

Cumbrian Identities: Some Historical Contexts

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The notion of 'Cumbrian' identity is complex and contested. This article provides a critical examination of the idea of Cumbria as a 'region' and as a coherent social, economic and political entity. It argues that 'Cumbria' is a geographical and political expression, with little or nothing to pull it together apart from its assumption of county status in 1974. Setting Cumbria in regional context, and developing a comparison with the Basque Country of northern Spain, emphasizes the very limited development of Cumbrian regional identity during and after the twentieth century.

THE problem of defining regions in an English context has proved enduring and intractable, especially if we regard a region as more than just a shape on the ground, carved out and imposed from above and without by politicians and researchers, to assist the governing process and the capacity to generate comparative statistics, or for the heuristic purposes of academics in pursuit of intermediate levels of understanding between the locality and the nation state. The idea of a region might be thought to entail a shared sense of recognition, identity, even loyalty, among the inhabitants, a common culture and even purpose, perhaps even a shared relationship to or identification with (for example) landscape, topography, speech, artefacts, diet, culture and customs. On such a basis, and even on less demanding assumptions, it is not even clear that England *has* regions, certainly not on the model of continental Europe, with its *Länder*, *Autónomas*, and similar entities, with their extensive devolved powers, elected regional assemblies, cultural policies and patronage of the arts and of academic endeavour. It certainly does not have political regions, with elected governing bodies: the only full-fledged exception, since 2000, has been the London Assembly, which might be regarded as a successor to the London County Council (1889-1965) and the Greater London Council (1965-86, extending much further into the Home Counties), but may be thought too metropolitan to be regarded as a 'region' in the conventional sense.¹ The creation of ten 'Government Office Regions' in 1994, and of Regional Development Agencies in 1997, did not receive direct democratic legitimacy through the establishment of elected bodies with devolved powers, and a determined effort to introduce them fell to heavy defeat in the North-Eastern referendum of 2004, which in turn led to the abandonment of similar initiatives elsewhere in England, including the North-West. A potential, or projected, 'regional moment' around the turn of the millennium seems now to have been placed 'on hold'.² There has been no officially constituted tier of government representing a geographical and political identity 'in the round', between the county and the nation, if we exclude the 'regional' census and agricultural districts, and the old nationalised water authorities, electricity boards and similar single-purpose, not-directly-elected organisations from the equation. There has also been little or nothing in the way of tradition or popular cultural identification on which to found attachment and support for such bodies: indeed, the proposed location of the North-Eastern regional assembly in Newcastle seems to have undermined its credibility in other parts of the region, given the strength and depth of rivalries between Tyne, Wear and Tees.

The absence of a regional level of elected government with significant devolved powers is, in European terms, an unusual omission, a missing tier of government and identity; and in its absence in England it has been the traditional (pre-1974) counties which have attracted and generated loyalty, attachment, symbolism and competitive sporting support. Indeed, fringe organisations such as the Association of British Counties (ABC) and (more controversially) the Dissident Congress still agitate for the maintenance and revitalisation of county loyalties, as part of an agenda to sustain British identities and a stable 'popular geography' against globalisation and the European Union. The Westmorland Association within the ABC is currently proposing a new county flag.³ New creations and divisions at county level, whether amalgamations, secessions or 'metropolitan counties' carved out of older ones to represent conurbations, have encountered apathy, rejection and at times organised resistance. But the strongest working loyalties have been to cities, towns and neighbourhoods, while attempts to construct regions in England have always sought to gain legitimacy and administrative convenience by using counties as their building blocks.⁴

Is Cumbria a region? Nobody has really developed such an idea; but if so, it is also (since 1974) a county, although one lacking in the historical legitimacy conferred on its predecessors, Cumberland, Westmorland and the northernmost hundreds of Lancashire, by the accumulation of a millennium of past life, of ceremony, organisation and associated institutions.⁵ The 'Cumbria' of the eleventh and twelfth centuries seems to have been an Anglo-Scottish entity, and to have disappeared from view in medieval times, before it could generate a persistent identity that might form a basis for a modern region.⁶ No imagined English region has ever been confined to a single county, even when that county is itself a recent amalgamation of older entities. It, or the area covered by the county that was designated in 1974, has formed part of some versions of an imagined North-West; but these constructions emerged mainly from the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially in relation to the Redcliffe-Maud report of 1969 on the restructuring of local government, which contributed to a climate of expectation about imminent change, although it did not in fact propose the creation of Cumbria. Indeed, its own proposals envisaged a division of the far north-western counties into two unitary area councils, one covering Cumberland and north Westmorland, and the other pulling together south Westmorland and Furness with the Lancaster area on the other side of Morecambe Bay. We owe the county of Cumbria as such to the subsequent Conservative government, which was elected in 1970 and produced its own local government White Paper a year later.⁷

