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***TALES OF DIFFERENCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION:  
NARRATIVES OF SECESSION***

by  
**Linda S. Bishai**  
Department of International Relations  
London School of Economics and Political Science  
email: [l.bishai@lse.ac.uk](mailto:l.bishai@lse.ac.uk)

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This paper will explore in detail the secessionist narratives of three contemporary separatist movements: Québec, Padania, and Hawaii. The point of this textual combing is to call into question the assumptions upon which secessionist claims are based and to reveal the linguistic processes of the politicisation (institutionalisation and materialisation) of identity which all such claims must involve. That is, secessionist narratives employ reiterated accounts of relational identity formations which operate to solidify the social and cultural boundaries of the secessionist group against Others and to frame the State as the only plausible institutional (territorial) manifestation of these boundaries. It is crucial to note that these analyses are not meant to be an exercise in the comparative approach. The examples were chosen for ease of access and current application: the choice is acknowledged to be accidental and thus should not be taken as an indication that these cases belong together as examples of single or contrasting categories within secessionist narrative literature. The singular common feature of these three cases is simply that they maintain an ultimate goal of sovereign independence. It is hoped that careful reading of these secessionist stories will highlight the process of the linguistic performance of secessionist politics—how the histories of the relevant group identities are created and validated through narrative as political necessities. What this paper definitively does not attempt is an analysis in search of causal patterns for secessionist activity. Such approaches have already been attempted and they rely on assumptions which directly contradict those of this work<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, a broad comparative approach assumes that there

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<sup>1</sup> See especially V. Bartkus, *Secession: An Analytical Framework Concerning the Decision to Secede* (Ph.D. diss., Magdalen College, Oxford, 1992).

are ahistorical and acultural patterns to political behaviour which can be discerned if the sampling is wide enough and deep enough. Under this approach, no attempt is made to distinguish historical revolutions from modern guerrilla or terrorist warfare, or to understand secession as a historically dependent phenomenon. This paper maintains that secession can only be understood as a by-product of the modern territorialist state system and that it must be historicised in order to be explained and in order for its effects to be dealt with meaningfully.

### Constituting Nationalism

The analysis of secessionist texts in this paper will show that the fruits of the modern territorialist assumption are exclusivist and violent. By definition, secessionists attempt to create a state based on a single identity group. These are not utopian political movements with open arms for all who wish to join. They are specifically aimed at defining and protecting an "inside" group, and no matter how loudly they proclaim that they will protect minorities and remain open to naturalised citizenship the very basis of their claim to statehood is national identity rather than political freedom. Even before the secessionist state materialises, its very purpose calls into question critical issues of civil and human rights. The nationalist foundations of such states are described by Robert Hayden as *constitutional nationalism*, in which states are created with "a constitutional and legal structure that privileges the members of one ethnically defined nation over other residents".<sup>2</sup> As Hayden explains, this structure does not necessarily result in overt discrimination, rather it is based on a vision of the state as the embodiment of self-determination for a particular nation, and thus the sovereignty of the state resides with the members of that nation and no one else. While Hayden takes the new republics of the Former Yugoslavia as his example, his description also applies to secessionist movements generally since they are based on obtaining sovereignty for a specifically defined national identity group and not an identity-neutral body of citizens. Additionally, as will become clear below, the language Hayden discusses from the constitutions of the former Yugoslav republics strongly resembles that of other secessionist texts. For example, the preliminary section of the Croatian constitution mentions as "Basic Sources" the "thousand year national independence and state continuity of the Croatian nation" and the "historical right of the Croatian nation to full state sovereignty".<sup>3</sup> The same document continues,

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Robert M. Hayden, "Constitutional Nationalism in the Former Yugoslav Republics," *Slavic Review* 51 (4) Winter 1992: 654-673, 655.

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*Ibid.*, p. 657.

asserting that Croatia is “established as the national state of the Croatian nation and the state of the members of other nations and minorities that live within it.”<sup>4</sup> While such language does not seem at odds with the tenets of a liberal democratic state, it actually enshrines the principles of ethnic nationalism into the state’s founding document. Hayden further clarifies that “Croatian nation” in this context has an ethnic rather than a political meaning in the native tongue. He also discusses similar relevant passages in the constitutions of Slovenia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but his most important point is the conclusion that European democracy and the principle of self-determination are incompatible.

The tragedy of Yugoslavia, as Hayden explains, was that the chauvinist politics of the seceding republics were accepted as democratic by Europe and the United States on the basis of the principle of self-determination. But failing to recognise the inherent contradiction between democracy and national self-determination as a political ideology can only lead to the continued agitation of separatist groups with exclusionist (cleansing) tendencies. Self-determination in the constitutional nationalism sense is not the neutral guarantee of political freedom referred to in United Nations declarations and covenants. It “establishes and attempts to protect the construction of a nation as a bounded unity: a sovereign being with its own defining language, culture and perhaps ‘biological essence,’ the uniqueness of which must be defended at any cost.”<sup>5</sup> This kind of uniqueness is not the harmless neutrality of open citizenship, but rather the harbinger of institutionalised racism and the repression of free expression of identity. As one example, Hayden points to the citizenship laws enacted in the former Yugoslav republics which grant special rights to ethnic members of the nation who are non-resident, effectively giving them citizenship by virtue of ethnic heritage alone. These laws are accompanied by exceptionally rigid naturalisation laws for non-national residents (some of whom have long resided in the country) who wish to become citizens.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the cloak of democratic rhetoric undercuts any protest by minority groups since their grievances will be viewed as traitorous in an institutional setting where all are purported to be equal. The result is that “Constitutional nationalism therefore builds a massive structural flaw into the polity that it is meant to define, since the permanent exclusion of minorities will likely

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Ibid.

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Ibid., p. 663.

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Ibid., pp. 666-667.

make them at best indifferent and at worst hostile to the state."<sup>7</sup> Ironically, the states which are founded by national secessionist groups are likely to engender further secessionist agitation from their own minorities who have been defined outside of the sovereign nation.

Thus, secessionist activities are very likely to engender further political separatism since they are based on two incompatible principles of international law: the concepts of national self-determination and the sanctity of state territorial boundaries. Because national self-determination involves a continual process of discrimination between members and non-members, it always contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. By defining its territorial sovereignty on the basis of the sovereignty of the people who are members of a specific nation, constitutional nationalism—and, by definition, secessionist movements—deny equality to people who are not members of the sovereign nation. The results can only be further unrest by groups who have been "minoritised" by this excluding process. Also, since the international political model remains one in which territorial states are the only legitimate actors, any organised alienated groups will logically seek the goal of an independent territorial state for themselves. It is no simple coincidence, then, that each of the secessionist cases analysed below contains the germ of further agitation from groups within which will become *minoritised* if the movements succeed.

### Language, Action, Politics

Before the introduction of particular secessionist texts, it is important to clarify the impact of narrative itself as a political act. Regardless of the many forms in which they may be told, the historical narratives of national groups have powerful effects upon both the tellers and the listeners. Secessionist leaders exert a kind of power in their telling of the nation. As Michael Toolan puts it:

narrators are typically *trusted* by their addressees. In seeking and being granted rights to a lengthy verbal contribution...narrators assert their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower, or entertainer, or producer, in relation to the addressees' adopted role of learner or consumer. To narrate is to make a bid for a kind of power.<sup>8</sup>

Secessionist leaders exert authority as narrators of the nation, telling the stories which create the national identity as distinctive and worthy of statehood. The secessionist stories, then, tell the past as distinctive and glorious, and foretell the future as one of sovereign independence.

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ibid., p. 669.

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Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 3.

In the cases below the addressees are primarily those who will be included within the identity-generating narrative, but they are also those who will become marginalised as outsiders within the secessionist state. Stories of nationality explicitly claim the authority to draw boundaries around social groups. They both unify and divide as they provide historical criteria for the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others from the national group. Such narratives constitute acts of power. They "act upon people" in two ways: "either by informing them and so modifying their perceptions or by defining them and so modifying the ways in which they are perceived by others."<sup>9</sup> These two effects are of course inter-related in the sense that one may have one's own perceptions modified at the same time that others perceive a modified view of oneself. Secessionist narratives operate in exactly this way—telling stories of the tragedy of a separate people who will finally triumph when they achieve sovereign statehood. At the same time, the texts define the membership of a seceding group and by implication create a category of all others as *not* of that group. Thus secessionist narratives exert great power and can be seen as *acts* which have political effects.

