Imagined communities against the tide?
The questioned political projection of nationalism[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the validity of Anderson's definition of imagined communities and the future of imagination typical of nationalism. It is based on bibliographic review and research on the case of Cerdanya. Three questions of Anderson's definition are revised: the limitation of the nation, its supposedly inherent sovereignty and the sense of community among unknown people. In this last point, the text focuses also on the consequences that imagined community is embodied for known people every day. It concludes that the production of local identities and dynamics in global, local and regional level represents a challenge for the political projection of imagined communities. Nevertheless, that production is not absolutely questioned. Denationalisation dynamics are produced in sovereignty and delimitation becomes more porous but it carries on the cultural production of community limits by education, army and communications. In addition, some global alternatives to national communities arise, but the nationalist grammar remains intact as a base of community categories and identifications.

Keywords: *Nation-state, culture, power, territory, globalisation, ethnicity*

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This is a curious force in history: at the same time it is an illusion, a powerful affirmation of authority, a cultural artifact, a present absence and an absent presence, a principle of unity that masks institutional disjointedness. At bottom, the State has always been rooted in work-in-progress. There is no time or place in which the State has been fully realised (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000: 323)

I lived in Puigcerdà, the capital of the Catalan and Franco-Spanish county of La Cerdanya, in the Pyrenees. I undertook an ethnographic study back then and

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during later visits. The purpose of the study was to see the impact on the county's residents of the Franco-Spanish border that runs through the valley[2] and the superimposition of the collective categories and identities they were invited to share. The magnificent study carried out by Peter Sahlins (1993) helped guide me. The by-line for my study was "The Construction of France and Spain in La Cerdanya", foreshadowing my thesis that the international border and its marches played a key role in the construction of the Nation-State. My study (Moncusí, 2005) revealed the continuity of a process that was deeply marked by wars in the first half of the Twentieth Century and the political, social and economic changes that came in their wake. Somewhat paradoxically, the implementation of the Schengen Accords heightened La Cerdanya residents' awareness of the border. Yet this was a paradox in appearance only for the process of building the EU had not involved any substantial transfer of sovereignty by Member States. This point had already been clearly demonstrated by various authors — Mann (1993), Connor (1994), Llobera (2003), who revealed the fears and suspicions of Member States. Furthermore, the process was felt in different ways on each side of the Franco-Spanish border as a result of historical vicissitudes, differences in political organisation, regional loyalties, and the civic and cultural links between population and State. One of the key comparative elements was the consolidation of a virtual Catalan State on the southern side of the border. Even so, the inhabitants of La Cerdanya showed considerable skill in exploiting the various cultural codes to turn the territorial division to their advantage.

I returned to La Cerdanya in December 2015. The first trans-national hospital in Europe had been set up near Puigcerdà's town pond and just a stone's throw from the Franco-Spanish border. The flags of Catalonia, the EU, France and Spain fly from the building. The hospital is jointly managed by the Catalan Government (60%) and the French State (40%). It opened its doors

in September 2014. My earlier work had revealed two difficulties that might arise in the project: the prejudices of French users and administrative problems.

During the defence of my doctoral thesis, one of the jury members — Dr. Joaquim Pais de Brito — asked me about death and its ritualisation in the county. I had not attended any burials and as a result my ethnographic studies had not shed any light on death rites in La Cerdanya. I recalled the question because another issue arose in connection with the dead during my last visit. What happens when a French or Spanish citizen dies on the other side of the border? Does having the border nearby help when repatriating the corpse or does it instead highlight the contradictions of living in a border area? Someone who worked at the hospital told me that the latter was the case. The hospital was built in Spanish territory, close to the border with France. Yet for a Frenchman who dies in the new hospital, the hundred yards or so that separate Puigcerdà and Bourg-Madame [La Guingueta] on each side of the border might just as well be the four thousand leagues that lie between Paris and Dunedin (New Zealand). That is because repatriation of a corpse is a bureaucratic nightmare.

