groups in other parts of

Europe. See Fortier, "Brittany", 144.

[41] Bernard Frelaut, "Le mouvement nationaliste breton pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale", *Historiens-Géographes*, Vol. 78, No. 318 (1988), 60. While a small group of Bretons did align with Germany, accepting arms and uniforms, Perrot's involvement in this particular camp is questionable.

During and immediately after the Second World War, those involved in pro-Breton activities came under suspicion of collaboration, a view which tainted France's image of Bretons for decades afterwards.[42] This led to the severe suppression of all aspects of nationalism in the post-war period. The concessions granted under the German administration were withdrawn and the Breton language was banned in schools. This renewed oppression served to strengthen rather than weaken the nationalist movement.

Brittany's failure to recover from the post-war economic slump meant that economic demands soon dominated nationalist programs. General economic stagnation in Brittany led to a new rural exodus, but urban areas, under the burden of reconstruction, were also lagging. While other areas of France entered a period of growth and expansion, Brittany continued in a state of decline. The scarcity of jobs and population surplus intensified migration, leaving a declining ratio of young people. The market system had changed little and the government's reluctance to regulate market prices produced violent reaction from Breton commercial farmers.[43] The interests of Paris still dictated the main arterial routes, leaving the interior of the peninsula unconnected with its peripheries and hence further neglected economically.[44]

New nationalist associations soon emerged, expressing first cultural rather than political or economic goals. Notably, fragmented groups began to draw together after 1950 under the unofficial Comité d'Etudes et de Liason des Intérêts Breton (CELIB). This highly entrepreneurial operation aimed to facilitate regional economic development and expansion by merging economic and cultural groups in a united front. A regional pressure group was formed to design and present programs of economic reform to the government. Although CELIB received official recognition in 1961, it was still unable to achieve any of its goals in parliament. As its failure became evident, a proliferation of nationalist associations, both political and cultural, emerged.

Those organisations which favoured political action included Le Mouvement pour l'Organisation de la Bretagne (MOB), Union Démocratique Bretonne (UDB), Front pour la Libération de Bretagne (FLB), Sav Breizh and Strollad Ar Vro (SAV). Each of these political parties had different aims for Breton nationalism meaning that the movement lacked coherence and effectiveness. The MOB, founded in 1957, promoted the evolution of Brittany toward internal federalism within the French state, although it later shifted this line in favour of independence from France and

[42] Kuter, "Labelling People", 21.

[43] Fortier, "Brittany", 147.

[44] Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 162.

incorporation within a European federal state.[45] The UDB, formed in 1963 to represent the more conservative element, called for a special regional assembly. By contrast, the FLB represented the extremist faction, prepared to use violence to reinforce the demands of Breton nationalism.

Embracing the policy of terrorism that characterised the prewar Gwenn Ha Du, the FLB sought to dramatise the issues of regional neglect and inequality through a campaign of violence and harassment rather than what they saw as useless negotiations.[46] Police stations, prefectures and tax offices were bombed as symbols of centralised authority and domination. The arrest of over fifty suspected members in 1969 led to a temporary halt of terrorist activity but bombings began again in 1976, culminating in the bombing of part of the Chateau de Versailles in June 1978.

Drawing heavily on the idea of Brittany as an "internal colony", the ideology of the FLB was particularly compelling. Brittany was depicted as another Algeria and the demand for "decolonisation" of the region was placed within the context of the worldwide movement to free former colonies. The militants of the FLB called for an end to Brittany's status of submission to Paris, demanding full independence.[47] During the 1972 trials of the FLB terrorists and public support for the cause of the FLB was evident, aided by the fact that their demonstrations had caused no loss of life.[48] Despite the formation of new groups such as the Sav Breizh, which grew from the 1968 riots, and the SAV, formed from disparate nationalist groups in 1972, the FLB, with its large youth component, continued to operate as the most powerful arm of the nationalist movement.

Youth involvement in Breton nationalist groups was a strong feature of Breton nationalism, growing in the post-war period, fuelled in 1968 and continuing into the 1970s. David Foutier wrote that during his field work in 1973 and 1975, "it was evident that Breton youth and young adults were becoming a powerful force in the renaissance of Breton consciousness."[49] He continued:

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[45] Fortier, "Brittany", 149.

[46] Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, 43.

[47] *Ibid*., 44.

[48] Kosta Christitch, "Les Autonomistes Bretons Devant la Cour de S! ret! de l'Etat", *Le Monde* (7 octobre 1972), 22.

