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THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AN 'INVISIBLE NATION' DEBATING BRITTANY

Brittany is an 'invisible nation': the regionalisation of social mechanisms in the Breton territory has never resulted in a complete social structure.¹ This incompleteness as 'regional nation', to phrase Michael Keating, is embodied in its weak institutionalisation as 'imagined community'.² One symptom of this failure is that with the formation of the historiography of Brittany and the Breton movement, the very object of 'Brittany' is the subject of constant debate around a 'usable past'.³ A unique feature of the region is indeed the unfinished work of imposition of a national definition of Brittany by the nationalist movement, involving the failure of the foundation of its own legitimacy as a representative of a national society in resistance against an inclusive (French) nation-building process.⁴

Conflicts linked to the history of 'regional nationalism' intend to establish a hegemonic representation of Breton society, and more specifically of the relationship between the definition of society itself (the nation) and those who aspire to be its representatives (the nationalist movement).⁵ These struggles determine the legitimacy both of a society as a nation and of the nationalists as its historical actors. In this sense, the historiography is important because it is a discursive construction of historicity, reflecting the struggles for the interpretation of a collective project as 'national destiny'.⁶ But far from being easily accepted by the regional elites, the Breton 'national' historiography is painfully negotiated in friction and interaction with the scientific field, revealing the tensions and difficulties



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surrounding the insertion of the nationalist movement in Breton society.⁷ These difficulties to establish a nationalist imaginary do not imply, though, that the Breton movement is irrelevant, as evidenced by the presence of the Breton historiography in the public space, both relatively sparse on the long term and, occasionally, seized by severe debates and controversies.

In the first part of this article, we will show that the national approach to the history of Brittany in the nineteenth century emerged during an intellectual cycle that saw progressively the differentiation of the activist and scientific historiographies, leading to a deadlock for the Breton national movement after World War II. The second part is dedicated to the historiographical cycle leading, from the 1960s onwards, to some reconciliation between activist and scientific historiographies.

The invention of an ontological nation (1830-1964)

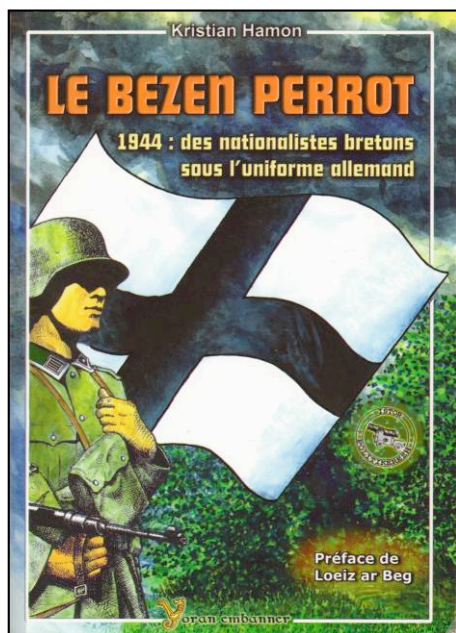
A first historiographical cycle lasts from the nineteenth century to 1964 and is dominated by a conception of history as a return to origins. Its first stage (1830-1918) corresponds to the social and cultural foundation of the Breton movement, particularly through reactionary cultural networks mobilising the history of Brittany on an academic as well as an engaged level. This patriotic historiography, which projects the essence of Brittany in the past, is reactionary in advocating the preservation of an ontological nation. Consensual, it also produces few conflicts, as it is in tune with the social bases of a conservative Breton society and in the process of being marginalised.

In the European context of Romanticism and the ‘spring of nations’, the 1830s are a turning point in the crystallisation of an image of Brittany: Breton intellectuals are eager to discover the past of the region and many books are published on its history, literature and oral traditions. One can mention Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué, who collects popular ballads with a historical dimension (*gwerzioù*); he edits them in 1839, in the *Barzaz Breiz*, with the objective, notably, to go back to the sources of Brittany’s history, then neglected in France, through the songs transmitted