This instance reveals that the Nation-State is still alive and kicking in a world that facilitates movement and has the potential for scrapping borders (Castells, 2000; Appadurai, 2001; Abèlés, 2008). The hospital puts La Cerdanya at the cutting edge of EU political construction, posing administrative challenges to the two Member States in making the EU relevant to their citizens' daily lives. When the hospital opened its doors, the Press echoed concerns about the need for specific procedures for repatriating corpses, police measures for interrogating suspects admitted to hospital, the registration of births and the administration of medicines (*El Periódico* newspaper, 5/09/2014; *La Vanguardia* newspaper, 19/09/2014). The hospital managers were called upon to adopt a practical approach to overcoming bureaucratic hurdles. Here, one should note that the inhabitants of La Cerdanya have a long history of grappling with Spain and France to allow cross-border movement and use of resources.

2   Translator's Note: Prior to the Treaty of The Pyrenees (1659), Catalonia included Rosselló (Roussillion). The treaty sundered Catalonia along a new Franco-Spanish border running through The Pyrenees — a cause of bitter resentment to this day.

'Spain', 'France' and 'Catalonia' configure what Benedict Anderson termed "imagined communities", which the author defined as "inherently limited and sovereign" (2005: 24). Anderson considered that the members of an 'imagined community' feel the bonds of kinship even though they do not know one another. That said, under certain circumstances collective imagination may have shortcomings as a basis for a given notion of 'community'. The modern formula of Nation-State was built on this collective imagination that had cultural roots (often a common language) and political, social and economic articulation of the territory. That said, the institutional structure of the Nation-State is both unfinished and questioned. The construction of collective identities requires an effort in terms of cultural and social representation that has often flown in the face of cold reality (Pujadas, 1993; Hall, 2003). This conflict is particularly sharp in the case of national identities, given their abstract nature and how they link with the State's political engineering. 'Imagined communities' find themselves under stress in places such as La Cerdanya, where it seems the process of building a nationalist imagination goes against the tide. The purpose of this paper is to Anderson's premises to explore ways in which the collective imagination may turned into a dream that is rendered either more or less realisable. First, we tackle the limits to a nation's sovereignty and then discuss the bonds between strangers and the consequences of a community in which people still know one another. This leads to acknowledgment that Anderson's ideas apply to the production of local identities and fascinating conflicting global, regional and local dynamics.

THE LIMITATIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY — CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

One can say that any community is imagined but in the case of a nation, such imagination is particularly plausible as an umbrella formula for the modern State. The script that binds together State and nation has guaranteed the durability of the political framework in the form of a hegemonic government. Nationalism was built on a useful ideology for maintaining order and was reinforced by the fact that it constituted both a political doctrine and the basis for identity (Guibernau, 2004). The issue lay in defining what 'order' meant, with the premise that whatever might happen should be subject to State control. The nation's survival coincided with State power and required obeying the Law and loyalty to the State's interests (Bauman, 2002). Under such conditions, the State institutionalised the 'imagined community' to furnish limits and sovereignty.

Biology and culture as challenges

With regard to limitation of the community, it was necessary to produce a State-sized society. This often involved the use of violence in sweeping away regional differences and identities and imposing a notion of State (Pérez Agote, 1993). Consolidation of a Nation-State depends on social consensus on the bonds forged. Nationalists think of the nation as a collective individual, a kind of super-organism with its own soul, history and destiny that renders it unique and that takes cultural form. The existence of the nation is considered by its subjects as something that is natural (Handler, 1984). It therefore gives rise to a process of mythification through natural history and institutional action that turns life into an 'imaginary' [here, the term is meant as a noun] because it is based "on the projection of the individual's life on a collective narrative framework, acknowledging traditions as the remnants of time out of mind" (Balibar, 1991: 93). The imaginary takes form in the aspirations and struggle of a people who have the State as a horizon. Shared norms, values and behaviour become key in this construction. As Balibar (1991) noted, an ethnic community is built on a race or language as defining elements.

In the 19th Century, the question of race was either explicitly or implicitly part of the discourse of European nationalisms and was considered the bedrock on which a national community should be based. Race remained a key factor until Nazism made people realise the appalling consequences of taking the idea to extremes (Geulen, 2007).

