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# Regional identity in late nineteenth-century England; discursive terrains and rhetorical strategies

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Regional identity and regionalist politics in contemporary England seem muted and indistinct when compared with some other European regions. It is therefore unsurprising that historians have failed to discover unambiguous regional identities in the past. However, this article investigates one possible exception in a case study of a peripheral English region. Adopting concepts of narrative, discourse and rhetoric, it examines the discursive moments and rhetorical strategies of spatial identity in nineteenth-century Cornwall. Evidence of a tentative regionalism is marshalled in order to reflect on the usefulness of social scientific approaches to discourse and rhetoric for understanding a specific place identity of late nineteenth-century England. While they provide a handy toolkit for the regional historian they also hint at the limits as well as the possibilities of applying discourse analysis to the past and require supplementing with the concepts of power and context.

**KEYWORDS** identity, discourse, rhetoric, region, Cornwall, temperance, Church of England

The historical consensus has been that regional identity in England remains a “difficult and elusive entity”.<sup>1</sup> In the past as much as the present English regions were “in large degree simply ghosts”.<sup>2</sup> If regions have little meaning beyond lines on the map serving political and administrative convenience then it is hardly a surprise that English regionalism is the “dog that never barked”.<sup>3</sup> Yet it was assumed that regions are not just the perceptions of historians and geographers; they can also be “conscious regions”, places where the inhabitants had a sense of their own identity.<sup>4</sup> According to Edward Royle, a region might be an administrative unit, but equally it could be a “zone of human activity” or even “a feeling, a sentimental attachment to territory shared by like-minded people”. He urged historians to

jettison an over-rigid attachment to one definition of region or to twentieth-century templates and concern themselves primarily with the view from the bottom, what a region meant (if anything) to the person living there.<sup>5</sup> John Marshall echoed this, arguing that the growth of regional consciousness in many parts of Britain was “almost totally unexplored”.<sup>6</sup> More recently, it has been claimed that “identity formation” has been “increasingly the subject of historical investigation”.<sup>7</sup> Yet analysis of regional identity formation in England by historians has been relatively sparse. This reflects a wider phenomenon, as the work of regional historians occurred largely in isolation from a growing body of literature from geographers and regional scientists on regions and their evolving and increasingly elastic definition of this contested and ambiguous term.<sup>8</sup>

In this article I ask how far a regional history informed by explicit social theory can expose the mechanisms of a sub-state territorial identity in the past and extend our understanding of regional identity. In what follows I first identify Cornwall as a place in England often cited as possessing a “strong” regional identity. I then introduce some conceptual approaches to regional formation before stressing the role of language in the construction of regions. Third, specific approaches to narrative, discourse and rhetoric are applied to Cornwall in the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, I reflect how far the employment of social theory helps us towards a deeper historical understanding of regional identity.

## The hunt for regions

The majority of historical work on regional identities in England is confined to the north of the country. Indeed, the absence of work on other regions speaks volumes. Even in the north, after an ambitious comparison with the Basque Country, John Walton concluded that the idea of a “North West” lacked any real meaning until the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> However, other northern regions are claimed to have deeper roots. The North East is sometimes singled out by scholars of contemporary English regionalization as the only region with a discernible territorial identity.<sup>10</sup> This is partly because its academics have constructed a powerful narrative of regional identity, claiming that remoteness from London, a mediaeval legacy provided by the bishopric of Durham and the kingdom of Northumbria, and an identity based on heavy industry and mining are taken as evidence that “North East England has had a marked political identity for centuries”.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the conclusions of extended work on the historical identity of the North East clashed sharply with the received wisdom. Far from a coherent regional identity with continuity over the centuries Adrian Green and A. J. Pollard concluded that the North East has “not been a coherent and self-conscious region over the *longue durée*”.<sup>12</sup>

If the North East only enjoyed an intermittently visible historic identity then other English regions have been virtually invisible. With one exception. Historians of English regionalism will often note Cornwall as a second example of a “strong” regional identity.<sup>13</sup> Cornwall is prone to be viewed through a prism of exceptionalism, both by its own historians and by others.<sup>14</sup> Eric Hobsbawm pointed out that