by folk tradition.⁸ In the same vein, Pitre-Chevalier publishes in 1844 his very conservative *History of Brittany* that integrates its parts into an indivisible whole, engaged in a centuries-old opposition to what would become France.⁹ Arthur de La Borderie should also be mentioned, creator around 1850 of the positivist or scientific history of Brittany, aiming to write a patriotic history of Brittany, understood as a nation. Most of the time, this nascent nationalist mobilisation is created in a dialectical relationship to the history of Brittany, that it endeavours to write and wherein it sees its own justification. However, like de La Borderie, it tends to remain prisoner of its nostalgia for the past, without trying to play the role of 'awakener' of the Breton people: its history is that of elites, saints and military leaders.¹⁰ These intellectuals have little to offer to the Bretons apart from the status quo, elaborating a historical narrative where the people are passive, and which they therefore have no reason to acknowledge, failing to claim a 'right of State' or for self-determination. This abortive birth of a nation is thus paradoxical: unlike other emerging nations, there is no transposition in Brittany of the national conflict of the past into the present and the future. Suggesting complementarities between the 'small motherland' (Brittany) and the 'big fatherland' (France), Brittany's elites celebrate on the contrary, like a De La Borderie, 'the blessed alliance [of the Bretons] with France, of which they have since been the most devoted sons, the most valiant defenders'.¹¹ Only with the creation of the first regionalist political parties (Union Régionaliste Bretonne in 1898 and Fédération Régionaliste Bretonne in 1911) and nationalist political parties (Parti National Breton in 1911) do claims for Breton self-government emerge, though still on a conservative basis.

This attachment to the past is no longer suitable during the inter-war period, which sees a new step (1918-1964) introduced to the historiographical cycle, marked by the emergence of activist nationalism. A new generation activates the national imagination to renew the terms of the Breton question and its history: turning their back on the academic world, they perceive historiography as an instrument for the transformation of Breton society. Through the political work of Olier Mordrel in journal *Breiz Atao* and the cultural and linguistic work of Roparz Hemon in journal *Gwalarn*, they 'switch their perspectives from the

regrets of the past to the building of a future'.¹² This modernising break is, however, incomplete: it still relies on an ontological conception of the nation and is based on nostalgia for the 'golden age' of Breton independence. From the early twenties, certain cultural, later political, circles produce works of nationalist pedagogy or exaltation fostered by historiography inherited from the first *Emsav* [Breton national movement]. Some books become the pillars of nationalist culture: the *Histoire de notre Bretagne* by Jeanne Coroller or the *Histoire de Bretagne* by Father Poisson (1954).¹³ The latter takes up the thread of the first *Emsav*, writing a history to prove that the Breton movement, born in educated and historical aware circles, are on the track of the Breton and Celtic tradition of resistance to the integration into the French nation.¹⁴ Similarly, the Breton National Party (PNB), created in 1931, advocates a conservative definition of Brittany's history and highlights it through its activism (propaganda, rituals) or early drafts of an internal historiography, both hagiographic and radical.¹⁵ However, the influence of nationalist historiography in the public area is weak. If the Church integrates to some



Kristian Hamon's 2004 study of Breton collaboration during World War II, a highly controversial issue.

extent the history and culture of Brittany in the normal *curriculum* of catholic schools, the regional elites remain loyal to France and reinterpret Breton history in this sense.¹⁶ The Second World War, the collaboration with the German occupation (to which a non-negligible part of the *Emsav* succumbed) and the subsequent purge only reinforce the strong distrust of Breton society towards the Breton national movement.

The post-war years are difficult for Breton nationalism, which maintains a conception of history directly inherited from pre-war years, with hardly any innovation at all.¹⁷ However, historiography is effectively disseminated as part of a prosperous cultural revival, consisting of traditional dance groups (the 'Celtic circles') and Breton pipe bands (the *bagadoù*). A modest evolution resides in the inclusion of recent history, notably via chronicles of *Emsav's* own history. A fine example is offered by the very knowledgeable work by Yann Fouéré, an activist of the times, and by Ronan Caerléon, the quasi-official historian of Breton nationalism. In the early sixties, Fouéré provides a synthesis, justifying the collaboration as the Breton form of the *politics of presence* pursued by the collaborating French.¹⁸ Despite its wealth of information, this work selects data to elaborate a nationalist version of contemporary history that all later scholars will contradict. Nonetheless, this reconstruction of history generates little intellectual conflict, as it remains completely hidden.