Post-war genetic research soon revealed the shaky foundations of racial classification schemes (Lalueza, 2002). Before that, laws on citizenship were based on blood ties, while national anthems were stuffed with naturalist metaphors (Comas d'Argemir, 1996). Institutional racism was practiced in keeping with that cultural racism (Wieviorka, 2009). Since then, Nation-States have shifted their engineering of national identity towards other criteria. Bourdieu (1985) and Gellner (1988) show that language not only came to play a special place as an instrument of group communication and cohesion but also helped articulate an internal market, communication with government and delimitation of a people.

In his conception of 'imagined communities', Anderson (2005) recalls that the limitation of a nation is linked to modern roots, such as: (1) the disappearance of Latin as the only written language and as the expression of absolute truth; (2) the belief that society owed its existence to a higher power enshrining the Laws of Nature; (3) that historical and cosmological time were one and the same. Scientific discoveries, political, social and economic changes, and the development of communications worked a transformation. Among these changes, Anderson highlights the role played by the printing press which, combined with Market Capitalism, quickly spread vernacular languages. The use of these languages in newspapers, literary works, operas, songs, dictionaries and the creation of Language Academies fostered national construction in various European countries. Similar processes took place in South Africa and Turkey. In the best cases (France and Great Britain), the illiteracy rate was 50%, and in the worst, 98% (Russia). Thus readers and consumers of this cultural output were former aristocrats, clergy, bourgeois industrialists, merchants and civil servants. The last of these made up a growing segment as the States they served also grew. Teaching the masses reading and writing helped spread populist nationalism. In parallel with these developments, an official nationalism was created by the ruling classes to legitimise their power as representatives of the nation (even though in many

cases the countries were monarchies). Sometimes the elites strengthened their position by exercising power over national education and the army to expand national sentiment (Hungary being a case in point). Others used opposition to a threatening minority (the case of Siam between 1910-14, which repressed the Chinese the State had earlier brought in as skilled workers and who were leading strikes).

The symbolic reproduction of the nation was made possible in the 20th Century (and in some cases, in the 19th Century) by censuses, ID documents, passports and maps, which represented the imaginary on paper. Schools, together with the printing press, spread a mythical view of history that ignored the fact that William the Conqueror — the supposed founder of England — did not speak English and that he conquered a people who would end up worshipping him. The official history also left out less glorious episodes, such as The Saint Bartholomew Night Massacre in France. Other episodes were 'doctored' for popular consumption — for example, The American War of Succession, which was really a war between 'pseudo-States'. A shared cultural world was also forged through the Press, internal migrations and military service, which fostered common beliefs, customs and values (Weber, 1976). In La Cerdanya, for instance, good communications contributed to nationalisation on the French side of the border in the first quarter of the 20th Century, notwithstanding the area's small, dispersed school system (Moncusí, 2005). In fact, France was much more successful than Spain in forging a sense of nationhood. While French efforts commanded a degree of civil support, Spain failed in its attempts to emulate the French model (Álvarez Junco, 2001). Furthermore, Spanish nationalism had a strong language-based ethnic component — especially during the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) (Archilés, 2014), During Spain's Fascist dictatorship, the country's ethnic diversity was dismissed as folkloric regionalism. Spain, on the other hand, was vaunted by the regime as an unquestionable, indivisible unit (Saz, 2014). The Second Article of the 1978 Spanish Constitution kept this formula [at the Army's behest], stating "The indivisible nature of Spain as the country of all Spaniards". Indeed, some authors see The Spanish

Constitution as an ethnic discourse insofar as it attempts to dictate what constitutes national identity (Serrano, 2008).

There is also another cultural vector — what Billig (2006) terms "banal nationalism" and that constitutes a daily affirmation of nationhood through discourses, practices and symbolism. This includes things such as opening hours, language, ethos, and bureaucratic procedures — all things that affect citizens' daily lives and that are easily observable in border areas (Moncusí, 2005). In these areas, one sees a particular kind of cultural reaffirmation and acknowledgment when it comes to dealings with the police (Moncusí and Ruiz, 2002).