“the Cornish are fortunate to be able to paint their regional discontents in the attractive colours of Celtic tradition, which makes them so much more viable”.<sup>15</sup> For Bryan Ward-Perkins Cornwall “remains the one part of England where not all indigenous inhabitants automatically describe themselves as ‘English’”.<sup>16</sup> This claim is extended into the past. Green and Pollard observe that Cornwall “was, and still is” the most distinctive county in England, “with an identity as strong as that of Brittany”.<sup>17</sup> David Neave, while dismissing the possibility that counties in England could also be regarded as regions in the nineteenth century, noted the exception of Cornwall, which he defined as a “culture region” notwithstanding its county administrative status.<sup>18</sup>

Yet there are those who hesitate to describe nineteenth-century Cornwall as a region. After all, the descriptor “region” was not applied to it by contemporaries, who preferred either “county” or, almost as commonly, “Duchy”, with its hints of a special status, a vestige of “Cornwall’s constitutional accommodation”.<sup>19</sup> Some observers have been over-influenced by the existence of a cultural and political nationalist movement in twentieth-century Cornwall, enthusiastically asserting that Cornwall is “a historic nation whose claims to statehood have never really disappeared”.<sup>20</sup> Others see Cornwall “sitting ... somewhere between region and nation”.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, others unproblematically read Cornwall’s current administrative status as an English county back into the seventeenth century.<sup>22</sup> Yet attempts to clarify Cornwall’s exact status miss the point. Defining a sense of place as a county community, a regional identity or a national aspiration is less important than recognizing the presence of a spatial identity cohering around the territory of Cornwall. The approach I take here is to recognize this plasticity and resist attempts at a rigid classification, preferring to view Cornwall as a sub-state territory with a de-facto county status, but a potential regional vocation which contains narratives of nationality.<sup>23</sup>

## Social theory and regional formation

Historians of national identity now agree that nations are “discursive terrains”. Language as rhetoric, narrative and ideology plays a critical part in constructing symbolic meanings, re-interpreting cultural practices and building mental boundaries around people and places.<sup>24</sup> Luis Castells and John Walton point out how regions also required the invention of “a distinctive culture that is capable of forging and sustaining a distinct identity of which the inhabitants are conscious”.<sup>25</sup> Like nations therefore, regions can also be viewed as “imagined communities”, constructed through representations, texts and practices and the narratives and discourses adopted by both insiders and outsiders.<sup>26</sup> Regional identities in the past were therefore “discursive products”. But historians have paid relatively little attention to the mechanics of the discourses that underpinned a regional sense of belonging. In practice there is constant slippage from the “images and perceptions of territory that contemporaries carried about with them” and the representations and discourses that carry identity myths to *post-facto* reconstructions of culture zones. Moreover, while a rich body of theory exists around the formation of group identity, historians have focused on identifying those factors determining an

individual's consciousness of belonging to a wider group or specifying which identities provided the strongest explanation for collective action and why. This focus on the role of identities in individual agency and action is clearly important but nonetheless detracts attention from the history of the identities themselves, how they function and how they change over time.

Regions, residing at a scale somewhere between locality and nation-state, give rise to a sense of place and belonging and to spatial identities. They can be created and changed by influences flowing from either direction—regionalization, involving state-centred policies imposed on regional problems, or regionalism, “the aspirations and activism of the concerned inhabitants of a region”.<sup>27</sup> The former, while over the long run capable of creating regional identity, is top-down and exogenous; the latter is bottom-up and relies on the agency of social actors in the region itself. Martin Jones and Gordon Macleod also usefully distinguish between these, which they term “regional spaces” and “spaces of regionalism”.<sup>28</sup> A wide variety of possible regions exist although only some are established as such in the dominant spatial discourse. The geographer Anssi Paasi emphasizes the role of language in “spatial socialization”.<sup>29</sup> More specifically, he proposes that the symbolic construction of space is based on a dialectic between two types of language. The first is a language of difference, distinguishing one place or region from another. The second is a language of integration, homogenizing the spatial experiences of a place or region. These twin processes, of differentiation and integration, are clearly central to any understanding of identity formation and for Paasi the “production and reproduction of the discourses on region are normally crucial in establishing the spatial frames for regional identities”.<sup>30</sup>