The reestablishment (1960s and 1970s)

A second historiographical cycle starts in the 1960s, taking a direction opposite to the first. A new generation of the Breton movement transforms the approach to the Breton society, its history and the role it plays. This new conception of historical development (that is of historicity), centred on a dynamic vision of the nation, introduces historiographical analysis highlighting, at every historical stage, the overlap of national and social issues, sometimes raising very fierce intellectual debates. More visible in society, the *Emsav* also generates – for the first time – a real interest among scholars in its past and present.

1964 corresponds to a break in the history of the Breton movement, in its self-representation and in its relationship to history. A new conception of historicity emerges: the *Emsav* (both in its political and cultural dimensions) gradually breaks with its cautious apolitical approach developed since 1945, which condemned it to isolation, and now claims itself as a left-wing and socialist actor in a struggle for national liberation.¹⁹ A symbol of this is the creation in 1964 of the Breton Democratic Union (UDB, Union Démocratique Bretonne), that was from the start a left-wing party and would become the main autonomist party in the region's history. As evidenced by its famous slogan 'Brittany = colony', this sense of historicity entails a new reading of Brittany's history, more focused on class struggle and decolonisation.

This trend is reinforced in 1968 by the student rebellion, which rehabilitates the appeal of popular culture and the interest for the regional issue.²⁰ Four years later, the wave of worker's and peasant's movements or even the revival of the Breton Liberation Front has a similar effect, increasing the interest of the hexagonal left for Brittany. This results in a recasting of the historiography of the Breton movement by the extreme left.²¹ In December 1971 and January 1973, the United Socialist Party (PSU), then main party of the alternative left, suggests a review of the history of the Breton movement (notably Gwenc'hlan le Scouézec and Glauda Millour).²² As biased as these articles may be, focusing on the most progressive dimensions of the Breton movement, they nevertheless help to publicise these issues and to take them out of the Breton movement. In 1973, *Les temps modernes*, Jean-Paul Sartre's journal, extends this enlargement of the study of the Breton movement in a special issue dedicated to the national minorities in France, containing several articles on Brittany. Ronan Roudaut notably offers the first Marxist socio-history of the Breton movement, its ideology and its sociological basis.²³

Often selective, based on a new 'usable past', this historiography is an instrument facilitating the alignment of the Breton movement with the left-wing and popular movements (workers, peasants, environmentalists, and so on). Quite logically it provokes a counter-historiography, equally militant and denouncing the imposture of the former, especially by the journal *La taupe bretonne*.²⁴ Originally, the group that publishes *La taupe*

bretonne, split off the UDB, aims to analyse nationalisms, and in particular Breton nationalism. Quickly, though, it adapts to state nationalisms, to carry all its efforts against minority nationalisms, considered as counter-revolutionary.²⁵ Without nuance and clearly biased, this analysis is challenging because for the first time it carries out a deconstruction of the discourse of the Breton movement, based on a theory of nationalism. For their part, Daniel Chatelain and Pierre Tafani analyse the cultural activism and nationalist ideology of regional movements in France through the lens of class struggle, which leads them to de-legitimise nationalist movements because of their social irrelevance.²⁶ Finally, the aim of Yannick Guin is to 'destroy the nationalist mythology maintained by the reaction for nearly a century and by ordinary leftism in recent years'.²⁷ This analysis, rooted in a mechanistic and simplistic Marxism, concludes that 'the Breton idea corresponds to the desperate chimeras of doomed factions', and would only be the product of the 'disintegrated agrarian bloc'.²⁸

Thus, the inclusion of the Breton movement within the social movements after May '68 disseminates the issues of the historiography of the *Emsav* beyond the nationalist circles, causing controversy and generating original ideas among left-wing activists. Nevertheless, this remobilisation of history is not the prerogative of the left: the former generation continues to take part in the contemporary debates of the Breton society, with its own point of view and without disavowing its conservative stance, strongly separating it from the young leftists. Fouéré continues his work of developing a nationalist historiography, reinforced by a new wave of militant works on memorial issues.²⁹ Although hidden, these publications give rise to great controversies. Many become obsessed with the figure of Fouéré himself, tending therefore to reduce 'the Breton issue' to the history of the *Emsav* during the war and the fascist orientation of its most extreme fringes.

Cover of Yannick Guin's critical
History of Brittany (1977).