Proposals for effective, functioning English regions with a form of devolved government through elected assemblies originated at the time of, and in response to, the Irish Home Rule crisis before the First World War; and various proposals for carving up the map of England were put forward by geographers and historians towards and just after the end of the war, at a time of general questioning and ferment, although the idea promoted by Patrick Geddes and others that regions should be constructed from the grass roots, rather than imposed from above and without, never gained traction. Attempts were made to revive debate, from a more theoretical perspective, on the eve of the Second World War. None of these initiatives gathered momentum, no consensus emerged on how many such regions there should be (and there was

an overlapping vocabulary based on ‘provinces’), while what is now Cumbria was always, and understandably (given its peripheral location and low population density), incorporated into larger blocks of territory.⁸ Several combinations of counties have been proposed as the basis for a North-West ‘region’, almost invariably imposed from top down and the metropolis outwards to be inscribed on the map in the furtherance of manageability and governability. They range from a grand amalgamation of Lancashire with Cheshire and (what is now) Cumbria (the most ambitious version, and the basis for the Government Office Region version of the North-West), through Lancashire, Cumbria and north Cheshire (the proposed north-western ‘province’ of the Redcliffe-Maud report), Lancashire and Cumbria, and Lancashire and Cheshire, to Lancashire south of the Ribble in combination with Cheshire.⁹ On the other hand Charles Phythian-Adams’ historical vision of English ‘cultural provinces’ divided Cumbria between a northern ‘Solway’ district comprising Cumberland and north Westmorland, and the northernmost part of an “‘Irish” sea’ province which included south Westmorland, Kendal and Furness, a vision that almost coincided with Redcliffe-Maud.¹⁰

The North-East makes much stronger claims to regional recognition, although its own identity is really little more coherent, despite the mythology of the ‘Geordie nation’: Newcastle may be a more plausible regional capital than Carlisle, but the valleys and estuaries of Tyne, Wear and Tees do not articulate a convincing integrated region, despite similar economic trajectories and working patterns during the classic Industrial Revolution, its aftermath and its legacy.¹¹ At least the North-East’s sense of a collective self, based on that industrial identity of coal, iron, railways and shipbuilding rather than any earlier mode of articulation, has found a focus in the Beamish open-air museum, carefully located in the centre of the imagined region, but dependent for its existence on the political skills of the entrepreneurial curator Frank Atkinson in managing conflict between diverse local government entities, although even he was unable to keep a Cumbrian presence in the project, to pull together a wider vision of the ‘North’ as was originally intended.¹²

Cumbria has neither a convincing ‘regional’ museum, based on any period of the aggregated history of its components, nor a consortium of regional universities to seek funding for research into its ‘regional’ history, as in the case of the North-East England Historical Institute, which may turn out to have been one of the last grand gestures of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Cumbria has been able to lay claim neither to educational institutions that might act as custodians and articulators of a regional identity, nor to the corresponding financial support, despite the best efforts of Lancaster University’s Centre for North-West Regional Studies, for which Cumbria has anyway formed only part of the remit. As for the University of Cumbria, it was an artificial late-comer, imposed from without in 2007 after extensive in-fighting between external institutions, which now seems to be retreating to its core location outside the county at the former St Martin’s College campus in Lancaster. This prompts questions about whether Lancaster should be seen as the *de facto* capital of South Cumbria, as Liverpool is said to be that of North Wales, or perhaps Shrewsbury that of mid-Wales, or indeed (returning to Cumbria) Carlisle that of the Western Borders, thereby complicating the idea of ‘Cumbria’ even further. The Cumberland

and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society officially represents only two of Cumbria's constituent counties, although in practice it has always published articles on Lancashire north of the sands; but this is necessarily a committed but minority constituency. In any case, as Dave Russell has argued, the broader 'North' is the strongest imagined and deepest-rooted regional identity within England; but even that is very problematic, and Russell is acutely conscious of the limitations of his necessary working compromise, based on yet another aggregation of counties.¹³