All this is intriguing but too often maddeningly imprecise. For instance, Paasi draws our attention to the presence of competing constructions of places and regions and multiple identities jostling each other in shared spaces. Nonetheless, his use of the concept of discourse remains over-generalized and restricted to a structural level. It is unclear how we might identify the hybrid, interleaving discourses he identifies and there are few signposts as to how discourses are produced and transformed in practice. In short, the mechanisms of the production and reproduction of discourses remain obscure and we are given little guidance on the way in which such competing narratives of place might nest within each other or “vie for hegemony within any given space”.<sup>31</sup>

## **Bishops and temperance: the regional politics of nineteenth-century England**

It is only when we identify sites of action, contexts in which discourses become legitimated, taking on a less aethereal shape as they find experience in material action, that we discover the limits of a particular discourse as it encounters other discourses.<sup>32</sup> Identities therefore have to be analyzed in specific contexts. In order to probe the limits of the Cornish identity in the nineteenth century I intend to ground this investigation on two specific sites of action that stretched across the slightly extended generation from the 1840s to the 1880s. The first of these was a

campaign to carve out a separate diocese of the Church of England from the diocese of Exeter that had combined Cornwall and the neighbouring county of Devon since the eleventh century. This demand emerged in 1847 and spluttered on for 30 years until success was achieved. It was quickly followed in the early 1880s by a shorter-lived and unsuccessful second campaign for legislation to close public houses on a Sunday. This flurry of temperance activity was the final throw of the dice for the United Kingdom Alliance's campaign, launched in 1853, seeking to devolve to local districts the power to ban the sale of alcohol. These campaigns at one level were typical nineteenth-century pressure group politics. But the elites who led them also corralled narratives of place, resorting to those narratives to generate and maintain support.

In 1883 several Sunday closing bills were laid before the House of Commons, including bills from Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, the Isle of Wight, Monmouthshire and Cornwall. Significantly, only Monmouthshire won the right for its people to vote on closing pubs on Sundays, in line with the other Welsh counties. Indeed, these bills had been triggered by the passing of the Welsh Sunday Closing Act in 1881. Sunday closing was one element of a nonconformist-led, distinctly Welsh, democratic politics that, by the early 1890s, had "persuaded Parliament itself to accept the principle that the United Kingdom consisted of four nations, not three, and that 'Wales' had a right to expect distinctive legislative treatment".<sup>33</sup> The politics of temperance possessed meanings in terms of the relationships between the nations of Britain, establishing Wales on a par with Scotland, where the Forbes Mackenzie Act of 1853 had closed pubs on Sundays a generation earlier.

If temperance campaigns in Wales reflected a politics of identity then did campaigns in the English counties play a similar role, reflecting regional and local identities? Those counties pressing for Sunday Closing in 1883 were all on the periphery of England, implying a possible tension with the centre. The campaign which came closest to succeeding, within one vote of victory in the House of Lords in July 1883, was the Sales of Intoxicating Liquor on Sunday (Cornwall) Bill. This was backed by a petition of nearly 120,000 names in 1882, equal to 56 per cent of the adult population of Cornwall. Such a level of support greatly exceeded the petitions of 89,000 presented from Northumberland and 60,000 from Durham (33 per cent and 11 per cent respectively of their adult populations). One reason for the level of support in Cornwall was the place of local option as a central plank of nonconformist politics. Over two-thirds of those attending a place of worship in Cornwall in 1851 chose to go to nonconformist chapels. But was the greater support for Sunday Closing in Cornwall merely a function of its nonconformist strength? Or, as in Wales, did aspects of territorial or ethnic identity shape its temperance politics? And what were the narratives at the heart of these identity discourses?

### **Narratives of Cornish identity**

Margaret Somers points out how we need to incorporate a more historicized understanding of narratives of identity.<sup>34</sup> We might specifically ask how public narratives of Cornishness in the nineteenth century incorporated a process of emplotment.