Henri Fréville, a historian at the Faculty of Arts of Rennes but also mayor of that town, returns to the Purge in the media sector in Brittany, of which he was one of the actors. In a description of the 1940-1946 period, he evokes both the German attempts to take control of the region's main journals and the reactions of regional elites to this strategy. Separating (politically) the wheat from the chaff, he clearly distinguishes the ruling elite, reluctantly pursuing a politics of presence, from the Breton nationalists (especially Fouéré), using German support to rise at the head of influential newspapers.³⁰ In a complex polemic, he relies a few years later on archives to challenge, among others, many of the major points of nationalist historiography.³¹ Condemning the great figures of the movement for collaboration, he relocates their careers to the strategy of German occupiers.³² Without revolutionising the available knowledge, this work enlightens little known events, at the cost though of mixing the roles of historian of the post-war period and of political actor in this very same period.

During the seventies, a new, scientific historiography puts the importance of Fréville's work and the many controversies into perspective. In this decade, scholars respond to social movements and public debates by shifting the perspectives on nationalism in three different ways. Two founding texts appear in 1976-77, which contradict the nationalist intellectuals' version of Interbellum nationalism. Based on an extensive knowledge of literature and archives, Alain Déniel draws a complex picture of the Breton movement, emphasising the replacement of regionalism by an innovative nationalism in the twenties, before the economic crisis led to extremism and collaboration. Besides accurately describing political nationalist leaders going astray, Déniel also shows that the project to render the Breton society susceptible to cultural matters was in some ways successful.³³ Michel Denis goes further by offering an abrasive summary of the period, one by one dismantling the current ideas of nationalist historiography. His demonstration follows three steps. Relocating the nationalist movement to the political fray, he stresses that its collapse following the 'Epuración' is caused less by the severity of the Repression than by its inherent flaws. He goes on by dissecting the internal political culture of the nationalist movement: this political culture accumulates the themes of fascism (elitism, racism, xenophobia and antisemitism), reflecting the contradictions of the ascending middle class hit by the crisis of the Thirties. The *Emsav* then locks itself in an exaltation of national fetishes (history, language), unable to expand its claims beyond the petty bourgeoisie.³⁴

Some analysts plough this sociological furrow more radically: putting into perspective the historical continuity discourses of the Breton movement, they question its contemporary ability to adapt to major social changes. Describing the Breton movement as resistance to integration into the French nation, Michel Nicolas consistently stresses its insertion into the broader realities, of both economic (industrial development) and political (the encapsulating of the regional scene by the French state and the local representatives) nature. This analysis highlights the break introduced by the UDB generation, which builds new political spaces by developing its own approach. It also highlights the limits of a Breton nationalism which, being marginalised within the French political arena, is forced to find

social intermediaries in the regional society, even though its historiography is quite unsuited for conquering the masses.³⁵ This analysis joins the epistemological reflections of some Parisian social science research calibrating the long-term prospects of the Breton movement (including its historiographical narratives).

A new tool for analysing social movements, linked to Alain Touraine, revitalises the perspectives on regional movements.³⁶ In Brittany as in Occitania they would be at the heart of the conflicts against the State, characteristic of modernity. It is therefore appropriate to question the historicity of the Breton movement, that is to say its ability to engage in conflicts concerning the evolution of regional society. In such a perspective, therefore, nationalism is not transhistorical, but must be understood in terms of the social and historical course followed by the social movement. Less interested in the conflicts between regional elites, this sociology extends the historian's analysis to highlight, beyond the fascist diversion, the modernising aspects of nationalism between the wars and, above all, to scrutinise its contemporary expression through its ability to enlist with the new forms of social action.

Ultimately, however, these studies lead to disappointing conclusions, probably because of a too ambitious definition of the social movement as object: despite its symbolic influence, the Breton movement is characterised above all by its inability to establish itself as a force for social change. This is partly explained by the nationalist reconstruction of history: Breton nationalism is still based on a historical *imaginary*, largely focused on the cultural conflict between Brittany and France, more than on a socio-political anti-hegemonic struggle against the French state, which impedes action in true life.³⁷

Maryon McDonald draws similar conclusions through the anthropological method of participant observation in the cultural movement. Without ignoring long-term history, she observes the actualisation of this historical dimension in specific and localised cases. Her conclusions assert the social and cultural gap between the linguistic and educational practices of the working classes in Brittany and those of the Breton movement based on an intellectual and political culture where the history of opposition to France

is omnipresent. Dismantling all the myths of the nationalist activists, this vitriolic picture finds a mitigated echo in Brittany in the context of the reflux of activists during the 1980s.³⁸ Still, it complements the analysis of social movements by showing how militant historiography isolates the Breton movement in the regional population, which itself sees no irreversible contradiction between France and Brittany.