In any case, how might we define a 'region'? There is nothing unusual about ambiguity and shape-shifting (over time, and according to who is doing the representing) in this regard. One of the few virtues of Frank Musgrove's largely misguided book *The North of England* was its recognition that the practical, experiential boundaries of a region without officially defined borders might change over time in response to shifts in political relations, traffic and transport, discourses and perceptions.¹⁴ A recent thesis on the development of the Ardennes as a 'tourist region' in Belgium brings that out very clearly and in interesting detail, while reminding us that not all imagined European 'regions', for whatever purposes, have found administrative or political expression. Cumbria is also complicated by having the Lake District within, but not coterminous with it, just as the 'greater' Ardennes (there are various 'lesser' versions, and national as well as provincial boundaries complicate matters) contains 'picturesque' hills, valleys, villages and small towns, suitable for the promotion of tourism, interspersed with less exciting industrial districts and agricultural plains.¹⁵

Cumbria can look quite convincing on the map, more so than most imagined English 'regions', especially in the amorphous Midlands, where the artificial nature of the 'Heart of England Tourist Board' springs to mind. As consolidated officially on 1 April 1974, Cumbria can offer 'natural' geographical boundaries on three sides, sealed off in the north by the rhetoric of historical authenticity provided (somewhat spuriously) by the Roman Wall and Scottish border. And at least it is all (now) in the same country, even though Carlisle's field of influence extends into south-west Scotland, and the Solway, like all estuaries, might be thought of as uniting as well as dividing. But it lacked a clear shared administrative identity before the local government reorganisation of 1974; and we should note the resistance to the implementation of the 1972 Local Government Act itself, especially in Westmorland, where the original county town of Appleby took the first opportunity to incorporate the name of the discarded county into its own. As already remarked, this imposed version of 'Cumbria' pulls together two 'historical' counties and two outlying hundreds of another. John Marshall and the present writer produced a book about the 'Lake Counties', so labelled, in 1981, following on from the volume of similar title by Bouch and Jones covering an earlier period; and we also found room for a sub-title about 'a study in regional change'. Even so, John Marshall found it hard to conjure up the elusive element of 'regional consciousness' through his 'Introduction'.¹⁶ A particular problem is that Cumbria contains at its core, but is much more than, the Lake District National Park, which has carried a much stronger recognition factor over the last half century or so. The National Park is emphatically not the whole of Cumbria, and in its detailed specificity it is a post-Second World War construct, though canvassed in various guises for over a

century before its actual introduction, and, like all the National Parks in Britain, the product of negotiation and compromise at the edges.¹⁷

If we focused on the mountainous core or ‘dome’ in relation to perceptions of the Lake District we might find a closer approximation to shared experiences, cultures and identities, but this is where the fewest people live, although it has also been where representations of tradition and perhaps even ‘race’ (in the form of the Vikings) are at their most powerful.¹⁸ It is also not ‘Cumbria’; and in any case this would run counter to an Everitt or Phythian-Adams definition of regions, a ‘cultural province’ or British equivalent of a *pays*, for Cumbria conspicuously lacks unifying rivers – the longest ones are on the ‘outside’, the Lune, Eden and Kent, and none have ever been navigable any distance inland, although the Cocker and Derwent have recently drawn locals within Cumbria together in shared suffering.¹⁹

The best historic (pre-1974) approximation to the current ‘Cumbria’ perhaps lies elsewhere, in the post-1856 boundaries of the Church of England diocese of Carlisle. Before its expansion at that time into territory previously under the ecclesiastical governance of Chester, however, the diocese, which had been based on the boundaries of the earldom of Carlisle, ‘sat uncomfortably with county geography’, missing out Copeland, Furness and Cartmel, and a substantial area of south Westmorland, as well as the anomalous Alston on the ‘wrong’ side of Hartside Pass in east Cumberland, while fitting in quite well with Phythian-Adams’ proposed ‘Solway’ and northern “‘Irish’ sea’ cultural regions. This was a significant anticipation of ‘Cumbria’ on the ground, but without visibly generating loyalties or identities beyond the purely ecclesiastical, and without the deep historical roots to which counties might lay claim.²⁰