Cornwall and the Cornish are now firmly secured within Celtic narratives. For Keith Snell and Paul Ell nineteenth-century Cornwall resembled Wales in having a “Celtic heritage”.<sup>35</sup> However, this conceptual narrative (a concept or explanation constructed by academics) has its history. It was Edward Lhuyd who first identified the similarities between the languages of the peoples of peripheral western Britain and France and applied the description “Celtic” to them.<sup>36</sup> The survival of the Cornish language into Lhuyd’s time guaranteed the Cornish a place in his Celtic family and writers in Cornwall thereafter intermittently employed this ethnonym.<sup>37</sup> Its use noticeably increased in the mid-nineteenth century. P. S. Morrish outlines the metamorphosis of the arguments of the campaigners for a Cornish diocese, noting a qualitative shift between the genesis of the campaign in the 1840s and its most intense phase in the 1860s.<sup>38</sup> Part of this entailed a narrative of Celtic descent and an ethnic frontier between “Celtic” Cornwall and “Saxon” Devon. The moment at which the Cornish antiquarian class re-discovered their Celticity can be dated quite explicitly. In 1860 an archaeological paper by Sir Gordon Wilkinson, published in Cornwall’s leading antiquarian journal, the *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, led to heightened contact with the Cambrian Society in Wales. Enthused by this, members of the Royal Institution rushed to sign up as Celts: “we are here at the utmost verge of the Celtic system; we want to connect our local antiquities with the antiquities of other Celtic tribes” stated their President.<sup>39</sup> From this point, campaigners for a Cornish diocese began to employ the Celtic dimension overtly.

Anthony Smith highlights the role of ethnic myths, memories and symbols as central components in the emergence of nations and nationalism.<sup>40</sup> In the Cornish case a symbolic repertoire was clearly well entrenched by the time that Wladislaw Lach-Szyrma, Rector of Newlyn and the son of a Polish exile, wrote a history of Cornwall in the 1880s after the establishment of the new diocese. Lach-Szyrma adopted the Celtic myth of origin that had solidified in the 1860s. To this he added memories of golden ages before the tenth century and in the seventeenth century. In the former the “glory of Cornwall as an independent nation reached its acme”. In the latter Cornishmen were loyally attached to Church and King, displaying a “natural Celtic conservatism” which was suspicious of the “new ways of the ‘gentlemen up in London’, a feeling not quite extinct now”.<sup>41</sup> Symbols and memories of the high point of the Cornish royalist tradition, when the Cornish had taken their place among the staunchest supporters of King Charles, fitted Lach-Szyrma’s aim of combining Cornwall’s Celtic past with the “simple-hearted, honest, obedient, God fearing ... Celtic people full of Christian zeal and enthusiasm”.<sup>42</sup>

Lach-Szyrma’s narrative leant on the view of the Cornish past constructed by the “fathers of Cornish history”—Richard Carew, William Borlase, Richard Polwhele and Samuel Drew—who wrote their works between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Collectively, these writers had by the 1820s inspired a narrative of difference. A distinct myth of origin and a history of “perpetual struggle against the Saxons” before the arrival of the Normans bequeathed a proto-nationalist public narrative.<sup>43</sup> This constructed the Cornish as a separate people and was eagerly quarried by campaigners for a separate diocese in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. They claimed legitimacy for the idea of the new bishopric by reconstructing

continuity with British bishops of the 800s, the spiritual leaders of “the miserable and despised remnant of the ancient race ... too fully sensible that the day of their independence had for ever departed from them”.<sup>44</sup>

This narrative, regularly repeated in pursuit of the diocese, was closely entwined with the Anglican project. However, there was some opposition. In 1880, when building work had begun on the new Cathedral, a letter to the Liberal and Methodist *West Briton* claimed that “to the majority of the Cornish people” the teaching of the established Church was “distasteful”. Indeed, “if no better use could be found for the ground on which it is to stand, infinitely better to appropriate it to the growth of cabbages”.<sup>45</sup> The existence of at least some dissenting voices at the time of the campaign for a new diocese indicates the presence of plural popular narratives. Methodists employed a different public narrative. In this John Wesley had come into a land of savage barbarians where the established Church was degenerate and complacent, overcame the opposition of that Church and its leaders and transformed the Cornish people into a civilized, industrious and godly people.<sup>46</sup> Like the narrative of difference constructed by supporters of the diocese this shared the presumption that Cornwall and its people were unique. But here uniqueness lay more in their commitment to Methodism than in a history stretching back to the days of a separate pre-Norman diocese. However, Methodist critics did not challenge the history constructed by their Anglican competitors. Indeed, Samuel Drew, one of the “fathers of Cornish history”, was himself a well-known Methodist lay preacher.