Finally, a third perspective of the social sciences reconciles the first two by broadening the issue of nationalism. Following the development of ethnology at the University of Rennes, the Centre for Studies and Research on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities (CERIEM) reconceptualises regional identity in terms of ethnicity in the journal *Pluriel*. Validating on the one hand historical work on the fascistic diversion of nationalism during the war, Pierre-Jean Simon emphasises on the other hand the underlying dialectic: the *counter-ideology* of Breton nationalism, modeled on French nationalism, experienced a particularly sharp radicalisation, due to the fact that it was a reaction 'directly related' to the rejection of the Breton identity by the French state. More broadly, this approach emphasises the creative and modernising dimension of nationalism during the inter-war period, which more than Breton society itself has created Breton ethnicity.³⁹ Finally, this modernity dwells less on the past and its historiographical narratives than on the current success of the Breton identity to qualify the phenomena of domination.⁴⁰

Suzanne Berger, who discusses the relationship between ethnicity and center-periphery relations in France, adds to this perspective. The specific power of the 'ethnic movement' in Brittany and its evolution to the left are explained by political developments: the singularity of Brittany is based on a symbolic universe, the effectiveness of which relies less on ethnic traditions than on the ability of these traditions to reinforce the tensions between center and periphery.⁴¹ This analysis therefore completes and adjusts those approaches emphasising the Breton movement's isolation in regional society: the reinvention of Breton culture makes it a *medium for the expression of Breton nationalism* which reaches a new level of integration into contemporary society through its ability to disseminate its major issues.⁴²

Public debate and the renewal of historiography (since the 1980s)

Between 1981 and 1995, the Breton movement is discreet: the regional issue, officially settled by the laws of decentralisation of 1982, is no longer on the agenda. This public silence, after the tumultuous seventies, is accompanied by an almost complete absence of studies on the Breton movement, with the exception of delayed publications of research done before 1981.⁴³ A loose consensus emerges: the Breton nationalist parties remain marginal electorally speaking, while Breton cultural demands and emanations gather some passive support. From the 1995 onwards, however, there is a cultural revival with the return of popular cultural events related to the Breton movement like the *festoù-noz* and other festivals, followed by publications on the Breton movement designed for the general public.⁴⁴

Only from 1997-1998 does the issue resurface with a revival of scientific studies, provoked by the media controversy regarding the Breton movement and the historiography of Brittany. The discussion partly focuses on the Breton movement which uses discrete but multiple and significant references to some of the leaders of the second *Emsav* (1918-1945). For some leaders, militant historiography composed during this period remains valid in the 1990s, by way of reverence to the *Gwalarn* generation. Originally crystallised around the symbolic figure of Hemon, the conflict is then brought to the entire Breton movement.⁴⁵ Pushed by some individuals engaged against the Breton movement, in publications as well as on the Internet or in the press, the debate crosses Brittany's borders and quickly raises numerous articles in the French press (*L'express*, 19 July 1999; *Le nouvel observateur* 7-13 December 2000).⁴⁶

For the first time, the discussion on the history of Brittany and the Breton movement is carried in the public arena. The newspaper *Ouest-France*, with a circulation of more than 770,000 units and not under suspicion of any sympathy for Breton nationalism, serialises Reynald Sécher's comic books on the history of Brittany.⁴⁷ Sensitive periods like the Chouannerie (the revolt by royalists against the Republic in 1793) and World War II

engender controversies between the regional press (*Ouest-France*, *Le nouvel Ouest*) and the Parisian press (notably *Télérama*). This *historiographical* controversy arises after twenty years of silence on the issue of Brittany, at the very moment when the Breton cultural movement finds a new dynamism and a social basis. These accusations, often the result of making a mishmash of facts and opinions and despite the work of historians, usually end up evoking the (assumed deleterious) influence of the *Emsav* on Breton society.⁴⁸