As J.G.A. Pocock describes in his discussion of speech as political act, no one's speech is strictly her own. Because language is so contextual and institutionalised, no statement has a completely pure meaning. Further, no statement is purely attributable to its author. Our language, both in utterance and understanding, is made up of words which have been formed "by sedimentation and institutionalization of the utterances performed by others whose identities and intentions may no longer be precisely known."<sup>10</sup> Our words, then, are only "borrowed" from countless others who have used and contributed to their meaning in the past. Language acts "have been preinstitutionalized; they must be performed by institutionalized means....[I]nstitutionalization makes my language available to the person to or about whom I speak for purposes of reply and refutation; he can, as we put it, answer me in my terms."<sup>11</sup> The application of this theory to the secessionist situation indicates the extent to which secessionists are both impelled and limited by the institutionalized setting in which they exist. If they wish to be recognised as possessing a valid identity, secessionists must speak in terms of sovereignty and the nation-state. The international sphere is one of sovereignty, democracy, territorial states and national self-determination. Each of these words has an

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J.G.A. Pocock, "Verbalizing a Political Act: Towards a Politics of Speech," in Shapiro, ed., *Language and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 28.

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*Ibid.*, p. 31.

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*Ibid.*

ambiguous and intersubjective meaning which has come to limit the way in which a people may perceive itself and be perceived. In the institutionalized practice of the international sphere, a distinct people has only two choices: that of being a sovereign nation with a territory or that of remaining a “minority” within a sovereign state.<sup>12</sup> Given the starkness of these options, it is not surprising that despite their ambiguity, terms such as sovereignty and self-determination are understood by secessionists in their most absolute sense.

The performativity of speech must be understood as a two-directional action. According to Pocock, the intersubjectivity of language determines that there can never be an act of self-definition which is entirely pure. Identities can only be located by reference to others. Charles Taylor calls this a crucial feature of the self: “One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.”<sup>13</sup> This is critical to our understanding of the politics of self-determination. “Now clearly [a nation] cannot say ‘we’ without redistributing a number of other human beings among the categories ‘we’, ‘you’, and ‘they’. To do this to people can have very considerable consequences for them....Liberation, even, that image of such potency in the contemporary sensibility, involves an act of power over others: a speech-act by which I define myself is performed in another’s universe and redefines him as well as me.”<sup>14</sup> Self-determination must also involve *other-determination* and thus constitutes an attack on the others’ political understanding of themselves. This is not to argue that social boundaries and identity definition are harmful in general, but rather that institutionalising these boundaries within the territorial sovereignty of the state perpetuates the politics of identification by exclusion rather than by encounter with the Other. Secessionist groups, then, do not only cause a redefinition of the boundaries of the parent state, but of the social boundaries of the rest of the world. When Croatia and Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia, they redefined themselves as national groups with international standing, and the rest of the international community was redefined as one which contained the actors “Croatia” and “Slovenia”. Furthermore, the national identities now permissible were redefined from those of a world in which “Croatian and Slovenian” were subsumed under “Yugoslavian” (and the rest of the world could claim a non-Yugoslavian identity), to

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I place quotation marks around the word minority because the term is only relevant as long as international practices continue to identify states with national groups.

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Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>

Pocock, “Verbalizing a Political Act,” p. 39.

one in which non-Yugoslavian-ness did not rule out the possibility of being Croatian or Slovenian (and the rest of the world had to rethink itself as not just non-Yugoslavian, but also non-Croatian and non-Slovenian). And all this in just the simplest terms, excluding all the difficulties of re-definition for the many members of non-national groups within the newly defined areas.

### Performing the Nation

Identities are necessary to all of us, so why should secessionist identity performative narratives pose any problem? Even while secessionist narrators assert their authority to tell us of their nation's history and cause, we (the non-secessionist listeners) also exert authority in our willingness to believe (or not) the validity of the narrative. Toolan concludes that "the ultimate authority for ratifying a text as a narrative rests not with the teller but with the perceiver/addressee."<sup>15</sup> However even if the text is recognised as a valid narrative, there is a further act of recognition which the addressee must grant a secessionist narrative—the recognition of the moral point of the narrative—that the national identity which the secessionists assert deserves sovereign statehood. This is the crucial distinction between narrative and non-narrative accounts, as Hayden White argues. Narrative necessarily refers to and creates a normative context for the subject. Thus, narrativity "is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine."<sup>16</sup> Secessionists do not write historical narratives for entertainment, they write them to create moral authority for their claims to a separate state. It is in this way that these texts are *performative*: they are discursive practices which produce the effects which they name.<sup>17</sup> By continually asserting the terms of their identity, secessionists perform that identity. These performances become more meaningful and more authoritative to the extent that they are repeated and compelled. As Judith Butler explains: "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or

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<sup>15</sup>

Toolan, *Narrative*, p. 8

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Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 14.

<sup>17</sup>

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 13.

myth-making  
 dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.”<sup>18</sup> Repeated identity performances, then, have the cumulative effect of normalising their own assertions. The less we question these norms (i.e., the more hidden their performativity), the more successful they become at achieving authority as natural or ideal. This establishes a critical link between performative speech and norms which must be kept in mind while attempting to reveal the concealed processes which produce political conventionality. As Cynthia Weber explains:

Key to understanding the difference between performance and performativity is their connection to normativity, understood as the ongoing citational processes whereby ‘regular subjects’ and ‘standards of normality’ are discursively co-constituted to give the effect that both are natural rather than cultural constructs.<sup>19</sup>

Normativity is the paradoxical element in the performative act, however. It provides both the end and the beginning. The performative subject cannot be engaged in the citation of norms without being herself created by them. Neither can these norms be resisted or re-articulated except by a subject which has been produced by the norms. This constitutive circle is what Butler calls “The paradox of subjectivation”. Where does this leave the reader of secessionist narratives? The task here is both to reveal and to question the extent to which norms of national identity have been essentialised through authoritative performances. In revealing the underpinnings of secessionist identity performances, we must remember that the ideals which secessionists strive to authorise have arisen from the political norms of the current international system. In this sense, we are all implicated in the identity performances of others, even while we reiterate the performances which legitimate ourselves.

### **An Act respecting the future of Québec**

On October 30, 1995, the government of the Canadian province of Québec held a province-wide referendum on the question of secession. The word “secession” was not mentioned, rather the question was posed as one of sovereignty under the terms of a Bill, called Bill 1, An Act respecting the future of Québec. The Bill, subtitled as “Declaration of Sovereignty”, included a preamble, a text and an appendix discussing the schedule of political separation under the terms of the June 12, 1995 agreement among the three secessionist parties. The effect of a “yes” vote on the Bill would have committed the government of Québec to attempt to negotiate a treaty of economic and political partnership with Canada. One year after such negotiations would have begun, the Québec government would have had a

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<sup>18</sup>

ibid., p. 12.

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Cynthia Weber, “Performative States,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no. 1 (1998): 81, 77-95.

mandate to declare Québec's sovereignty, either under the terms of the partnership treaty or after having determined that the negotiations had failed. As is now well-known, the 1995 vote ended with the narrowest of margins in favour of rejecting sovereignty. Nevertheless, the text of Bill 1 provides an excellent example of a secessionist narrative identity performance.

The Preamble of Bill 1 consists of about two and a half pages of the reasons why Québec is a nation and why it should be sovereign; the passage ends in a declaration of sovereignty. The Preamble is the stuff of great drama—narrated like a Greek tragedy, it contains a monologue of the history of the people, interspersed with songlike choral interludes. It begins:

- I. *The time has come to reap the fields of history. The time has come at last to harvest what has been sown for us by four hundred years of men and women and courage, rooted in the soil and now returned to it. The time has come for us, tomorrow's ancestors, to make ready for our descendants harvests that are worthy of the labours of the past. May our toil be worthy of them, may they gather us together at last.*<sup>20</sup>

This opening paragraph provides a strong set of clues about the assumptions and goals of the Bill's supporters. It is heavy with territorial import. The agricultural metaphor of toil, sowing, harvest and reaping creates a strong tie between the Québécois and the territory of Québec. Moreover, there is an element of obligation implied in the references to the ancestors who have laboured so hard for four hundred years. It is the only honourable choice, the words imply, to vote yes and bring to a culmination all the work of the "ancestors". In fact, this preamble speaks only to the national group of Francophones and excludes both immigrants and English-speakers, whose ancestors have not "toiled" for independence.