Globalisation means that people who live immersed in a national world can also be part of a global one and that a trans-national or world-spanning imaginary may arise (Appadurai, 2001). This cultural output and identification may question national identifications. However, the linguistic imaginary of a Nation-State is used by groups outside the country to imagine the nation. Language underpins wider, more abstract loyalties (with the exception of supra-national organisations — for example, NGOs and social movements). Such organisation have not replaced the nation (Appadurai, 2001). In this respect, the Nation-State continues to be a practical artifact for culturally constructing the Nation's bounds.

The transcendental dimension of the nation: rituals and traditions

National communities have been imagined as being delimited by biology and particularly by culture. However, their existence has also been underlined by rituals and traditions to which transcendental importance is attributed from time to time. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1988) show that nationalism manifests itself in the invention of traditions in the sense that these create a set of practices governed by explicitly or tacitly accepted rules, and a symbolic ritual that — through repetition — fosters certain values and rules of behaviour and imply continuity with the past. Unlike custom, tradition is taken to be unchanging, fostering a sense of community and

legitimising the power of the State. Tradition symbolises social cohesion and a sense of belonging to shared elements. These elements cover such things as flags, national anthems, dances, stories and language. Public scene-setting is particularly important. As Guibernau (1997) shows, this scene-setting is not the sole preserve of State nationalism but can also be used by nationalisms against the State.

Leaving aside the question whether these 'traditions' are artificial or not, they help forge links between a cultural group and the State. Indeed, traditionalism attempts to make the nation transcendental and set it on a pillar. Eriksen (1993) took a similar line in explaining the birth of Norwegian nationalism at the end of the 19th Century. The urban middle classes travelled to the country's remote valleys and mountains in a quest for the essence of Norwegian traditions. Elements of peasant culture were lauded as enshrining national culture after being re-interpreted and placed in an urban political context as part of an effort to show that 'Norway' was a world apart. The nationalist ideology argued that in the past, townsfolk and yokels had been part of the same group and distinct from the Swedes. Nationalism brought together rich and poor, workers and Capitalists. Up until the end of the 19th Century, Danish was the language in official use and carried the most prestige. In the early 20th Century, this was replaced by vernacular Norwegian, standardised from local dialects. It can therefore be said that the language was partially invented, becoming a symbol of cultural unity and a practical tool for the new Nation-State. The role played by folklore in nationalism towards the end of the 19th Century can be found in many other cases, as can be seen from Llobera's (1994) historical review. As Santamarina (2013) shows, the notion of Mankind's heritage in today's globalised world has supplanted the nationalist idea of 'heritage' yet is rooted in it. UNESCO has channelled this process with its 'Heritage of Mankind' initiatives in which States play a leading part but no longer the sole one.

One should also recall the ritual aspect of monuments and institutional commemorations as national representations of collective political bonds (Abélès, 2008). Police on the

streets and in border areas also play a role. As Moncusí and Ruiz (2002) showed, globalisation may lead to much freer movement across borders.

Rituals, traditions and monuments reveal the religious and civil nature of nationalism (Llobera, 1994), offering paths for mobilisation and social action that may lead to change or at least suggest it is possible. As Albert and Hernàndez (2011) showed, this may lead to either sharing of official political positions or to collective opposition to them. This is not only true of official commemorations but also of sports and festivals that strengthen community values, defining the nation and the role men and women play in its construction and reproduction. This is an aspect that is often forgotten in studies on nationalism (González, 2013).

Territorial sovereignty in question

The sovereignty of the modern Nation-State is eminently territorial. The State deploys forms of power and control over a territory, promising security to those it recognises as full citizens and maintains order within a legal framework (Bauman, 2002). That said, the sovereignty goes beyond jurisdiction to embrace culture and membership. That is because while the State's legitimacy and power is rooted in its territorial claims, the nation — or rather its citizens — produce and recognise other aspects such as language, race, and religion that are not necessarily rooted in the nation's territory (Appadurai, 1999). This last aspect rests on the community demarcation based on culture, biology and tradition and is what has best adapted to a global context whether through trans-national policies covering expatriate citizens, the political organisation of emigration, constitutional redefinitions that incorporate ethnic minorities and/or institutional racism and the expulsion of non-citizens. Here, the thrust of the State's actions is to maintain the nation's powers both at home and abroad. It is worth mentioning cases where sovereignty is questioned from within — for instance by independence movements. Nation-States may respond in various ways. Barring putting tanks on the streets, Nation-States may respond in one of two ways. The first is to provide democratic channels for