Economic history is less than helpful to the case for Cumbria as a ‘region’. Cumbrian farming is diverse: it embraces mountain dome and Solway plain, High and Low Furness, the Eden Valley, different soil types, and contrasting mixtures of arable and pasture. Industry is mainly coastal and its development in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was tied up with the development of Irish Sea (and for a time Atlantic) economies, and thereby dependent on processes which derived their dynamics from outside the region, making (for example) west-coast coal and haematite iron marketable by sea and rail. West Cumberland has never really had an inland hinterland: import redistribution via little ports through coastal shipping is not the same thing. Nor has Barrow, since its astonishing burst of mid-Victorian growth on the basis of exporting and processing haematite iron ore. Carlisle has and has had a limited hinterland of its own, assisted by its roles in county and church governance, but it extends into south-west Scotland as well as to the local industries of Brampton, Longtown or Wigton; the city has never been, or had, a major port in its own right, as the limited success of the Silloth project of the 1850s, promoted by local business interests who enlisted the support of the North British Railway, underlines.²¹ To the east, Alston (with its lead mines) has looked more to Newcastle: indeed, Alston’s attachment to Cumberland seems to be an historical as well as a topographical anomaly.²² For a century, between the 1860s and the 1960s, the Waverley Route linked Carlisle directly with Edinburgh by rail, but its construction was driven from the Scottish end, and it never generated much economic growth in northern Cumberland and the Borders. L. A. Williams’

study of road transport in Cumbria in the nineteenth century identified Cumbria as a 'distinct physical region of England' but made no claim to discovering an internal articulation of identity through the development of a road system, beyond a few towns at which knots of turnpikes intertwined.²³ There was no unifying equivalent of the North Eastern Railway, which played such an important part in pulling North-East England together as a genuinely regional institution.²⁴ The Furness did only part of that job. Up to the grouping of the railways in 1923 seven railway companies met at Carlisle, three of them Scottish (the London and North Western, the Caledonian, the Maryport and Carlisle, the North British, the Glasgow and South Western, the Midland and the North Eastern); but not, directly, the Furness itself, which in turn relied on co-operation with adjoining companies (the North Eastern, the London and North Western and the Midland) to sustain its traffic flows, the most important of which ran across the Pennines to link up with the complementary mineral resources of County Durham. Running powers, parallel routes and interpenetrated territories ensured that no regional transport undertaking could pull Cumbria together and shape an identity for it. Even after 1923, and indeed after nationalisation, two giant companies and then three regions of British Railways shared a significant Cumbrian presence.²⁵

This is a reminder that Cumbria was not necessarily even part of a 'north-west' (industrial, as here, or otherwise), although it has usually been identified with such a construct. Bill Lancaster has recalled how C.B. Fawcett's imagined 'North' split what was later labelled as Cumbria in two along a fault-line running from west to east, and linked its northern half with Northumbria, with an imagined capital at Newcastle. Such a 'North' expressed an identity defined in relation to the Anglo-Scottish border and Hadrian's Wall, to the road through the Tyne Gap, and to the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway; and the trading and social relationships associated with the coal industry in north-east England and West Cumberland also reflected a west-to-east orientation across the country. The southern half, in turn, was to be assimilated into an expanded 'Lancashire' which also included Cheshire, a proposed imposition based on 'rational' assumptions about regional planning, which paid no heed to existing loyalties or relationships. Significantly, Fawcett's book appeared in a series called 'The Making of the Future'.²⁶ The volume on 'The Northern Counties' in the Longman regional history series, which was organised around aggregations of counties, also covers both sides of the Pennines, but embraces the whole of post-1974 'Cumbria' as well as Northumberland and Durham.²⁷ To complicate matters further, it has also been suggested that the 'High Pennines' along the 'backbone' of Northern England might reasonably constitute a 'region' in its own right, although singularly lacking in population and resources.²⁸

Moreover, it is significant that preferred nomenclature has also presented persistent problems, not least among those who write about the area. The historical roots of any general usage of 'Cumbria' seem shallow and dispersed. There are some anticipatory uses of 'Cumbria' before *c.*1970, such as Bill Mitchell's magazine of that title, inaugurated in 1951, whose name was borrowed in turn from that of a Youth Hostels' Association Lakeland sub-regional group.²⁹ But otherwise its currency originates mainly from geographers and planners 20 years on, who knew reorganisation was

coming and wanted their terminology to match the new definitions. Earlier coinages covering similar territory are ‘the Lake Counties’ and, more narrowly, ‘Lakeland’, both of which base an assumed identity on a tourist, literary, Wordsworthian landscape that hardly spoke to Lancashire north of the sands, the west coast, the Solway plain or even the Eden Valley, or indeed to Carlisle, the Roman Wall corridor or the Northern Pennines. Lakeland and the Lake District, whether or not defined in terms of National Park boundaries, are less extensive or inclusive than Cumbria.