After this opening chorus, the Preamble continues to further describe the group for whom the referendum is specifically designed. They are "the pioneers" who had "come from a great civilization" and who "maintained the heritage of France". Despite the "conquest" of 1760, the determination of these pioneers' descendants to "remain faithful to a destiny unique in North America" continued. "Neither attempts at assimilation nor the Act of Union of 1840 could break their endurance." These passages cement an image of the heroes of the narrative: the gritty, tough hard-working settlers who fought to keep their French identity, despite deliberate assaults on their very Frenchness. This version of Québec history establishes a record of protest against domination, of the constant struggle not to succumb to the temptations of Englishness, no matter what the cost. It describes a clash of cultures in which an embattled minority of French speakers emerges victorious. To give the (un-named) authors

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Bill 1 *An Act respecting the future of Quebec* (Introduction Quebec Official Publisher 1995) Italics in Original.

some credit, they do acknowledge a debt to non-French peoples: “the First Nations” who further “enriched” their great civilization, the English community “that grew up at their side”, and the immigrants “all have contributed to forming this people which became in 1867 one of the two founders of the Canadian federation.” But if the native peoples, the English, and the immigrants did indeed contribute to the formation of the Québec people then why is the narration of Québec’s history one which excludes their stories?

The Preamble continues with a series of points justifying the right of the people of Québec to choose their future. “Because the heart of this land beats in French”—the words resonate. “Because we inhabit territories delimited by our ancestors”, and “because for four hundred years we have cleared, ploughed, paced, surveyed, dug, fished, built, started anew, discussed, protected, and loved this land that is cut across and watered by the St. Lawrence River.” The insistence on four hundred years of history persists in excluding all who do not spring from the loins of the first French pioneers. Here is the performative “We” in clear relief—the “We” which enacts and creates the Québécois norm. The many histories, longer and shorter than four centuries, which went into -- which were crucial to -- the making of today’s Québec are nullified in this text. The description of the nature of the land and the work done on it shows a staggering deafness to the history and rights of the tribes of the “First Nations”. In the story told by this Preamble, the land simply had no existence before the pioneers came and called it “Québec”. At most, the narrative allows that the natives and the non-French-speaking peoples can claim to have “contributed” to the making of the nation -- a helpful, but not formative role. Meanwhile, those who can comfortably belong to this specific French “We” are exhorted by “the legacy of the struggles and courage of the past” to “take charge of [their] own destiny.”

Interestingly, the Preamble’s attempts to include “all those men and women who inhabit it” among the people of the land of Québec are fraught with contradiction. The non-Francophones are those who currently feel most threatened by the prospect of an independent Québec. They perceive their interests in self-expression to lie in a multi-cultural Canada rather than in a French nation which promises to uphold their rights. They also perceive their legal status to be at risk from a change of state governance. More specifically, the native peoples are parties to a treaty with the Federal Government of Canada respecting their rights and usage of reservation lands. This treaty covers a very large portion of the northern half of Québec’s provincial territory. A secession by the province, the native peoples have warned, would be regarded as a unilateral (and therefore void) change in the terms of the treaty and would not be valid in their eyes. They would, moreover, claim a secession of their own in order to maintain control over their lands. In the referendum on this Bill which took place in October 1995, the

English speakers and immigrant population, about 18 to 20% of Québec's total, voted solidly "no". These people were not convinced by the story of the Preamble. The story which excluded them and spoke to a particular national group, privileging it in the founding document of the proposed state. The story the Preamble tells, of an obligation to claim sovereignty over the land because "it is this land alone that represents our pride and the source of our strength, our sole opportunity to express ourselves" is a story which performs a particular subject. The people who claim "our pride", "our strength" and "our sole opportunity" for expression, are the "descendants" only of the French. They are the people whose Frenchness has been a baton passed by each generation, who feel that their very selves are imperiled unless they can be guaranteed the normative materialisation of a sovereign (French) state. The language of self-preservation and expression in the Preamble speaks only to Francophones. It is only they who feel so fiercely the connection between their cultural preservation and a secessionist state. Native peoples, immigrants, and English-speakers, by contrast, cannot identify with the embattled metaphor since their identities are not tied to the story of a French cultural struggle. In fact, these non-French identities fare far better in multi-cultural Federal Canada where they are subsumed in a plurality of identities, and where the state is no longer overtly linked to a particular (sub-federal) national identity.

The Preamble's second chorus sings:

- II. *We know the winter in our souls. We know its blustery days, its solitude, its false eternity and its apparent deaths. We know what it is to be bitten by the winter cold.*

Here seasonal metaphors set the tone for a passage which discusses the difficult times in the history of the Québec people. The images of winter, blustery cold and "apparent death" narrate the hopelessness and despair of the Québécois, of their thwarted dreams and aspirations to build their own sovereign nation. The story then takes a turn with the entry of Québec into the federation with Anglo-Canada "on the faith of a promise of equality" and "respect for our authority in certain matters that to us are vital." This description of the province entering willingly into a federative union misleadingly implies that it had a choice. The territory of Québec as a colony had been lost by France in a war with Britain. Thence it became a British territory to be governed as Britain saw fit, which eventually included unifying it with the rest of Canada as one administrative unit. The French-speaking province wished from the beginning to be recognised as "distinct" and vociferously withstood all attempts at assimilation. Although current Federal policies of bilingualism privilege Francophones beyond the proportion of their numbers within the Federation, they continue to long for a status beyond that of one culture among a multitude. They wish to be recognised as

“unique”, a “distinct society” and an autonomous national group. At this point, the Preamble introduces Anglo-Canada as the villain and paints a tale of betrayal: the arrangements within the Federation “did not live up to those early hopes. The Canadian State contravened the federative pact, by invading in a thousand ways areas in which we are autonomous”. Attributing a unitary motive of trickery and deceit to the Federal government, the Preamble declares, “We were hoodwinked in 1982 when the governments and Canada and the English-speaking provinces made changes to the Constitution, in depth and to our detriment, in defiance of the categorical opposition of our National Assembly.” These words maintain an assumption of bad faith on the part of “English-speaking” Canada which narrates a conflictual relationship between Francophone and Anglophone, making it likely to become a performative one. This belies the previous assurances of welcome given to the Anglophone minority of Québec. There can be no clearer statement of othering than that of *We were hoodwinked by Them*, the English-speaking provinces. Although the writers and supporters of Bill 1 clearly have no wish to alienate their own non-French minorities, they also cannot refrain from narrating Québec the way they see it—the way which involves an oppressed nation struggling to break free of the cultural chains of the Federalist state. For Québec, anything but total independence is an insult to its greatness. The other stories tied to the history of this province cannot be told without marring the purity of the movement for the liberation of the French “Us”. The story told by the Québécois is one in which the very presence of the province in an English-speaking country is one of constant threat. Thus, the *We* “reached a decision never again to restrict [themselves] to mere survival but from this time on to build upon our difference”. And this difference cannot flourish in a plurality but must have the freedom to be pure: “Because we have the deep-seated conviction that continuing within Canada would be tantamount to condemning ourselves to languish and to debasing our very identity.” The identity performativity of these words produces profound social divides. These words act upon the people of Québec to create two groups: those who are the “We” of French pioneer ancestry and who therefore *must* vote for independence as an act of self-preservation, and those who are the “Them” of Canada, of plurality, of multiculturalism, who will be excluded from this story of Québec no matter what they vote for. By producing the identities which it describes, such identity performative language serves to create and perpetuate social fault lines which are not easily repaired. These groups will remain at odds in Québec for as long as the issue of secession continues to be active, and would certainly not simply assimilate within an independent state.