redefining territorial and/or political relations. The second is to use what might be termed 'Legal Fascism', using the Law (and especially the Constitution) to maintain the *status quo*. Here, the Constitution is treated as if it were an expression of an unchanging (and unchangeable) order of things (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000).

Yet the financial and human flows stemming from globalisation have rendered the borders of Nation States much less meaningful. Both flows beg the question whether the modern Nation-State's territorial control is anything more than an elaborate fiction. At the same time, the world seems to be ever less organised on the basis of clearly-defined cultural and territorial units. National society is being replaced by a global one that does not have the State as its reference point. In parallel, sovereignty is fragmenting in ways that often reach far beyond the State (Beck, 1998). No Nation-State is self-sufficient in military, economic, cultural and social terms. Moreover, the very notion of such self-sufficiency in today's world is increasingly absurd. As a result, institutions are taking the place of Nation States and in so doing, forming a network of interrelationships whose actions are unpredictable (Bauman, 2002).

The contemporary Nation State faces global flows that relentlessly drive supra-national institutions and decentralisation. Furthermore, political control of the Media in a highly-globalised world is a mirage (Castells, 2000). Yet despite everything, politics is renationalising, with States stressing their sovereign right to control their borders (Sassen, 2001; De Lucas, 2015). The refugee crisis in Europe tragically reveals this process in the form of expulsions and the raising of barbed wire and walls. Here, one should note that barbed-wire fences have been around for some time now — for example, in Ceuta and Melilla [two Spanish enclaves on the North African coast]. The fact that the refugees are fleeing from war and Islamic fundamentalism makes the cruelty of 'Fortress Europe's' defences starker. Yet the policy of expulsions as part of deals struck with third countries and the use of force against those who want to cross borders

are nothing new. Draconian measures have been systematically applied over the last few years (De Lucas, 2015). One significant development is the implementation of 'outsourcing' of the control of migratory flows in third countries whether of origin or transit. This control involves the deployment of advanced technology and mobile controls. In addition, sovereignty has been redefined by the Schengen Accords with regard to readmission and the setting up of FRONTEX[3]. This co-operation leads to multi-national police operations of dubious legality and blurred jurisdiction. It is evidenced by the sub-contracting of policing duties (Casas-Cortés *et al.*, 2015).

While Nation States seem to have answers to migratory flows, the same cannot be said for control over monetary policies, financial markets and income redistribution. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) noted, many authors highlight the way market forces place the Nation State in crisis, driving capital and manpower flows that overwhelm a country's border controls. The Nation State cannot regulate either the market or employment and although it still has a role to play in neo-liberal Capitalism and globalisation, it can do little to shape the global economy. The State has lost its monopoly in monetary policy and its ability to tax citizens and corporations. Much falls outside the scope of the Nation State, with trans-national communities and social movements playing a key role, the universalisation of Law and Justice (with supra-national courts and arbitration), violence that spans borders and all kinds of organisation through the Internet. The globalisation of capital is the *sine qua non* for waning State sovereignty (Bauman, 2002).

The present economic crisis reveals some of the challenges facing the Nation State. Austerity measures and budget cuts have been imposed by supra-national entities. National sovereignty is now so straitjacketed