The concept of narrative therefore takes us some way towards identifying the public articulation of Cornishness in the later nineteenth century. Moreover, the written, public historical narrative rubbed shoulders with less coherent popular narratives, ones that borrowed from and were influenced by other narratives. This echoes a problem with the narrative concept. There is little sense of how varying dimensions of narrativity interact. We might make a further point. It is implied that narratives change over time.<sup>47</sup> Yet the way in which this happens is unclear. Narratives come and go historically but why some narratives are relatively robust and others more fleeting is not really addressed other than through their implied instrumentality in terms of agents’ empowerment or their relation to material structures of power beyond narrative. Further purchase on this diachronic aspect of identity formation can be obtained by looking in a little more detail at the mechanics of discourse.

## Discourses of Cornishness

Historians tend to apply the term “discourse” in a merely descriptive way. Some use it interchangeably with narrative. For others, discourse equates to a less politically nuanced and more free-floating ideology. Furthermore, when it is subject to greater definition the preference of social and cultural historians is to borrow from literary approaches.<sup>48</sup> Discourse then becomes a linguistic terrain occupied by tropes of figurative language. Historians proceed to pick their way through this landscape, on the way dissecting any metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche or irony they might find. However, discourse analysis encompasses a wide range of approaches spanning the humanities and the social sciences, from the literary

through linguistic approaches to critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology. In this section I want to focus on the discourse analysis of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as a route to a more explicit model, before applying this to the discourses found in later nineteenth-century Cornwall.<sup>49</sup>

Discourses work to produce meanings for groups and individuals. From such a perspective collective identities cannot exist until they are constituted in discourse; “it is not until someone speaks of, or to, or on behalf of a group that it is constituted as a group”.<sup>50</sup> Discourses are structured patterns of language that constitute a linked system of meanings, produced and reproduced by social practice. Laclau and Mouffe assert that such meanings are never fixed, although people constantly struggle to stabilize definitions of society and the individual. Therefore, discourse analysis should be about plotting the course of the struggles to fix meaning. To do this Laclau and Mouffe use a number of key concepts. For them, discourses comprise a collection of “moments” or signs, the meaning of which is determined by their relation to other signs. Moments crystallize around privileged signs which they term “nodal points”. These nodal points are filled with meaning by being equated with and contrasted against other signifiers. Meaning is invested through the construction of chains of equivalence (constructing common features of groups) and difference (contrasting these with the features of other groups). When a nodal point is established and meanings become naturalized or taken for granted the fluctuating meaning of signs is temporarily halted. Such a situation establishes “closure”, when signs are brought together in a particular formation that produces meaning. Closure can only be temporary as there is “always room for struggles over what the structure should look like, what discourses should prevail, and how meaning should be ascribed to the individual signs”.<sup>51</sup> Their interest in how discursive structures are reproduced and transformed makes Laclau and Mouffe’s approach of relevance to a historical perspective on the making and unmaking of discourse. Furthermore, their notion of discourse as fundamentally unstable and subject to change exposes the apparent “objectivity” of dominant discourses as being the result of political processes and struggles.

The principal nodal point of the mid-century discourse of Cornishness was “Cornishman”. Cornish people were relentlessly interpellated by this gendered call to identity, best illustrated in the campaign for a Sunday Closing Bill. At one of the 170 public meetings in support of the campaign in 1881/2 a working man, William Andrew, stated that “Cornishmen ... should now stand as honourable men, and show England what Cornishmen can do today”.<sup>52</sup> The opposition to the Sunday Closing Bill campaign that belatedly emerged during 1882 also adopted a nomination trope of “Cornishmen”. A meeting of victuallers at St Austell concluded that the Bill “had been to a very great extent promoted by travelling preachers who were only in the county two or three years, and were not Cornishmen at all”.<sup>53</sup> Such sentiments echoed the words of the mayor of Truro in 1877 who, on the enthronement of the new bishop, congratulated his audience “as Cornishmen upon the restoration of their ancient rights”.<sup>54</sup>

The sign “Cornishmen” was linked closely to that of “one and all” to construct a logic of equivalence within this discourse. In the eighteenth century the crowd in many parts of England and Wales used this slogan to indicate solidarity and

determination at times of action over corn prices.<sup>55</sup> However, with the decline of food rioting as a collective response in other parts of Britain after 1800 and the continuing predilection of Cornish communities for this form of protest, “one and all” became seen as a peculiarly Cornish motto. By the 1830s

in any matter which recommends itself to the general opinion of the county, a unity of action among all classes appears still to be occasionally manifested. In such cases the Cornish motto ‘One and All’ may be recognized as still possessing some degree of vitality.<sup>56</sup>