The third and final choral interlude of the Preamble reads:

III. *For the men and women of this country who are the warp and weft of it and*

*its erosion, for those of tomorrow whose growth we are now witnessing, to be comes before to have. And this principle lies at the very heart of our endeavour.*

Images of woven fabric and of present and future set the tone here for a segment which elucidates the characteristics which will make the new nation great. It will be the very expression of the identity of the Québec people, an existential necessity regardless of the economic cost. "To be comes before to have". Contextually, this passage could only imply that *being* cannot be expressed in any way other than through a fully independent state.

The Preamble continues with a section about the distinctness of French language and culture. "In order that the profound sense of belonging to a distinct people be now and for all time the very bastion of our identity, we proclaim our will to live in a French-language society." The recurring phrase "distinct people" and its dependence on French language and culture reveals assumptions about the nature of the identity cherished by the Québécois. It is an identity which is seen as identifiable (distinct) and therefore as pure. The ferocity of the *will to be French* evinced in this document stems from a shared feeling that Frenchness is something definite, recognisable, fixed, and therefore capable of being adopted as a political agenda. Why else would there be a desperate need for a state? The assumption of the supporters of Bill 1 is that Frenchness is necessary for the identity of the Québec people, and that political sovereignty is necessary to guarantee Frenchness. This is a hidden—but nonetheless clearly present—statement of constitutional nationalism along the lines of those indicated earlier by Hayden.

Interestingly, the need to acknowledge the presence of non-French people in Québec surfaces immediately following the strong declaration of the need for a French identity. But again, the non-French elements of Québec are relegated to the place of attractive side dish, definitely not part of the main course. The non-French peoples are described as "varied and new contributions" through which "our culture takes on fresh colour and amplitude." This is not an acknowledgement that modern Québec's identity is produced through continued contact and mutual absorption of various cultures, it is a statement of toleration under the wing of the French Québec nation. Thus the purity of Frenchness is preserved, and also enlivened, through contact but not mingling with other cultures. The Québécois see that "It is essential that we welcome *them* in such a way that never will these differences be seen as threats or as reasons for intolerance."<sup>21</sup> The non-French cultures are to be made "welcome"—they will be guests, tolerated—part of the state of Québec, but not part of its special Frenchness. Although

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Emphasis added.

the nature of the state envisioned by Bill 1 is that of a liberal democracy, it is a mistake to see it (and indeed, liberal democracies in general) as automatically culturally neutral. The whole *raison d'être* for an independent Québec is one of nationalism and identity. And although the rights of the English-speaking community “will be maintained” and also the rights of the First Nations will be “safeguarded”, that does not erase the fact that the state which will be in charge of the maintaining and safeguarding them will be one which has an official national identity of Frenchness. This identity is actually mandated under the terms of the Bill in the section entitled *The New Constitution*. Clause 7 reads: “The new constitution shall state that Québec is a French-speaking country and shall impose upon the Government the obligation of protecting Québec culture and ensuring its development.” Institutionalising the protection of a national culture in the state’s constitution is the hallmark of a nationalist state.

One year after the 1995 referendum, the former leader of the Parti Québécois, Jacques Parizeau, contributed several articles to the newspaper *Le Devoir*. These were translated and published in Toronto by *The Globe and Mail*. In these articles, the secessionist leader clarifies his post-referendum stance and his continued insistence on a vision of a sovereign Québec in the future. In a piece poignantly titled “Who Are We? Where Are We Going?”, Parizeau reiterates that “We” the people of Québec must have sovereignty: “Québec’s sovereignty appears to me necessary for the Québec nation. It must be responsible for itself.”<sup>22</sup> Defining it as a simple equation of rights and interests, he states: “Defending one’s interests, promoting them, isn’t just an option, it’s absolutely natural.” But Parizeau deliberately simplifies the complex question of *whose* interests and *how* they are to be determined. With the clarity of a purist, he sees the social conflict as normal and acceptable. The behaviour of those who voted against secession is “perfectly comprehensible. They prefer to remain part of the Canadian majority rather than becoming a minority in Québec. Their interests dictate this attitude.” There is nothing to condemn them for, *their* interests are not *our* interests—the *We*, the French. For Parizeau this is acceptable, because the *We* will prevail and the referendum will finally be won: “Afterwards, they will adapt.” Thus with stunning simplicity, the foundations of the secessionist standpoint are laid bare. The *Us* of the nation must have sovereignty in order to preserve our fixed and definable identity. Others who are not of this identity may contribute to the life of the nation as long as they choose to also preserve and adapt to it. Any other non-national groups will be allowed to continue as institutionalised minorities with special “protections”. However, the identity of “The Nation” will be enshrined in the state.

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Jacques Parizeau. “Who Are We? Where Are We Going?”, transl. by P. Van de Wille. *The Globe And Mail* (Toronto: October 30, 1996).

Parizeau himself answers the question of what is the Québécois nation with the response: "It is constituted essentially of Francophones (whatever their origin), sharing a culture unique to them." That is, anyone may be a Quebecker -- as long as she speaks French, and joins in the French Québec culture. As for those other elements of the society, the native groups and English speakers, "once sovereignty is achieved they should, at their own pace, integrate themselves into the Québécois nation." The irony of this sentiment seems completely to have escaped Parizeau, who writes it with all apparent seriousness. The Québécois must not be assimilated into English-speaking Canada—this is an insult to their very identity, yet English-speaking Canadians should, in order to be Quebeckers, assimilate into French-speaking Québec. This is natural. Having writhed under the cultural constraints of bilingual Canadian federalism, the Francophone leader feels no compunction about advising the members of Québec's minorities to capitulate. He might as well have included the sentiment that French culture is superior to any of the others and therefore more worthy of being assimilated into. Of course, Parizeau himself does not see it as a question of exclusivity, but of open welcome to membership in the Québec culture: "We need to be responsible for ourselves. There is nothing racist or xenophobic in saying it: A Quebecker is whoever wants to be one. Case closed!"<sup>23</sup> What he does not allow for is the possibility that many people wish to be both Quebeckers and Canadians, or Quebeckers and Native Americans, or Quebeckers and representatives of various immigrant groups. The secessionist view of national culture is an absolutist one -- you may be either "in" or "out" on the terms with which the secessionists have defined the nation.

This analysis does not presuppose malicious intent upon the drafters of any particular secessionist text. Rather, these texts are the logical outcome of a political ontology of national being which blindly impels an exclusivist ideology towards disastrously conflictual results. These texts show that the Pandora's Box of secessionism is actually more like a Russian doll. Having been denied a fulfilling sense of recognition for their identities, secessionists feel the need, in turn, to create pure political spaces for themselves where their identities may be sheltered and protected. This constitutional nationalism, in turn, threatens the identities of members of non-national groups -- many of whom have made their home in the country for centuries, if not actually indigenous. The driving forces behind secessionist movements which enable them to succeed in the difficult goal of state creation are invariably nationalist. If a people do not feel the ties of a common identity, no matter how recently constructed (or

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Jacques Parizeau. "The objective is sovereignty, not partnership," transl. by P. Van de Wille. *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, December 19, 1996).

reconstructed), they will not be willing to suffer the difficulties and uncertainties of creating a new state. This is especially the case now when global economic interdependence has greatly increased the possibilities for regional prosperity based on global markets. This dynamic will be illustrated most clearly in the next set of narratives.