We also find apparent contradictions in the literature when we start to look (unfairly, because with hindsight) for retrospective consistency. John Marshall wrote about Old Lakeland with the subtitle ‘Some Cumbrian Social History’, and went beyond most working definitions of ‘Lakeland’ by including (for example) Grange-over-Sands and Kirkby Lonsdale (Underley Hall) in his remit.³⁰ Bill Rollinson, the great Barrovian historical geographer, almost always wrote about ‘the Lake District’, with a single major publication on ‘Cumberland and Westmorland’, and an enduring enthusiasm for the Scandinavian heritage of the area, celebrating the marks it left on landscape, language and culture.³¹ Bill Mitchell has edited *Cumbria* (and ventured into ‘Wild Cumbria’ for Robert Hale) but written mainly about ‘Lakeland’, ‘The Lakes’ and ‘The Lake District’, as if they are all synonymous.³² There are hybrid and intermediate forms: Norman Nicholson wrote about ‘Greater Lakeland’ (1969) as well as ‘Cumberland and Westmorland’ (for a county-based series) in 1949, but usually about some variant on ‘the Lakes’ when not focussed on Millom, and never about ‘Cumbria’;³³ or there is Lehmann J. Oppenheimer’s ‘Heart of Lakeland’ (1908, reissued in 1998).³⁴ Perhaps these findings are affected by publishers’ preferences for appealing titles. Within all this there are enduring loyalties to the older counties.³⁵

What might hold a ‘Cumbrian’ identity together? It cannot really lay claim to a common language or dialect, which is often a strong unifier. Attempts to lay claim to (and even to revive) ‘Cumbric’, as a language allegedly spoken in parts of northern England and southern lowland Scotland until (perhaps) the twelfth century, fall foul of the impossibility of reconstructing what seems not to have been a distinct language anyway. This would be an even more heroic task than the revival of Cornish, and much less firmly grounded.³⁶ There is a well-established Lakeland Dialect Society, with its own annual journal, although its website conflates Lakeland with Cumbria, and it is not clear that the dialect of (for example) West Cumberland has sufficient in common with that of (say) the upper Lune or Eden Valleys to justify the label, especially in the light of the marked differences even in the oft-cited vocabularies for numbering sheep. Late Victorian attempts, especially through the writings of W. G. Collingwood, to construct a common identity around a ‘Viking-age linguistic residue in north-west England’, sustained by Thomas Ellwood’s contemporary glossary of dialect words ‘which seem allied to or identical with the Icelandic or Norse’, are focused on the Lake District rather than a broader imagined ‘Cumbria’, while extending beyond the county to (for example) Lancashire, Merseyside and Tyneside.³⁷ Bill Rollinson’s more recent compilation of a dictionary of ‘Cumbrian’ dialect, tradition and folklore cannot allay these doubts, especially as the Barrow dialect is generally recognised to be distinct from its neighbours; and it would be hard to argue that Cumbria was really pulled together by a common mode of speech, idiom or oral culture that differed

systematically from its neighbours in such a way as to differentiate the county as a whole from adjoining ones.³⁸ In this respect as in others, it is one thing to identify particular characteristics with places or areas within the county, but quite another to claim them either as peculiar to it, or as signifiers of the county as a whole.

Moreover, as suggested above, there is no common economic system: the coast has faced outwards to engage with an Irish Sea economy, and lacks a hinterland; West Cumberland has strong Irish influences as well as links with the North-East through mining-related migration; while Barrow has Scots and Cornish, and a tradition of transatlantic migration associated especially with the shipyards.³⁹ More fundamentally, 'Cumbria' lacks a common agricultural system, despite the rhetoric of tradition attached to the ideas of the 'statesmen' and the yeomanry, and even despite Searle's label as 'the odd corner of England' between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, and the work of Winchester, Whyte and others on the peculiarities of commons, late enclosure, stone walls, customary tenure, agricultural vocabulary, common rights and landscape more generally. These characteristics are associated with an upland North, and especially with the Pennines and the North-West (but also with the Scottish borders), but not specifically with 'Cumbria', even if they are particularly prevalent there. Indeed, when Winchester wrote about 'regional identity in the Lake Counties' (or, in the same title, 'Cumbria') his focus was on patterns of land tenure and their relationship with the timing of 'improvement' in ways that were relevant across a much wider area.⁴⁰