by multi-level governance that some might think the Nation State has become a basket case. In the EU, Member States often find their sovereignty questioned and thus seek to strengthen their position with nationalist arguments. The modern State is interlinked with regional and global spheres (Abélès, 2008). At the global level, power is being decentralised and the world's great cities are 'denationalising'. Paradoxically, the State takes an active role in legislative decisions at this level, creating a field in which public and private sectors intertwine. In this respect, sovereignty has become decentralised and denationalised, with companies and global financial markets calling the tune (Sassen, 2010). There are supra-national players that strongly influence local and trans-local spheres and that help build global imaginaries through non-State networks. This is the case of global cities, entities, corporations and NGOs, whose power comes at the expense of the State's formal monopoly of power within its borders. Cities in particular weave close-knit economic relationships that foster non-territorial loyalties based on projects that may even run counter to State policies (Sassen, 2004). New forms of networked governance take root, with a strategic redefinition of national scale in relation to local, regional and international scales. Cities and city-regions play a leading part in this process and try to strategically position themselves in capital-accumulation circles (Brenner, 2009). This protagonism by city-regions such as Catalonia (with Barcelona at its heart) and The Basque Country (with Bilbao as its base) fosters agreements among cities and with the private sector and supra-national entities (Calzada, 2015). Multinationals are also centres of power. According to Beck (1998), in 1997, 53% of the world's wealth came from such companies. A study reveals that five years ago, no less than 40% of the world's wealth was concentrated in just 147 multinationals (Vitali *et al.*, 2011). The main elites are transnational. Under these circumstances, States are relegated to the role of linesmen, watching the game from the sidelines and flagging foul play (Bauman, 2002). As a result, States no longer play the social role that hitherto legitimised their authority and with it, sovereignty (Sassen, 2010).

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3 Translator's Note: European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union.

STRANGERS AND KINSHIP

The kinship of strangers is a third feature that Anderson established to define 'imagined communities'. This means fostering a kind of harmony and across-the-board kinship with those belonging to the same nation and who have a certain loyalty towards the political entity it represents. We have already seen the importance of language, culture and the media in Anderson's theory. One can say that the construction of imagined communities has grown greatly. Appadurai (2001), for example, has shown that new communication technologies forge today's imagined communities, which now transcend the Nation State and the Press which (according to Anderson) helped shape it. Social networks broaden the scope of daily knowledge, helping spread values and discourses. As Abèlés (2008) suggests, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) — especially networks — offer dense channels for strengthening the sense of belonging to an ethnic community in which the use of slang and jargon have boosted awareness of differences. Sassen (2010) recalls that trans-national affinities emerge at the fringes of global movements. From this point of view, community feelings reach far beyond borders. One could argue that this is where world citizenship or post-national citizenship is at home, fostering phenomena such as an international regime of Human Rights (Sassen, 2010), whose impact is boosted by social networks. That said, the hordes of refugees seeking succour casts grave doubts on how real such 'citizenship' is (Bauman, 2002).

Nationalism maintains its ability to represent imagined communities, in part thanks to new technologies. The kinship of strangers is still an option today. That said, the role played by acquaintances should not be underestimated. Associations, intellectuals, artists, workers, consumers, producers and people in general most interact with those whom they know. In principle, nationalism is an ideology and movement that is led by elites but that also has a mass following (Pérez Agote, 1993). This following arises through the posing of conscious demands and/or mindless daily reproduction of national categories, practices and discourses. Civil Society drives State-linked nationalism

whether through identification or through opposition (Llobera, 1994). Nationalism is expressed in both the real world and in the virtual one (social networks). While interacting players do not necessarily know one another, acquaintanceship may boost emotional identification. For example, in the case of Catalan Nationalism, the unfavourable judgment handed down by Spain's Constitutional Court on the 2010 Statute of Catalan Autonomy was a watershed in citizens political positioning, greatly broadening support for Catalan independence (Nagel, 2014). Many Catalans felt humiliated and frustrated by the judgment (Clua, 2014) and this found vocal expression at all levels — local, associations, and friends and family. After the judgment, the lone-star Catalan independence flag fluttered from street balconies and flag poles in many Catalan towns and villages, bringing new life to the movement. It is worth noting Castells' (2000) analysis of the boost given to Catalan nationalism even though his comments are made in the context of regeneration of the Spanish State. On this occasion, regeneration took the form of plans to improve economic, social and political prospects that sprang from citizen participation in the civic construction of a new country (Clua, 2014). Utopian plans were laid by civic and other groups in each town and village. Friends and family encouraged one another to turn out *en-masse* to well-organised demonstrations that have left their mark in the social media.