### **The Northern League**

The activities of the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) of Italy represent an interesting blend of radical secessionism and practical politicking. The Northern League itself is both a political party with a respectable presence in the Italian parliament and a political movement for independence for the North of Italy. The thirteen regions of the North have been given the national name "Padania" after the god of the Po River which runs through the area. Padania has a flag (a green Celtic star on a white background) and a national symbol (a medieval warrior with sword raised -- commemorating the struggles of the North Italian communes for self-rule in the 12th and 13th centuries). There is a parliament of Padania which has 200 members elected from a field of 1,175 candidates. Identification cards and currency have been designed, but are not in general use. These activities are largely due to the efforts and motivation of one man, Umberto Bossi, the founder of *Lega Nord*. Tapping into the economic frustration of heavily taxed businessmen of the North, Bossi attacked Rome both with pleas for a federalist structure in which the North would have autonomy and with threats of secession if this did not occur. The political activities of the Northern League in Rome's parliament carry a high percentage of local support. However, support for secession is calculated at a maximum of 20%.<sup>24</sup> Despite having been coy about the possibility of secession in his speeches to the Italian Chamber of Deputies in Rome, Bossi took steps to set up a government for Padania. He announced the approval (by the Constituent Assembly of the Regions of the North) of a provisional "Constitution of the North" on 24 March 1996. On 4 May 1996, the Parliament of the North changed its name to the Parliament of Padania, and began the business of forming a government of Padania. Eight days later, the Padanian Parliament chose its first Prime Minister, Giancarlo Pagliarini, and appointed a Committee for the Liberation of Padania. On the 15 September 1996, a ceremony announcing the Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania was held on the banks of the Po River. The State of Padania currently exists in virtual limbo—no longer a simple political party, but also not a recognised state with an international presence (despite its symbolic efforts and "foreign office"). Its public relations documents indicate a certain ambivalence

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Alexander Stille. "The Fall of Rome?" *George* (September 1997): pp. 102-108.

between the contradictory goals of sovereign independence and a federalist restructuring of the Italian state. Most of the population of Padania considers itself to be Italian, but that does not seem to bother Bossi, who declares “History is made by minorities, not the majority.”<sup>25</sup>

The Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania is a textual performance which attempts to produce an identity for Padanians on several levels. On its face, it acts as a document for the purpose of declaring that Padania is a separate state. But through its language and style, it evokes an image of Padania as one of a distinguished company of secessionist revolutionary nations destined for democratic greatness. The opening passage of the Declaration is taken more or less directly from the American Declaration of Independence of 1776:

When in the course in [sic] human events it becomes necessary for one Peoples [sic] to dissolve the bands which bind them with another, to establish themselves as an independent and sovereign community, and to assume the role assigned to them by the Natural Law of Self-Determination among the nations of the Earth, respect for International Society and all of humanity requires that they should declare the reasons which impel them to the separation.<sup>26</sup>

The Padanian version of this passage has been slightly altered to fit more securely into the 20th century system of nation states. Thomas Jefferson’s text made no reference to the “Natural law of Self-Determination” (a post-World War I form of usage), but instead refers to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”. The slight differences in language between these two passages serve to highlight the vast differences in effect between the two documents on the whole. While the American document is largely one of complaint and invective against the monarch, referring to the Lockean doctrine of equality to support its (then novel) claims for popular sovereignty, the Padanian declaration strives to locate itself within a context of sovereign states based on historical national rights. While the Padanian declaration, like the American one, accuses the central government of abusive colonialist policies toward its people, its main claim to legitimacy derives both from the concept of national self-determination and the identification of Padania as a historical nation which belongs to Europe and the tradition of democracy.

The Declaration strives to produce a distinctive “We” in the people of Padania: “Since time immemorial, we live, we build, we work, we protect, we love these lands handed down to

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid.

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*Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania*, 15 September 1996. Available from <http://151.4.58.42/eng/declar.htm>

us by our forbearers, bathed and quenched by the waters of our great rivers”. In order to lay valid claim to the principle of self-determination, a people must be distinct. Thus: “Here we have invented an original way of living, of developing the arts, and of working.... We therefore constitute a natural, cultural, social, and economic community founded on shared values, culture, and history, and on harmonious social, moral, and economic conditions”. Not only is Padania a historical entity (regardless of the fact that its name is of recent vintage), but its independence is necessary for the security of the cultural identity of its people: “Padania is our pride, our precious resource, and our only chance for freely and fully expressing our individual natures and our feeling of community”. These are the performative words of secessionist speech acts in operation—the differentiation of a people, and the declaration that those people cannot live under the rule of any other people but themselves. The definition of the people in Padania’s case is almost entirely based on prior administrative territorial delineations. The fact that Venice and South Tyrol have vastly different histories is casually ignored in order to assert the unity of identity within the declared boundaries. And since there is no distinct language to help distinguish the differentness of Padania, grounds must be elaborated for the distinctness of its people from those of the south of Italy. In other words, not only must the Padanians declare that they exist as a people, but they must clarify how different they are from the people with whom they are now forced to share a political system. This is a crucial part of every secessionist movement. Without this process of *social and cultural* othering, there can be no justification for the *territorial political* othering which they hope to achieve.

In Padania’s narrative southern Italy, symbolised by the Italian State, is painted in the colours of a colonialist power which bleeds the wealth of Padania dry. In contrast to honest, hard-working Padania, “the history of the Italian State has become the history of colonial oppression, of economic exploitation, and of moral violence: The Italian State has, over time, systematically occupied Padania’s economic and social system through its parasitic bureaucratic apparatus: The Italian State has systematically annihilated every form of autonomy and self-government of our Towns, our Provinces, and our Regions”. But again, unlike the American Declaration of Independence, which refers to the British people as “our brethren”, the writers of the Padanian Declaration find it necessary to make a national case beyond the one of colonialist exploitation. The Italian state, they claim, “has deliberately attempted to suppress the languages and the cultural identities of the Peoples of Padania through the colonization of the public education system”. Also, the laws of the Italian State are not only unfair, but are “applied with racist criteria” and enforced by “Roman-style prefects and law enforcement officers applying the most hateful forms of Statist colonialism”.

These grievances finally lead to the necessary conclusion: "We are profoundly convinced that the continued presence of Padania within the confines of the Italian State would lead to gradual extinction of all hope of rebirth and the annihilation of the identities of its Peoples". Thus, despite the fact that technically Padania is still very much a part of *The Italian State*, the performative rhetoric of its secessionist leaders attempts to effect a social chasm between residents of Padania and the rest of Italy.

The advocates of Padanian secession adopt two contradictory metaphors to validate the need for independence. The first image is one of history, the continuity of the present day Padania with the communes of the medieval Northern Italy, as symbolised by the medieval warrior of the national symbol. This image tells a story of Padania as a continuous entity whose ancestors struggled and toiled to build a prosperity which the current people are bound to protect. But in direct opposition to that, the narrative also tells a tale of Padania as a new baby being birthed by the secessionist leaders and embodying new hopes for the inclusion of Padania in a Federation of European regions. Thus, the assertion, "Padania will become a political and institutional focal point for the construction of a Europe of the Regions and of the Peoples"; and the proclamation that "the hour has finally arrived to set forth on the great enterprise of giving birth to this new Country which we baptize today with the name Padania". On September 15, 1996, Umberto Bossi enacted the baptismal metaphor by pouring a jug of Po River water into the Venice lagoon after having read the Declaration of Independence to a crowd of one hundred and fifty thousand.

Having read out the Declaration, Bossi and his supporters have the heavy task of creating a sense of nationhood among the residents of Padania if they are ever to be taken as a serious secessionist movement. A document titled "Padania: The Foundations of a Nation" provides further details of the points hinted at in the Declaration.<sup>27</sup> This text also indicates the extent to which the secessionist leaders of Padania are aware of the performative potential of their language and the intentional re-presentation of history. This document is replete with irony and narrative sleight of hand. In a section called "Reclaiming Our History", the author condemns the tactics of the Italian State in attempting to create an artificial nation by confusing the people into believing that States and Nations are the same thing: "Italian officialdom professes to teach us Padanians that we should regard ourselves mentally and emotionally closer to the inhabitants of the southernmost islets off Sicily, than to, say, those of neighbouring Southern Switzerland, sharing the same mode of speech with Lombardy. How can we build a Europe of the Peoples on such an artificial basis?" The People of Padania, the

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*Padania: The Foundations of a Nation* (no author given). Available from <http://151.4.58.42/eng/remake.htm>

text goes on, are more definitively a Nation than the Italian State, “which for 135 years has attempted in vain to define itself as a Nation”. Moreover, according to this history, Padania has long had close ties to the rest of the continent of Europe, looking northward rather than towards Rome from the sixth century onwards. In the Middle Ages, the history continues, Padania was the site of the development of the Free Communes which developed “profound differences in civil life and social organization” from the rest of the Italian peninsula, and which “reached the heights not only of industry, commerce, and finance, but also of culture, indeed, of Western civilization.” Moreover, we read, the description of the entire territory of the Italian state as the “Italian peninsula” is an erroneous and “thinly veiled attempt to instill the idea that the ‘Nation-State’ is eternally defined by nature itself.” A glance at the map, the Padanian historian tells us, would show that only 130,000 square kilometres of Italian State territory are peninsular. The remaining 120,000 “are clearly part of the European continental land mass.” Therefore, Padania is geographically as well as historically pointed towards Europe and its “geographical position in the center of Europe has made it a strategic area for communications, and also for warfare.” Thus Padania’s history must be narrated to re-situate it as different, not only politically from the modern Italian central state, but also historically as an entity which was never a natural part of the rest of the Italian territory. Old ways of understanding and speaking of Italy must be swept away, and “When we hear people talk about the ‘northern part of the Italian peninsula’ in reference to the Alpine-Padanian regions, we must object to the incontrovertible abuse of this expression.”