'Cumbria' also lacks a common, articulated transport system, as we have seen, between the main line over Shap and the coastal rail route (originally the product of several different railways, and now used as a through route only by seekers after scenic tourism with plenty of time to spare), or west of the A6 and then the M6, and south of the lost Cockermouth, Keswick and Penrith Railway and the A66. It can hardly be argued ever to have displayed a common culture, despite the historically high rural rates of literacy, low levels of recorded crime and pockets of high illegitimacy to which Marshall has drawn our attention, some of which were more a feature of the northern part of Cumberland, and were also shared with rural southern Scotland. High literacy levels were, indeed, a Victorian characteristic shared by the rural areas of all the northern English counties, wherever mining did not intrude. In writing about these themes, incidentally, Marshall was already using 'Cumbria' as a geographical descriptor, here as elsewhere in his work, several years before the county came into being.⁴¹ Cumbria has had no common or unifying set of media, whether print, radio or electronic – the newspaper press from the eighteenth century was based in Carlisle, Whitehaven or Kendal (or even Lancaster), and later Barrow, and cleaved to local or at most county-wide concerns. In television terms there have been Border and Granada, in tense and overlapping relationship and without even raising the hopes of a celebration of regional identity that came with the Tyne Tees franchise in the North-East, but came closer to fruition through the BBC.⁴²

Particular culinary traditions have also been used as symbols of regional identity,⁴³ but Cumbria has little to offer in this respect. The recent travails of the Cumberland sausage are indicative. Attempts to secure EU protected designation of origin status

for this delicacy have been complicated by disputes over whether the designation should be based on Cumbria or the old county of Cumberland, and confusion is worse confounded by the association of the historic sausage with the Cumberland pig, a breed that was allowed to die out in 1960, while attempts to recreate it have merely generated further controversy.⁴⁴ Herdwick sheep, meanwhile, are identified only with parts of Cumbria, essentially the central and western mountains.⁴⁵ Nor does regional patriotism find a convincing match in a local regiment: after several amalgamations the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, with its base and museum in Carlisle, acts as the focus for such sentiments, but the 'Royal Cumbrian Regiment' is a fiction, although it must have seemed a convincing invention.⁴⁶ As Mike Huggins shows elsewhere in this issue, too, sporting traditions cannot be identified with Cumbria as a whole: they are associated with places within the county, as with Workington football, or with the older counties, valleys or areas (as with hunting, fell running or Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling). Sporting traditions are either not confined to Cumbria, or limited to particular places within it, and therefore cannot articulate loyalties to it. Nor is there a recognisable (or imagined) Cumbrian style of play, even in Rugby League, which is in any case largely confined to the old mining areas of the west coast, but which does at least produce an occasional Cumbrian representative side.

We might compare this lack of 'pulling together' with, for example, the Basque Country of northern Spain, to take a seemingly comparable European region. Its three core provinces (those that constitute the autonomous region) are of similar size (a little more extensive, with 7,234 square kilometres in Spain to Cumbria's 6,768), but contain more than four times as many inhabitants (officially 2,155,546 in 2008, compared with just under half a million), and have a much more developed urban system, with three proud provincial capitals; it has a mountainous core and a partly industrial coastline (but its larger imagined version, including Navarra and part of south-west France, extends into a second official nation state, so that it is northern in one and southern in the other);⁴⁷ it lacks an articulated internal transport system; it has fuzzy edges which do not map on to official administrative boundaries (especially in Álava and on the French side, while the contested inclusion of Navarra, only part of which is culturally 'Basque', would extend its area considerably); it contains within it contrasting economic systems; and, far more so than Cumbria, it has articulated internal rivalries between provinces and capitals, including twentieth century sporting ones. So from a unifying, identity-building perspective it should have similar disadvantages to Cumbria, and in some respects more challenging ones.⁴⁸