This historiographical controversy and its by-effects have only marginally touched upon the Breton movement and its social image in Brittany.⁴⁹ Rather, it seems to have been a strong factor in a collective reinvestigation of the Breton movement's recent history, and in particular of the link between the pre-war period (and nationalism) and the current period (and the Breton identity *sensu lato*). However, those links are less obvious than ever, even though some scientific works stress the historical continuity.⁵⁰

In fact, regional elites refuse to see their efforts to re-appropriate Breton history reduced to a dubious political crusade. They continue to invest in 'Breton identity' – as does the influential newspaper *Ouest-France*. Similarly, certain personalities at the intersection of academia and the Breton movement are engaged in critical work on the *Emsav's* behavior during World War II, allowing the Breton movement to clarify its own history. Kristian Hamon for example uses the historical archives to draw an unambiguous picture of the collaboration by part of the political movement.⁵¹ This research was not warmly received, but contributed nevertheless to a long-awaited work of collective memory, as a 'right to inventory'.⁵² The scientific reaction to these controversies illustrates best the new relationship between militant historiography and regional society.

but also in relation to other regional experiences in Europe. The synthesis and the advancement of knowledge confirm the earlier scientific work: the Breton movement has sought to advance its own goals by engaging in a powerful political and cultural collaboration.⁵⁴ This has earned the movement severe and justifiable retribution at the Liberation, although individual stories may be more complex.⁵⁵ The conference is also a great public success, well covered by the regional and national press. The two main newspapers in Brittany (*Ouest-France* and *Le télégramme*) announce the debate and then report the content of the contributions on a daily basis. As concluded by the historian Christian Bougeard, the objective has been achieved:

‘Many areas have been investigated, demonstrating, from the perspective of historians and hopefully of the media alike, that there were no more “skeletons in the closet”. [...] Only deliberate or lazy ignorance of these developments, or bad faith, can further fuel the controversy or give a distorted picture of Breton historical reality. [...] Now well established, the facts should no longer allow the amalgamation of the entire *Emsav* with the collaborators.’⁵⁶

Beyond the conference, the academic study of the Breton movement extends to other periods. The knowledge on the period of the early twentieth century is renewed, notably with a conference on the figure of Emile Masson, the famous left-winger who first tried to link socialist ideals and Breton nationalism or with the study of Philippe Le Stum on the impact of neo-druidism.⁵⁷ The thesis of Francis Le Squer helps to understand better the Bleun Brug, a catholic and regionalist organisation created by the abbot Yann-Vari Perrot, which, from 1905, became arguably the main mass movement in the history of the *Emsav*.⁵⁸ A successful exhibition dedicated to the artistic movement Seiz Breur, which imagined in the 1920s and 1930s a Celto-Breton art with lasting cultural influences, is also worth mentioning.⁵⁹ Another new period of interest are the 1970s, notably with Tudi Kernalegenn’s analysis focusing on the left and the Breton national issue, clarifying the 1960s shift to the left of both the Breton movement and the claims for devolution.⁶⁰ On the 1970s, also the

study of Erwann Chartier and Alain Cabon on the Breton Liberation Front should be mentioned, as it has had a strong symbolic impact on the region.⁶¹

Concerning the contemporary period, the studies are also multiplying, with notably a *Dictionary of Breton heritage* focusing on the Breton identity's constitutive elements.⁶² Not less interesting is a collective publication on *The building of regional identity. Examples of Saxony and Brittany, 18th-20th centuries* reminding after Catherine Bertho that the Breton identity is a social construction and not a given.⁶³ Thirdly there is an overview of the history of the Breton movement since the 1980s.⁶⁴ These studies reach a wide audience, as demonstrated by a series of conferences in 2000-2001 on the topic *Brittany 2100. Identity and future*.⁶⁵ Within ten years, the historiography of the Breton movement has awakened and shed light on many of its stages and aspects.

Not only historians, but sociologists as well have covered the subject with several studies on Breton identity, both groups insisting on the intrinsic plurality of Breton identity, in a constant process of elaboration.⁶⁶ From this literature though has emerged a public consensus reappropriated outside university, on a depoliticised conception of the Breton identity. According to mainstream social actors, it should remain cultural, pertaining to the heart, the emotions, and not be 'instrumentalised' in order to ask for specific Breton institutions. This depoliticised conception of Breton identity, removing its social and political dimensions, has indeed consequently defused the debate about the political future of Brittany.