In a segment of the *Foundations of a Nation* document titled “The Padanians Rise to Consciousness”, the Padanian narrator attacks even the notion of linguistic compatibility by claiming that the language of the Padanian area is not a dialect of Italian, but rather an entirely different language group: “According to distinguished scholars, the Romance languages (neo-Latin dialects) are divided into two large groups: Western, including Gallo-Romance and Iberic idioms; and Eastern, including Italia and Romanian.” The border between the two language groups apparently (conveniently) runs right along the southern border of the would-be state of Padania.<sup>28</sup> But, the author continues, knowledge of this linguistic border “is rigorously forbidden in Italian schools so as to make people believe that our modes of speech are dialects of Italian.” Of course the point that most residents of the Italian State can freely communicate with one another is bypassed in the haste to establish—scientifically— that the

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The orthodox view appears to contradict this assertion, placing all of Italy together within the romance language category. See Christopher Moseley, R.E. Asher, eds., *Atlas of the World's Languages* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 247; Bernard Comrie, Stephen Mathews, Maria Polinsky, eds., *The Atlas of Languages: The Origin and Development of Language Throughout the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 40.

people of southern Italy are *different*. With the Padanian Declaration of Independence, it became crucial to enact a unique culture in order for secession to take place. Since the doctrine of Self-determination is lauded as the linchpin behind the right of Padania to sovereignty, the Padanian *self* must be determined. Economic prosperity has never been the appropriate theme for narrating a unique culture, and so the Padanians must proclaim their cultural difference as historical. The Padanian narrator freely acknowledges that the culture of the North is not simply its tax base: “the Padanian identity cannot be explained a priori as the reaction to the oppressive tax burden, the mafia, uncontrolled immigration, the arrogant bureaucracy, the inefficiency of the Italian State...etc....The reality is that we Padanians identify Rome and the unitary Italian State as the carrier of all these threats to the progress and stability of OUR life in civil society.”<sup>29</sup> This litany of the faults of Rome cleverly strengthens the colonialist metaphor, while serving to outline the cultural differences by implication. Without saying so explicitly, the Padanian historian implies identity through negativity. Whatever Rome *is* (oppressive, corrupt, out of control, arrogant and bureaucratic, inefficient), Padania *is not* (liberal, incorrupt, controlled, polite and decentralised, efficient). Thus being subject to all the evils of Rome will taint the good Padanian regions. But does inefficiency in the central government thereby create a unique culture among whatever people wish to impose efficiency? Is this what self-determination is meant to achieve? The re-telling of Padanian history illustrates very clearly the means by which a unique culture can be “found” among people of the same language, religion and geographic region. Moreover, once this unique culture is asserted, its leaders can easily argue that separation is necessary for survival, as in this case: “The Italian State, the Italian rule-by-party/vote-pandering system is a beast afflicted with incurable ills which thrives on forcibly and deceptively holding together Peoples of different civic traditions.” Thus not only will Padania fall ill with the same fatal disease if it is not set free, but it also should be free based on the purity of its “civic tradition”.

The medical metaphor of the Italian State as sick and on the verge of infecting Padania continues throughout the document. The Italian State is “impotent”, it has “been infected” by the “cancer of the Mafia” and it uses its “transmission mechanism” to infect Padania as well. Furthermore, the demographics of the South of Italy combined with Padania’s negative rate of population growth have created a “risk of moving down the path to extinction.” The purity of Padanian identity is also threatened by the laxity of Italian immigration control and the “massive non-European immigration” which “causes serious problems of public order” and “endangers the identity of our Peoples.” Secession is once

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Emphasis in original.

again called upon to protect the dubious idea of cultural and racial purity, regarding migration and immigration as invasion: "The point is that a People have the human right not to be invaded by other Peoples, thus risking to become foreigners in their own land." Only if a culture believes in its own inviolable purity and distinctiveness can it ever become a "foreigner" in its own land—by refusing to accept and embrace difference as a necessary contribution to its *self*.

The Padanian focus on the fact that the immigration is "non-European" is no accident—it is part of a tactic of identifying Padania with Europe (efficient, wealthy, successful) and distancing the south of Italy as something "other" than European (lazy, poor, corrupt). In a section of the Padanian narrative called "Padania Towards a Europe of the Peoples and of the Regions", a specific vision is set forth of Padania as a unique regional voice within Europe. But the Europe envisioned by Padanian leaders is one which encourages local authority in the regions and avoids "mere transfer of power from the bureaucratic State capitals to the super-bureaucratic institutions of Brussels." In a decentralised Europe of the Regions, Padania would shine as a local power and become further differentiated from its southern neighbour. The Padanian European vision is one in which southern Italy is isolated by its inefficiency and corruption. For the Padanian narrator, localism "is a European-wide phenomenon which the retarded and provincial Italian State, culturally and economically mired in the backwaters of Europe, cannot and wishes not to see for evident reasons of self-interest." Ironically, (since the Italian State is a full member of the European Union) the Padanian version of Europe—the true Europe, the one of regional autonomy—excludes the south of Italy.

The distancing tactic employed in this Padanian text resembles the phenomenon formulated by Edward Said as *Orientalism*. The Orientalist perspective "refers to pervasive patterns of representation of cultures and societies that privilege a self-confidently 'progressive,' 'modern' and 'rational' Europe over the putatively 'stagnant,' 'backward,' 'traditional' and 'mystical' societies of the Orient."<sup>30</sup> Strangely, in the Padanian narrative, the "Orient" is southern Italy. While Padanian historical narrative cannot give southern Italy a past within the Ottoman Empire, it links the south with all of the same undesirable characteristics usually associated in the European mind with the Orient. This othering tactic is not necessarily limited to the Ottoman/Christian dichotomy, but includes a whole symbolic geography of Europe which distinguishes among axes between eastern and western churches,

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Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) cited in Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51 no. 1 (Spring 1992): pp. 1-15.

communist and non-communist states, and northern and southern cultures. As Bakić-Hayden and Hayden point out, a rhetoric similar to orientalism.

has been preserved and applied in regard to another orientation of post-war symbolic geography, one in which an underdeveloped, poor south is contrasted with a developed, rich north. This modern economic geography of the world reflects and continues an older European political geography in which “undisciplined,” passionate” peoples of southern Europe (e.g. Italy, Spain, Greece) were contrasted to the industrious, rational cultures of the north.<sup>31</sup>

So even though most of the region which is historicised as Padania in this narrative has been referred to as “Italian” for centuries, there is a conscious and overt need on the part of the secessionist leaders to dissociate Padania from Italy and its Oriental (negative) connotations. This dissociation extends even to the Pope—Padanian documents refer to the medieval history of the region and describe Papal rule as a “conservative, sometimes oppressive regime”, which had a stagnant economy (unlike the north) and “worst of all, the Papal State acted as a barrier (both political and cultural) between the South of Italy and Europe.”<sup>32</sup> Thus Padanian texts vividly illustrate the political uses of historical narratives and the norm-creating potency of the performative language used to declare and enact a separate people. By definition, because of the requirements for state recognition and the understanding of self-determination, secessionist movements can not be neutral. They must rely upon narratives of othering and difference, and also by definition exclusion of that difference. But as the situations of Québec and Padania have shown, not only do these attempts to separate and purify identities make for hostile and violent politics, they are also futile since even so-called “distinct” and “unique” cultural identities must be created in an interactive process with the Other.