The discourse of Cornishness generated during the first quarter of the nineteenth century adopted and adapted “one and all” for its own purposes. In doing so it cut across potential class-based identities. On the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the new cathedral, amongst the mottoes chosen for the ceremonial arches set up in Truro in 1880 we find the ubiquitous “one and all”. After the ceremonies were over it was confidently stated that the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall had “completely won over the hearts of ‘one and all’”, the phrase now entirely stripped of any insurrectionist connotation.<sup>57</sup>

If the logic of equivalence revolved around the moments of “Cornishmen” and “one and all” the logic of difference was constructed around other signs reinforcing Cornish uniqueness. By the 1880s these fell into three types: historical, occupational and racial. The most common moment in the differentiation aspect was that of occupational uniqueness. In 1854, a newspaper editorial had claimed the Cornish were “different” because “the fact of there being a great mining population, and some of them engaged in our fisheries, renders them an independent, and intelligent, and a self-relying people”.<sup>58</sup> Mining, industry and independence in Cornwall were contrasted with farming and, by implication, dependence, in neighbouring Devon. As this argument was deployed in the 1860s to bolster the case for a separate diocese the border between Cornwall and Devon was sharpened in terms of socio-economic structures. Occupational difference was still a moment in the Cornish discourse of the 1880s, although by this time it was being eroded and blurred by the growing economic clouds ominously gathering around the Cornish mines, which were rapidly reducing their workforces.

As occupational differences became a discursive moment increasingly detached from material conditions so a new moment in the logic of difference appeared. The Reverend Reginald Hobhouse wrote in 1860 that the Cornish were “a different race and of a different tone, habits and disposition, to those of Devonshire”.<sup>59</sup> By the mid-1860s this was overlaid by the distinction between Celt and Saxon. Calls for special treatment legitimated by ethnological and racial difference reached their peak in a pamphlet written by the Reverend Lach-Szyrma. He asserted that “no contiguous counties in England contain populations so entirely distinct in race from one another as Devon and Cornwall ... The Cornish ... are mostly Celts ... A distinct race requires a distinct mode of treatment”.<sup>60</sup> The borders between Cornwall and Devon were now not merely socio-economic, but racial, dividing Celtic Cornish from Saxon English.

By the 1870s racial difference was firmly established as a moment in the discourse of Cornishness. A racial identity was also in this decade being extrapolated back to

former times and linked to narratives of historical difference. Lamenting hard times, William Copeland Borlase asked

where is that proud race of stalwart tinnors of whom we have read that in ancient days they formed a separate caste above the common tillers of the soil, and who lived under direct royal protection (though that was another name for royal spoliation) with manners, and customs, and laws all peculiarly their own.<sup>61</sup>

By the 1890s Borlase was speculating about the “basis of the Cornish race” and adapting the idea of racial difference to the discovery that the Cornish scored highly on Beddoe’s index of “nigrescence”.<sup>62</sup>

The discourse of Cornishness in the third quarter of the nineteenth century therefore constructed subject positions of “Cornishmen”, linked to “one and all” and tied back to common myths of origin. These were the master signifiers, organizing a collective identity of Cornishness. They comprised the logic of equivalence for the Cornish subject. Moreover, the discourse combined this logic with history, occupation and race as moments in its logic of difference. Such moments were temporarily fixed in the 1870s and gave voice to a collective identity that had been transformed over the course of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century industrialization.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, such an account of group identity might also seem too structural, positing a set of linguistic structures which then possess the power to regulate the individual. The subject becomes an unfinished product and an effect of discourse rather than an initiator of action. This has prompted some social psychologists to challenge this approach to discourse and instead focus on discursive performance, on the production of identity through interaction, moving from discourses as sets of structures with a regulatory power to their use by agents in everyday discursive performance. In the final section, I will move from discourse as a regulatory structure towards rhetoric, or the way in which discourses were actively used as strategies and how they were deployed in argument in order to counter potential or actual challenges.

## Rhetoric and Cornish campaigning

Ruth Wodak has focused on the discursive strategies adopted in the reproduction of national discourses.<sup>64</sup> In so doing she asked a number of simple questions of the texts she analyzed. These included how persons were named or referred to, what qualities or features were assigned to them and how preferential treatment was justified. Such rhetorical strategies—of nomination, predication (or category construction) and argumentation—help construct an “us” as opposed to “them”. We have met nomination strategies already in discussion of the discourse of Cornishness. But what argumentation strategies were drawn on to support the campaign for a Sunday Closing Bill for Cornwall in the early 1880s?