[49] He continued: "Prominent in the assertion of the new ethnicity was the use of sleeve and sweater patches displaying the Breton flag or symbols of identification with Celtic heritage. Traditional folk-dancing events (*Fest-Noz*) were often held several times a week and were overwhelmingly attended. Breton music, traditional and modernised, along with music of Ireland and Scotland, dominated jukeboxes in a growing number of cafes and bars dedicated to fostering a new Breton consciousness and its links with the broader Celtic world. Breton recordings, virtually unavailable before 1965, were escalating between 1973-75. Breton language classes were offered in evening courses at several lyc! es as well as at the University of Brest. Some classes were held in sections of more than 100 students, primarily young adults." Fortier, "Brittany", 151.

> *[A] new consciousness, even pride, in being Breton seems finally to be taking root in the new generation. Although membership in formal political organisations may be low proportionate to the regional population, the acceptance of the new ethnicity appears to be the clearest expression of the swelling flood of protest against years of recurrent cycles of regional economic crisis and decline.*[50]

Such testimonies raise the face of nationalism as a means of finding and expressing identity rather than a political movement and again highlight the very strong role of culture and language in the expression of Breton nationalist sentiment.

Particularly in the post-war period, the language issue generated heated confrontation between the central authorities and those Bretons calling for regionalism or independence. After centuries of resisting the centralising policies of Paris on the language question, Breton intellectuals demanded more autonomy in order to maintain the Breton language.[51] Breton militants claimed that the French national education system functioned as a tool of cultural genocide by coercing Breton children to give up their regional language and traditions.[52]

Yet years of petitioning and protests had achieved only token concessions. Groups of Breton parents began to create their own institutions, such as the Diwan ("seed") schools. Funded by private donations, these schools gave primary school children the opportunity of learning in the Breton language. As Breton was perceived as less of a threat, further concessions followed. In 1970 Breton was admitted as a subject for the baccalauréat.[53] In 1982 a circular announced that any school which manifested a demand for teaching of the Breton language should be given the facilities, although this was not always followed through in practice.[54] As a result of the efforts of the Breton movement, the Breton language now has a place in education.

The resurgence of the Breton movement at a time when Breton culture was declining and when differences between Bretons and the rest of France were smaller than ever provides an interesting study in nationalism. Hélias writes that it is not

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[50] *Ibid.*, 151-152.

[51] Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, 43.

[52] Ellen Badone, "The Construction of National Identity in Brittany and Québec", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1992), 807.

[53] Michael Keating, "The Rise and Decline of Micronationalism in Mainland France", *Political Studies*, Vol. 33 (1985), 9.

[54] Gerard van Rijn and Cees Sieben, "The Effects of Regionalist Ideas on Public Policy. Some Developments in Language Policy in Wales, Brittany, and Friesland", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Vol. 64 (1987), 55.

surprising at all and that upheaval occurred precisely because the Breton culture was in decline.[55] Some see the facilitating circumstances for its rise in the weakening of class alignments in politics which left a political space to be filled.[56] A growing awareness of Brittany as an "internal colony" allowed Breton nationalism to enter this space. The most likely explanation however, and one that is often overlooked, is that the surge of ethnic nationalism reflected a natural, and according to Hechter's model, predictable stage in a process that has been under way for the past century.[57] As demonstrated above, the ethnic nationalism that emerged in the post-war period was by no means new. Its prominence at this time is largely due to the strong youth adherence and the militant action taken by terrorists to promote the Breton cause.

The decline of the Breton movement since the 1970s however is not surprising. The gradual evolution of French ways and customs in the peripheral regions, again fitting Hechter's diffusion model, predictably dissipated the need for a separated, visible identity. As political and economic inequalities diminished, so too did the desire to claim separate nationhood. The decentralisation of the French government, beginning in 1981, returned some powers to local authorities.[58] Similarly, concessions regarding the Breton language decreased the threat to Breton culture.[59] Although dissatisfaction about the economic and political relations between core and periphery is still apparent, these concerns are vocalised by interest groups rather than nationalist movements.[60]

A second reason for the decline of Breton nationalism is provided by the schismatic nature of the movement's political organisation and its failure to achieve widespread support. A lack of leadership and disagreement over aspirations meant that organisations suffered from factionalism. While many Breton people were sympathetic to the "Breton cause", the mass support needed for effective political action was absent. Despite this, cultural organisations flourished, suggesting that discovering and maintaining an ethnic identity held more importance than using that identity to achieve political aims.