### **The Kanaka Maoli**

The population of Hawai‘i literally embodies the contradiction between a purifying preservationist narrative of secession and the inescapable mutuality of human interaction. In the two centuries since the isolation of the indigenous peoples was breached by the arrival of Europeans, a diverse ethnic mixture has come to populate the islands which includes, along with the native Kanaka Maoli, Caucasian, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Korean, and other Pacific Island peoples. The Hawaiian spirit of *aloha* has

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<sup>31</sup>

Ibid., p. 4.

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*Fighting for the Freedom of North-Italy* (no author given). Available from <http://151.4.58.42/eng/intro.htm>

permeated the cultural mix and resulted in the ready acceptance of intermarriage and mutual respect among the different cultures, to such an extent that few individuals would claim unmixed heritage of any sort, and pure Kanaka Maoli have practically vanished. Therefore it is all the more surprising that there is a strong (if tiny) secessionist movement afoot in this multiculturalist archetype, and that it is overtly based on racial criteria. No one denies that the history of Hawai'i has been one of exploitation and dishonest dealings by the United States. Beginning in 1893 when the Hawaiian monarch was overthrown by resident Americans in cooperation with the U.S. military, the United States acted unilaterally and unlawfully by annexing Hawai'i (1898) and turning it into a territory of the United States (1900). Further, in 1946, when Hawai'i was designated by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory and placed under the authority of the United States, the option for full independence was never given, and the 1959 vote on the question of Hawai'i's immediate statehood included U.S. military personnel and others who had resided on the islands for only a year. In 1993, the U.S. Congress finally passed a law known as the "Apology Resolution" which officially apologised for the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i and recognised that "the indigenous Hawaiian people never directly relinquished their claims to their inherent sovereignty."<sup>33</sup> Given the discrimination and socio-cultural disadvantages which accompanied U.S. territorial administration and statehood, many of Kanaka Maoli descent feel entitled to reparations. These range from better funding for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, to some form of autonomy over public lands, to fully-fledged sovereignty.

Sovereignists claim that Hawai'i is currently in a state of occupation but is undergoing a transition phase towards restoration of the original Hawaiian Nation. On January 16, 1994, a coalition of sovereignty organisations gathered in Honolulu to endorse a document called *The Proclamation of Restoration of the Independence of the Sovereign Nation State of Hawai'i*.<sup>34</sup> Apart from declaring independence, the Proclamation authorised the Council of Elders ('Aha Kapuna), to act as Hawai'i's provisional government and to take steps towards restoration and the development of a constitution. The Proclamation narrates a story of injustice—the invasion and suppression of an indigenous people. It consistently speaks for "We, the Kanaka Maoli" who reestablish their Sovereign Nation and "join the World Community of States." Its very title emphasises that this people do not claim self-

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United States Public Law 103-150. (November 23, 1993)

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*Proclamation of Restoration of the Independence of the Sovereign Nation State of Hawai'i* (January 16, 1994). Available from <http://www.hawaii-nation.org/hawaii-nation.html/proclamall.html>.

determination to create a new state but to restore a historical one. "We have resided here forever, from time immemorial. We have displaced no other people. We, the Kanaka Maoli, are the original inhabitants and occupants of these Islands." Kanaka Maoli historical narrative does not list character traits or language differences in order to demonstrate the distinctness of this people. Rather, the Kanaka Maoli define themselves strictly and simply by genetic relationship. "The current citizens of the Independent and Sovereign Nation of Hawai'i consist of all those who are descendants of the Kanaka Maoli prior to the arrival of the first westerners in 1778, and [those who are descendants of persons] who have lived in Hawai'i prior to the illegal overthrow, invasion and occupation of January 17, 1893". This is constitutional nationalism in its clearest form, and especially striking in a population famous for the breadth of its genetic mix. The strictness of this definition of nation does allow political space for those who have some Kanaka Maoli heritage but do not identify themselves with the national movement, or for people with a Hawaiian lineage more recent than 1893. Although possibly fourth or fifth generation, these "habitual residents of Hawai'i" must apply for citizenship by means of naturalisation, according to the Proclamation. Thus the Kanaka Maoli identity performative language is stunning in the sharpness of its delineation, and therefore in the finality of its exclusion.

One of the primary reasons for restoring sovereignty is the feeling by the sovereigntist Kanaka Maoli that their culture is in danger of being wiped out. The Proclamation declares that the new state will revive the traditions of the pre-1778 nation: "We, the Kanaka Maoli, today embody within our governmental structure traditional customs and culture of the 'Aha Kūka O Na Kupuna (Council of Elders), based on mutual respect, traditional practice, and family order. Their consultation on many decisions is highly regarded as the basis of all authority and principle, as handed down through generations of teachings." The assumption underlying these sentiments is that ancient traditions can and must be resurrected and preserved from the destructive forces of modernity. That is, the ancient Kanaka Maoli culture is something knowable and reproducible in the late twentieth century; and further, that it is Hawai'i's only salvation. "We must protect our sacred 'aina [land] from such invasion and exploitation, to liberate it from alien destructive forces, and preserve and protect our Cultural Heritage for future generations, from the devastation of extinction." Designating the land as something "sacred" immediately establishes a relationship with it which has religious connotations in terms of purity and reverence. In conjunction with designating the land of Hawai'i as sacred, the Kanaka Maoli have associated non-Hawaiians (aliens) with destruction, and their own native traditions with preservation. Such clearly drawn social boundaries preclude the possibility that non-native Hawaiians might wish to love and protect and claim

Hawai'i as their home also. This narrative establishes the Kanaka Maoli not only as a people with cultural traditions in need of respect and protection, but as the sole legitimate arbiters of the fate of Hawaiian territory. The Proclamation describes those non-Kanaka Maoli who now "illegally occupy our Territory" in no uncertain terms as "Those who disregard the Principles and Rule of the Law of Nations, Justice, Integrity, Morality of Character, and Humanity, by force and acts of aggression". Institutionalised national exclusivity of this sort can only lead to bad feeling between the Kanaka Maoli and all the various peoples who call Hawai'i their home.

Exactly one year after the Proclamation was read out, the Kapuna (elders) met to sign the national constitution.<sup>35</sup> As a document which details the type of law and government a society will have, how its powers will be both mandated and circumscribed, a constitution may be considered essential reading for theorists of political narrative. The Hawaiian Constitution does not disappoint. It begins with a Preamble describing the members of the nation not as "We the People", but as "We the Kanaka Maoli Nationals and Descendants". As a people who have been "subjected to the international crimes of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity", the Preamble asserts, the Kanaka Maoli have a right to self-determination and to "freely determine to restore Our political, economic, social, and cultural rights".<sup>36</sup> The difficulty is that the new Hawaiian State, as envisaged in the Constitution, is one which creates legal discrimination against non-Kanaka Maoli citizens, regardless of whether they have resided in Hawaii since 1778 or wish to become naturalised. There are officially two separate types of citizenship defined in the Hawaiian Constitution, and they are endowed with different rights. The Kanaka Maoli are referred to as "Nationals" and defined in Article XV as "any person who by birth or national origin and ancestry is a descendant of the original inhabitants who prior to 1778 exercised sovereignty over the Archipelago of Hawai'i." The second definition, "Citizens, Naturalized", covers anyone not descended from the original inhabitants and is defined as "all persons who qualify and choose to become citizens of the Nation." The qualifications are left open for enactment by the Legislative General Assembly. The differences between these two classes of citizens are apparent throughout the Constitution. The constitutional structure of the Hawaiian government is based on a tripartite system with

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*Hawai'i Constitution* (16 January 1995). Available from <http://www.hawaii-nation.org/hawaii-nation.html/constitution.html>.

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The claim of genocide against the Kanaka Maoli has never been made legally, and would be difficult to substantiate, but the use of the term has great shock value in confirming them as victims of great evils and therefore entitled to serious reparations.