But we need to consider what else it has, especially since the foundation of an articulated Basque nationalist movement on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees from the 1890s, building on earlier attachments to Basque privileges and peculiarities.⁴⁹ Its nationalists have told a strong story about Basque identity (extending to blood groups and cranium measurements) which is expressed above all through an ancient and highly distinctive language; it has an ideology that celebrates honesty, strength and rural virtues (running parallel with those ascribed to the 'Lakeland yeoman'); it has unifying invented sporting traditions, with its own sports (much more strongly developed and articulated than in Cumbria, especially *pelota*, which has also been exported with the Basque diaspora), alongside a distinctive attachment to football;⁵⁰ it takes immense

pride in an innovative cuisine which is firmly grounded in traditional ingredients and practices; it expresses hostility to outsiders (especially Spanish nationalists) who resist or seek to undermine this culture, while eventually welcoming those who embrace it; it has its own flag, national day, anthem, and historical mythology, among other things.⁵¹ Much of the ceremonial apparatus was invented by Sabino Arana, the founder of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (and the flag was based on the Union Flag, as befitted the strongly anglophile traditions of the nineteenth century Bilbao bourgeoisie to which he belonged), but it 'took' with remarkable success.⁵² It is reasonable to ask why there is no Cumbrian, or indeed English, equivalent, and part of the answer lies in the political history of the nineteenth century in Spain, especially the partial (and highly emotive) loss of the *fueros* or special economic and constitutional privileges of the Basques at the end of the Carlist wars in 1876. It should also be emphasised that there was no widespread sense that Spain was an alien presence in the Basque Country, or that the Basques could not or should not live with the Spanish, until the emergence of the radical nationalism of the restored democracy of the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵³

Where the Basque Country has Arana, the Lake Counties had Collingwood, who celebrated an imagined past and a 'blood and soil' identity of sorts, but without Arana's original agenda of racist exclusiveness. Cumbrians should count their blessings; but the full Arana agenda was never shared by most of his followers, and was fading into something less assertive and more benign by the 1920s, only to be reconfigured by the reaction against the Franco dictatorship. Significantly, the Lake Counties also had no military dictatorship to contend with, imposing an alien external project of national unification to try to suppress distinctiveness and impose uniformity, thereby stoking the grievances and reinforcing the separatist culture of an established nationalism. Instead, the Lake District's (and Cumbria's) distinctiveness have been celebrated for tourism and literary purposes, with the politics that might be associated with regional identity largely set aside, even as its agricultural and industrial economy has been neglected and West Cumbria has come to depend on the 'defence' and nuclear industries. By contrast, resistance from local authorities and some political parties in the Basque Country successfully blocked proposals originating in 1972 for four nuclear power stations, and the remaining one, at Lemóniz, was abandoned in 1982 when almost completed, after the radical Basque Nationalists (specifically the military wing of the ETA terrorist organisation) used kidnapping, blackmail, sabotage, explosions and murder while holding that the ends justified the means. The gaunt, evocative shell of the abandoned Lemóniz reactor on its isolated coastal site is testimony to the determined, indeed ruthless, success of a violent campaign which went too far for many original supporters.⁵⁴ But there could be no starker contrast than with the local acceptance in West Cumberland of Windscale/Sellafield and the 'nuclear coast', although the enduringly parlous state of the local economy played its part in this: the nuclear industry delivered local jobs, and acquired its own legitimacy thereby, whereas the severe crisis that developed in the established Basque manufacturing economy from the mid-1970s was too sudden, and too late, to affect attitudes significantly from this perspective when the nascent nuclear industry came under intensifying attack during the transition to democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁵

Nationalism has divided the Basques as well as uniting some of them, and even the

language has several variants, while the constituent provinces and their capitals have their own cultures, specialities and loyalties, not least sporting ones. But the nationalist presence is strong, pervasive and inescapable: the Partido Nacionalista Vasco usually forms, or dominates, the government in this autonomous region. The contrast with Cumbria is remarkable. We would have to imagine a Cumbrian nationalist party, reinventing a Norse-based language (as the Cornish have done with theirs), pushing for autonomy or independence, and producing a terrorist wing (with significant electoral support which reached a peak of more than 20 per cent of the votes cast). We might feel somewhat relieved at the contrast, and conclude that for most purposes it may be as well that Cumbria is just an imposed administrative entity projected on to a geographical expression, and that there has been no grassroots identity building here. But that would be to leave the many intermediate experiences out of account: the key point is that the almost complete absence of regional identity in Cumbria is, itself, close to an extreme of its own.

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