With a pluridisciplinary approach, a group of young social scientists, originally gathered around Ronan Le Coadic and Christian Demeuré-Vallée in the association Identity and Democracy – International Debates (IDDI), have actively contributed to develop this new research dynamic around the Breton issue, with an international symposium in Rennes in 2002, praised by the critics, and two books.⁶⁷

Finally, political scientists have focused on the social construction of Brittany. Political institutionalists have notably questioned the political capacity of Brittany, which they revealed by a detour through history.⁶⁸ Romain Pasquier shows how the capacity of the Bretons to construct

territorialised coalitions of interests is specific in the French sphere, and explains to a certain degree the ability of Brittany to act as a collective and territorialised social actor, and therefore shapes its social reality. Political sociologists have more focused on the analysis of Breton regionalism as the convergence of territorial mobilisations in various social areas across Brittany.⁶⁹ An alternative approach to regionalism is to see it as the expression of a territorialised social analysis, the region being to a certain extent a cognitive tool to understand reality from a specific point of view.⁷⁰

The period since 1997 is thus characterised by a historiographical controversy surrounding the Breton movement, with the use of the past to attack the movement in the present. The result is an overinvestment in one era of the Breton movement: World War II. However, this works as a catalyst for the study of the entire Breton movement, both within the movement itself and in academic circles. In some ways, this revival picks up the thread of a historiography interrupted for almost twenty years, and contributes to a beneficial clarification of the discourse and task of remembrance of the Breton movement.

Conclusion

Breton identity and its impact on the Breton society remain clearly paradoxical. On the one hand, it cannot be considered as an ideological matrix encompassing the whole regional society in a single collective project (in comparison for example, up to a certain point at least, to the Catalan or Welsh identities). It is neither translated clearly into the political space, the regional nationalist parties never having had a strong impact in elections, in contrast to most other similar territories in Western Europe. Brittany is indeed still an 'invisible nation'... but, on the other hand, it constitutes a strong symbolic frame, contributing to integrate symbols, actions and strategies within a real sense of a collective identity. Hence, political invisibility does not necessarily mean weakness... An explanation of this paradox lies partially in the (historic) fate of the Breton movement itself and of its historiography.

Founded on very conservative roots and a fascination for the past, the Breton movement has never been able to become a central actor of the Breton society and therefore, notably, has always had difficulties to be considered as a legitimate actor in the political definition of Brittany as a specific society (in the cultural realm though, its influence has been determinative in the long term). Its historiography has impeded more than helped the *Emsav* in the twentieth century, and its vision of history has remained marginal for most of its existence. The historiography and analysis of the Breton movement have even remained hidden until the 1960s. From the 1970s though, the *Emsav* has become a legitimate object for historians and social scientists, creating a new scholarly historiography. This has not been without polemics, notably on the attitude of the Breton movement during WWII. Nonetheless, scholars have clearly distinguished between the errors of the past and the contemporary Breton movement, helping it to turn to the future on more sound foundations.

The historiography of the Breton issue has been clearly developing since the end of the 1990s. Scientific knowledge has grown on most aspects and periods of the history of the Breton movement. An important milestone is the global synthesis published by Nicolas.⁷¹ Unfortunately, a forceful analysis of its different historical periods is still lacking, most notably on the low tide, from 1945 to 1964.⁷² Other lacunas are specific, transversal aspects, for example the movement's progressive and left-wing trend. Moreover, many essential actors are still without any specific study, most notably the Union Démocratique Breton, or the Comité d'étude et de liaison des intérêts bretons (CELIB).⁷³ New theoretical approaches are also to be expected, notably to better explain the Breton paradox of a strong and recognised identity without any determining political emanation up to now.

Endnotes

¹ A. Dieckhoff, *La nation dans tous ses états* (Paris, 2000); S. Gemie, *Brittany 1750-1950. The invisible nation* (Cardiff, 2007).

² B. Anderson, *L'imaginaire national. Réflexions sur l'origine et l'essor du nationalisme* (Paris, 1996); M. Keating, *Nations against the state. The new politics of nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (London, 1996).