Nationalist feelings have been patent at the local, daily level in La Cerdanya for years. Transactions among subjects form the basis of collective identification processes, focusing on categories that organise interaction and society (Barth, 1969). In La Cerdanya, narratives and daily interactions have sustained a nationalist grammar and reproduced symbolic borders daily (Moncusí, 2005 and 2011). Daily interaction is key to building a sense of belonging that is not only based upon relationships but also on experience of governing bodies. This experience comes either directly through personal familiarity with red tape and bureaucrats or indirectly through the media. Furthermore, different paces of life and symbolic worlds are created as a result. These worlds are not necessarily at odds but they do

reveal ways in which the freedom of their denizens is clipped. As has been seen in other cases (for example, Castelló 2001), collective identities are based on plausible daily relations (for example, speaking only to those who share one's mother tongue).

The people of La Cerdanya are past-masters at slipping across the border whenever it suits them and at nagging the Spanish and French States to solve local issues. As a result, they now use paths between villages on both sides of the frontier, operate a municipal ski resort, regulate water use from an irrigation channel, and have set up and run a trans-border hospital. This was all made possible by demanding France and Spain review their sovereignty and act in consequence. This has sometimes spurred cultural, political, social and economic dynamics with nationalist overtones. Social and Cultural Anthropology shows that politics embraces the values binding a national group. This ensures that its members can maintain a shared organisation when it comes to the exercise of power and its ritualisation (Abèlés, 2008). Maintaining the imagined communities constituting nations means emotionally charging and conferring value on shared cultural elements. However, daily life requires reaching and maintaining agreement on what values are required to stay united. La Cerdanya is a case in point, revealing a fascinating blend of opposed and superimposed national feelings and the need for social organisation. There is daily affirmation of imagined communities and references to categories and national identities limiting freedom of action. While the two Nation States (France and Spain) have both left their mark on the valley, there have been plenty of difficulties and contradictions along the way. Oddly enough, this has ended up creating a border area with shared values.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The delineation of the limits of nations as imagined communities continues through culture, rituals and traditions. Biology (in particular, births and descendants) is ever-present in the legal ordering of States through the definition of who are citizens and who are not. One can say that the nationalist imagination and its emotional potential remain intact are reproduced in both real-world places and in networks through reaction to daily events. They are elements that Anderson highlighted in his seminal work. By contrast, the sovereignty he said was inherent in nations is today widely challenged by: the financial world; population mobility; government organisations; international bodies. The modern State as a formula for manifesting territorial sovereignty is being questioned. While the State still tries to impose control and make its power felt, this now involves other countries and foreign entities. How do Nation States meet these challenges to their sovereignty (1) within their borders (plans for secession); (2) beyond their borders (supra-national and corporate); (3) in the marches (frontier areas that require greater flexibility and/or greater vigilance)? In the first case, the main resort is to the Law (in particular The Constitution as a fetish), using the army [which, in Spain, has a predilection for *Coups d'État*], exerting international pressure, or even opening negotiations. In addition, the State also relies on strengthening national unity through rituals for the masses (in which Sport plays the leading role). These are formulas for appealing to a symbolic universe replete with transcendental values to bolster power and the illusion of the Nation State. Faced with external threats, the Nation State hinders the entry of foreigners (whether by fair means or foul) and has informal channels for granting citizenship to those who have put down roots in the country. The State may become a fetish to exorcise the evils of globalisation and internal rebellion as a way of wooing voters and national public opinion. It can also be used to paint a utopian future but given today's context in which neo-liberalism and Capitalism hold sway in the financial and policy-making fields, this is a tall order. In border areas such as La Cerdanya, one can see the role played by local populations in State policies and by Nation States in culturally engendering identities. Yet one can also observe the paradoxical role played by national categories in community organisation. Imagined communities have a bright future ahead of them but their limits and sources of inspiration are likely to change with the times.

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Imagined communities against the tide? The questioned political projection of nationalism

DEBATS · Annual Review, 1 · 2016 — 27

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