Cornish Sunday closing was justified by a range of arguments. Many were part of wider British temperance or teetotal discourses, but some overlapped with the discourse of Cornishness. The latter relied on the discourse of difference: the Cornish

were the relics of a grand old race which were [*sic*] in possession of the whole of England before the Saxons came over and the Cornish people preserved characteristics which were recognized as distinct ... Cornwall, especially, because of its love of the virtue of temperance, had a claim upon England for a Sunday Closing Bill, which no other county had.<sup>65</sup>

This gave Cornwall a leadership role which the organizers of the campaign were keen to accept. It was no insult for Cornwall “to be in the van” and “what Cornwall does today will echo from far and wide tomorrow”.<sup>66</sup> Another argumentation strategy however was a demand for equality. Supporters of a bill were simply asking “for the same facilities as have been given to Ireland, Scotland and Wales”.<sup>67</sup> This strategy contrasts starkly with that of the campaigners for a local option in the North East. There, the campaigns were explicitly seen as stepping stones to national legislation, “the North meant to have Sunday Closing for the nation”, stated the Venerable Archdeacon Watkins at a meeting in Darlington in 1883. In the North East activists tended to see county bills as second best, but were prepared to try any route to Sunday Closing, “either by county or national legislation”.<sup>68</sup> A meeting of the Newcastle Temperance Society viewed “with pleasure the agitation in favour of an entire Sunday Closing Bill for Northumberland; but while giving this our most cordial support, we do not slacken our efforts to promote the national measure”.<sup>69</sup> Unlike Cornwall, campaigners in Northumberland and Durham made little reference to historical arguments in support of local bills. Instead, newspaper editors concentrated on the implications of “piecemeal legislation”, agonizing over a “new principle” they were clearly unsure about.

Although campaigners in Cornwall asserted their equality with Ireland, Scotland and Wales rhetorically, here lay the campaign’s Achilles heel and the political limits of the Cornish identity. The most insistent counter-argument levelled against it was that such a bill would be “partial legislation” for an English county. This objection was echoed even in Cornwall, the *West Briton* stating “we are strongly of the opinion that no Government would pass a measure for one county of England. It would be piecemeal legislation brought to an absurdity”.<sup>70</sup> Launching the campaign, Canon Mason had asserted that

most of them were inclined to think there was a good deal of difference between Cornwall and other counties. [But] Cornish people were very happy to be united to England and they did not wish to have home rule (laughter).

The laughter indicated the hedging that took place around this issue. Arguing for equivalence with Wales on the grounds that it was a “sister kingdom”, Mason and others were quick to play the “Celtic” card and claim that the Cornish shared “Celtic blood” with the Welsh. But they stopped short of proposing that Cornwall was not part of England. The latter element existed, but the discourse of Cornishness did not at this point explicitly include it.<sup>71</sup> The reason for the exclusion of this particular rhetorical strategy lay in the power of another discourse of identity—that of Englishness—to achieve a closure and accommodate Cornwall firmly within its boundaries. This was one reason why the Sunday Closing campaign ultimately failed to achieve success despite widespread public support. It was

generally accepted, even by its proponents, that it required “exceptional legislation”. For most observers, that also meant it did not lie “within the range of practical politics”.<sup>72</sup>

Essentially, those expressing a Cornish identity utilized a regionalist discourse, co-existing and indeed feeding into a national discourse of Englishness. Cornishness and Englishness were not contradictory or incompatible; indeed the former could be the building block for the latter. Historical narratives of a close connection between Crown and Cornwall, reproduced via the Duchy of Cornwall, were part of a conservative, royalist tradition looking back to a golden age in the seventeenth century, albeit mediated by reference to Cornish self-identification in earlier times as “ancient Britons”, like the Welsh.<sup>73</sup> Such a conservative royalist discourse was still very evident in the celebrations surrounding the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and the laying of the foundation stone of the new cathedral in 1880. On the “Cornish arch” were placed the arms of four “old Cornish families”. These jostled for attention with the county arms, the ducal coronet and the new coat of arms of the Cornish see. At other places in the town the ubiquitous Cornish motto “One and All” could be seen, but alongside others such as “Welcome to England’s Prince” and “God Bless our Gracious Queen”.<sup>74</sup>