Legislative, Executive and Judiciary branches. The proposed Hawaiian Legislative General Assembly contains two parts, the Na Kapuna Council and the Citizen's Assembly. The former shall consist only of Kanaka Maoli Nationals, while the latter shall consist of "56 Nationals" and "56 Citizens". The duties of the Na Kapuna Council include laws relating to "the preservation of Hawaiian cultural values" or "maintaining cultural values". Consent by the General Assembly may occur concerning the passage of Bills on cultural values, but it is not necessary as "the Council law shall have supremacy". The Executive Administration consists of "the Head of State, a Deputy Head of State, and all Ministries established for the purposes of executing the laws and business of the Nation." The office of the Head of State or Deputy Head of State shall *only* be held by a person "who is a Kanaka Maoli National and Descendant". Thirdly, the Judiciary consists of National Tribunals as the Legislative General Assembly sees fit, and one Supreme Tribunal. All judges are to be selected by the Na Kapuna Council, and "Every judge shall be a Kanaka Maoli National". Thus, the Hawaiian Constitution describes a State in which there are two classes of citizens with one, the "Nationals", definitively privileged over the other in exercising governmental power. Of the three branches of government, one - the judiciary - is entirely closed off to non-nationals; one - the legislature - restricts membership to one half of one of the two chambers; and the third - the executive - allows non-nationals only as appointed to the ministries with the consent of the Na Kapuna Council.

Despite its references to international law and human rights, the Hawaiian Constitution contains provisions which would alarm the most jaded of peace negotiators. Not only do non-Hawaiian descendants have limited access and representation in government, but they are constitutionally locked out of the communal land tenure system which is part of the Restoration of the Hawaiian regime. "Prior to 1778, the Kanaka Maoli Nationals lived in a communal land tenure system, and every National had the right and privilege to receive and acquire the use of land." Once the "transition" to an independent Hawaiian State has been made, all National land will be held in trust "for the Kanaka Maoli Nationals" by the government. Thus not only will all private ownership of land vanish but only individuals of the proper lineage may apply for use of the communal land. Institutionalised discrimination of this sort can never make reparation for past wrongs, it can only further exacerbate the friction among the various groups that make up Hawai'i's richly various culture.

#### **Secessionist Narratives and the Uses and Disadvantages of History**

Any examination of secessionist texts soon reveals an assumption shared by them all—that the nation in question had a common history and that it was glorious and deserving

of preservation through the continued reverence and traditions of the national population today. But what is also clear is that history can be narrated in many ways, and that the politics of secessionist identity performance require it to be told in an exclusivist, boundary-drawing fashion. The secessionist nation (“We”) performs its identity against non-nationals (“Others”) in ways which neglect the necessity of the non-national for the identity of the nation.

Historical narrative is the tool used for this boundary drawing, and as such its meanings have become as contested as the territorial space to which it so often refers. Nietzsche recognised and criticised this use and abuse of history, considering it an encumbrance on mankind. He wished for history to be used in the pursuit of life being lived, rather than that lives should be dedicated to the perceived fulfillment of history. Nietzsche argued that man could only feel happiness during moments of forgetting, or feeling unhistorically, since history burdens us by circumscribing our identities.<sup>37</sup> He compares humanity to animals, reminding us of how much the latter are unburdened by memories of a historical past. Mankind cannot live without a memory, but, Nietzsche might argue, the essence of truly living occurs in the space between remembering and forgetting. That is, we must remember in order to know who we were, and forget in order to become what we may be. The disadvantages of historical narratives, for Nietzsche, are that they focus on the past to an extent which limits the possibilities of the present and the future. In terms of the secessionist texts here, the historical narratives have been used to limit the terms of identity of the particular groups. Because their Frenchness, their Northern Italian-ness, or their Hawaiian-ness was narrated historically in certain circumscribed ways, these secessionist groups now maintain that their current and future identities must perpetuate these patterns. But Nietzsche’s critique equates historical identities with death: they are the identities of the dead, and therefore to maintain the pattern of the past is to *mortify* your own identity, excluding the possibilities of the living present.

Nietzsche provides a useful schematic of humanity’s three types of relationships to history and how history is necessary for life. These uses of history contain recognisable echoes of secessionist narratives. He describes the first relationship as *Monumental History*, which involves the belief that “the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this chain unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human peaks...that is the fundamental idea of the faith in humanity”.<sup>38</sup> But, Nietzsche argues, it is this

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Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.” *Untimely Meditations*, transl. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

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*Ibid.*, p. 68.

demand for eternal greatness that causes great conflict. Monumental history inspires foolish courage and fanaticism. "As long as the past has to be described as worthy of imitation, as imitable and possible for a second time, it of course incurs the danger of becoming somewhat distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention; there have been ages, indeed, which were quite incapable of distinguishing between a monumentalized past and a mythical fiction".<sup>39</sup> Monumental history clearly plays a role in secessionist narratives in the way that the past is told as a story of grand struggle and the mythical ancestors whose toil and oppression shall not have been suffered in vain. Secessionist movements do not confess to the faults in their national histories: to the violence against indigenous peoples, or the exploitative use of cheap immigrant labour. National histories must be exalted as sacred and worthy of political enshrinement through sovereign statehood.

Nietzsche's second category of man's relationship to history is that of *Antiquarian History*. The antiquarian historian is a preservationist, painstakingly recording the conditions of his existence for the generations to come. This kind of history builds on the sense of communal continuity: "the contentment of the tree in its roots, the happiness of knowing that one is not wholly accidental and arbitrary but grown out of a past as its heir, flower and fruit, and that one's existence is thus excused and indeed, justified".<sup>40</sup> But Nietzsche finds antiquarian history to be problematic in its extreme restrictedness of vision. Everything old and of the past is taken to be worthy of equal reverence, while everything new is rejected. He compares antiquarian history to a tree's awareness of its roots. It judges its roots by the size of its visible branches, but if "the tree is in error as to this, how greatly it will be in error regarding the rest of the forest around it!—for it knows of the forest only that in it which obstructs or favours it and nothing beside."<sup>41</sup> Antiquarian history, too, is a recognisable part of secessionist political discourse. The attempt to recreate the past as the only system worthy or valuable, and the rejection of change (and the present) as destructive and threatening bear all the hallmarks of Nietzsche's typology. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the wishes of the Kānaka Maoli to resurrect all of the ancient patterns of governance, including the land tenure system, simply because these patterns were theirs historically.

The third relationship is one Nietzsche describes as *Critical History*. This is the

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ibid., p. 70.

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ibid., p. 74.

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ibid.

necessary mode because if man is to live, he "must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it". This sweeping away of the past is necessary to liberate mankind from the burden of history. Furthermore, no group is immune because "every past...is worthy to be condemned—for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them."<sup>42</sup> But, Nietzsche warns, critical history is difficult and dangerous, since it is always hard to know when to stop—the complete denial of the past results in a denial of one's own participation in the chain of human history, and therefore also of the responsibility of being human.

According to Nietzsche, the best we can do is maintain knowledge of our inheritance and try to combat it with the cultivation of a new instinct, a new habit. The logical outcome of critical history is in fact the downfall of nationalist identities, since a thoroughly scrupulous look into any nation's past will crumble its monumental and antiquarian pretensions. This is what E.J. Hobsbawm meant when he wrote that a serious historian of nations or nationalism could never be a dedicated nationalist: "Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so."<sup>43</sup> It is critical history which is missing from (indeed which vitally threatens) secessionist historical renderings. Rather than examining their histories as burdens and restraints on their present, secessionists must persist in the veneration of the past, in both monumental and antiquarian terms. Such uses and abuses of history fail to create a "new origin" which will bequeath a less violent and weak legacy upon the future. The critical relationship is a frightening way to engage with history, but it is a necessary one if the cycle of violent encounters is ever to cease. As Michel Foucault commented, "The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."<sup>44</sup> For Foucault, history can only be seen as productive to the extent that it exposes the discontinuities of our existence. It is this vision of history which secessionist politics obscures and obstructs in its attempt to lay claim to a purity of the present and the worthiness of the past.

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*Ibid.*, p. 76.

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E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 12.

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Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. with introduction by D.F. Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977): pp. 139-164.