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55 Hélias, *Horse of Pride*, 329.

56 Suzanne Berger, "Bretons, Basques, Scots, and Other European Nations", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Summer 1972), 173-174.

57 Walker Connor, "Ethnonationalism in the First World: The Present in Historical Perspective", in Milton J. Esman (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World* (London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 25.

58 Minahan, *Nations Without States*, 86.

59 Kuter, "Labelling People", 23.

60 The 1994 protests by fishermen against economic injustices provides the most salient example of this. 5000 fishermen marched through Rennes in Brittany. In the ensuing riots a flare was shot into the historic Breton parliament building, destroying an important symbol of Breton pride. Eventually the government was forced by immense public pressure to meet their demands. See David Brooks, "France Without Tears", *National Review*, Vol. 46, No. 5 (March 21 1994), 27.

Another reason for the decline of Breton nationalism is evident in the instrumentalist nature of the nationalist movement, a feature that reoccurs throughout the history of Breton nationalism. Time and again, a single "Breton identity" was constructed, a feature that while typical of ethnic nationalist movements, also explains the lack of mass support. Anthropologist Maryon McDonald makes the crucial distinction between the "real peasants" and the "would-be peasants".[61] Within a left-wing rhetoric that demanded a "right to difference", the latter claimed to represent "the people" of Brittany.[62] Yet as Ellen Badone has shown, there are diverse Breton identities at a local level in Brittany. At many times, élite construction of Breton identity focused on external boundaries while ignoring the local boundaries.[63] Rural people meanwhile found themselves objectified and valorised for the very features of their existence which they sought to abandon.[64] From these points of view, it is not surprising that nationalist political organisations failed to achieve mass support.
Finally, the effect of European integration is instrumental in explaining both the decline and maintenance of Breton nationalism. As Europe struggles to balance elements of federalism and nationalism, Dominique Moisi suggests that a new multi-layered construct will emerge which will have a major impact on Europeans:

> *Like the union they live in, they, too, will possess local, national, and continental identities. In the Europe of tomorrow, one will be simultaneously Scottish, British, and European; Breton, French and European; or Catalan, Spanish, and European.*[65]

The nation becomes less a culturally homogeneous unit shaped by state ideology and more a framework for political action based on a multiplicity of identities.[66] The fact that the European Union (EU) has failed to displace inherited national allegiances is of significance.[67] The EU instead offers a supranational domain for bypassing national-level structures to create ties with other European regional minority groups.

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[61] Badone, "The Construction of National Identity", 807. "Would-be peasants" were not native Breton speakers, nor were they from rural areas.

[62] Maryon McDonald, "The Construction of Difference: An Anthropological Approach to Stereotypes", in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *Inside European Identities: Ethnography in Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 233.

[63] Badone, "Ethnicity, Folklore, and Local Identity in Rural Brittany", 161-190.

[64] Badone, "The Construction of National Identity", 807.

[65] Dominique Moisi, "Dreaming of Europe", *Foreign Policy*, No. 115 (Summer 1999), 48.

[66] Brian Jenkins and Nigel Copsey, "Nation, Nationalism and National Identity in France, in Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (eds), *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 112.

[67] David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 162.

Less threatened economically and culturally, it seems that while Breton nationalism will always exist, and may even increase in the more congenial arena of the European Union, the resurgence of a militant Breton nationalist movement with a wide base of support is unlikely.

In the face of economic and cultural threats over past centuries, groups of Bretons organised national movements in order to reaffirm and reassert the Breton identity and achieve greater equality in the state's treatment from a centralised government. To combat a form of "internal colonialism", numerous groups sought various forms of autonomy in order to protect their national culture and economy. However a lack of both stable political organisation and leadership meant that these groups never achieved the mass support needed to attain that autonomy. Furthermore, the Breton identity that many groups claimed to represent was a largely constructed and hence slightly false version of Breton culture. With measures of decentralisation and the promise of an increased voice in the European Union, the need to maintain a Breton nationalist movement has declined with focus shifting to voicing particular concerns rather than achieving an entirely separate political identity for the region and its people as a whole. Breton nationalism remains unsatisfied in that political goals set out by various groups were never achieved, but the reasons for its rise and decline and other goals achieved in maintaining a Breton ethnic identity offer new insight into nationalisms worldwide.

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