Opposition to the day’s jamborees was aimed at the Bishop and the role of the Freemasons, rather than at the royal connection.<sup>75</sup> The alternative Liberal/Radical, progressive and nonconformist discourse that fuelled the later Sunday Closing Bill campaign was also fundamentally an English discourse, locked into the taken-for-granted assumption that Cornwall’s status was that of an English county. Rhetoric from within this discourse was even less likely to transcend that status than a conservative Cornish royalist tradition bent on romanticizing the role of the Duchy of Cornwall in Cornish life. Instead, it resisted the urge to look backwards and dream of lost golden ages and was unable to escape the dominant territorial discourse of (Cornish) county, (English) nation and (British) Empire.

## Conclusions

In Cornwall, a territorial identity infused campaigns for the devolution of decision-making to a more local level. This spatial identity, with its appeal to “Cornishmen” and “one and all” and its discourse of differentiation, was ubiquitous by the later nineteenth century. But its political limits were met in the campaign for Sunday closing. In this case, campaigners were unable to neutralize their opponents’ claim that a bill for Cornwall alone would lead to “Cornwall being isolated, as it were, from the rest of England”.<sup>76</sup> The presence of a shared discourse of Englishness meant that proponents of the bill could not follow the logic of their own claims for parity with the “sister kingdoms” of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. A restructured Cornish patriotic discourse had constructed Cornwall and its people as “different”. It was influential enough within Cornwall to make an appeal to Cornishness an automatic resort of politicians and newspaper leader-writers alike. Yet, strong in the cultural sphere, it was only weakly articulated in the political. Even Lach-Szyrma, the most prominent contemporary Celticist, wrote of Cornwall as

being “of England” at the same time as he was arguing that the Cornish were racially not English.<sup>77</sup> Celtic categorizations and elite narratives of a myth of origin that was non-English had combined with older elements to produce a territorial identity vigorous enough to sustain the campaign for a Cornish diocese in the middle decades of the century. However, in the struggle for a Sunday Closing Bill it came into conflict with a dominant geo-cultural narrative of Englishness, supplying a set of constraining parameters, practical limits within which the late nineteenth-century Cornish identity was confined. Only when Cornish nationalism appeared in the twentieth century did local narratives begin to transcend this space.<sup>78</sup>

This inability to transcend an over-arching narrative of Englishness in the late nineteenth century locates the Cornish identity as an example of an English regional identity. A “reflective and conscious” region was in the making. But it was not made. Cornwall was also an administrative county and viewed as such within the broader socio-spatial consciousness of British society. Ultimately Cornish regionalism was unable to counter that wider consciousness and a proto-regional identity was consequently unable to escape being represented as a county identity. Later, in the early twentieth century, Cornwall’s brief heyday as a rare example of a self-conscious English region faded into a hybrid identity as either (Celtic) nation or (English) county, or sometimes both. Moreover, the discourses of Celticity and a sense of historical ethnic difference that fuelled the Cornish sense of identity were unavailable in England. It is not that Cornwall was unique in the way appeals to place were mobilized for single-issue campaigns. This could and did happen elsewhere. What made it unique within England was the historicized appeal to a non-English past and the demands for equal treatment with Wales, Scotland and Ireland. This “trans-Celtic” appeal and a narrative poised at the edge of Englishness and teetering on the brink of rejecting that Englishness, was not—could not be—replicated in other English counties and regions.

How far has the range of theories touched on here illuminated our understanding of the construction of regional identity in the light of this example of tentative regionalism? The discourse analysis of Laclau and Mouffe and the approach to rhetoric of Wodak help to clarify the workings of a specific discourse based on territory. They provide a useful toolkit, the concepts of which could be applied to other regions and times. But on their own, such approaches do not determine the limits or consequences of that territorial discourse. Campaigns for Sunday closing ultimately failed within England. Even the Cornish identity discourse had no practical impact as it clashed with more powerful territorial discourses. In Paasi’s terms, the Cornish “region” had not been established in broader social consciousness as part of a regional system in the late nineteenth century. Its failure lay not in the discourse itself or the level of its internal coherence but in its context. Ultimately then, discourse analysis must be supplemented by context in order to comprehend spatial dynamics and the role of regional identities.

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