³ M. Keating, *The new regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial restructuring and political change* (Cheltenham, 1998); M. Denis, 'La génération des années 1960 et l'émancipation bretonne. Essai d'histoire impertinente', in: A. Croix, F. Hubert & E. Le Bris du Rest (eds.), *Monsieur le 'Conservateur'. Musées et combats culturels en Bretagne au temps de Yann-Cheun Veillard* (Rennes, 2001). We will use the term 'Breton movement' (or *Emsav*) to refer to the members of the political and cultural organisations that make up the nebula of Breton regional nationalism (M. Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement breton* (Paris, 1982)).

⁴ G. Noiriel, *Etat, nation et immigration* (Paris, 2001).

⁵ See L. Boltanski, *Les cadres; la formation d'un groupe social* (Paris, 1982).

⁶ M. Keating, 'How historic are historic rights? Competing historiographies and the struggle for political legitimacy', in: X.M. Reboredo González (ed.), *Etnicidade e nacionalismo. Simposio internacional de antropología (abril de 2000)* (Santiago de Compostela, 2001) 45-81.

⁷ M. Hroch, 'From national movement to the fully-formed nation', in: *New left review*, no. 198 (1993) 3-20. In this article we consider 'Breton national historiography' as the historiography referring to Brittany taken in its national dimension, that is to say by and/or on the Breton 'national' movement.

⁸ F. Postic & J.-Y. Veillard, 'Reconnaissance d'une culture régionale. La Bretagne depuis la Révolution', in: *Ethnologie française*, 33 (2003) 381-389.

⁹ H. Guillourel, 'Problème breton et mouvement breton', in: *Pouvoirs*, 19 (1981) 83-102.

- ¹⁰ M. Denis, 'Arthur de La Borderie (1827-1901) ou "l'histoire, science patriotique"', in: N.-Y. Tonnerre (ed.), *Chroniqueurs et historiens de la Bretagne du Moyen-Âge au milieu du XX^e siècle*, (Rennes, 2001) 143-155.
- ¹¹ A. de La Borderie, B. Porchnev & E.S.B., *Les bonnets rouges* (Collection 10/18) (Paris, 1975) 23.
- ¹² P.-J. Simon, *La bretonnité. Une ethnicité problématique* (Rennes, 1999) 187.
- ¹³ J. Coroller, *Histoire de notre Bretagne* (St.-Vincent-sur-Oust, [1922] 1997).
- ¹⁴ H. Poisson & J.-P. Le Mat, *Histoire de Bretagne* (Spézet, [1954] 2000) 453.
- ¹⁵ Notably R. Caerlëon, *Gwenn ha du* (Pleyber-Christ, 1938).
- ¹⁶ M. Lagrée, *Religion et culture en Bretagne (1850-1950)* (Paris, 1992); Y. Tranvouez, 'Les catholiques et la question bretonne (1940-1944)', in: C. Bougeard (ed.), *Bretagne et identités régionales pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Brest, 2002) 285-306.
- ¹⁷ M. Nicolas, *Le séparatisme en Bretagne* (Spézet, 1986).
- ¹⁸ Y. Fouéré, *La Bretagne écartelée (1938-1948)* (Paris, 1962); R. Paxton, *La France de Vichy* (Paris, 1973).
- ¹⁹ M. Nicolas, *L'Emsav. Politique et thématique du mouvement breton* (PhD diss., Université de Rennes, 1980) 2 vol.; Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement breton*; V. Porhel, 'Usage politique de l'histoire par le régionalisme breton dans les conflits sociaux des années 68', in: M. Crivellom P. Garcia & N. Offenstadt (eds.), *Concurrence des passés. Usages politiques du passé dans la France contemporaine* (Aix-en-Provence, 2006) 131-144.
- ²⁰ T. Kernalegenn, *Drapeau rouge et gwenn-ha-du. L'extrême-gauche et la Bretagne dans les années de soixante-dix* (Rennes, 2005).
- ²¹ The reason for this intellectual interest of Marxist activists for Breton nationalism is the idea that the revolution they are calling for will emerge from the union between class struggles and national struggles, hence the need to better understand the latter.
- ²² G. Le Scouézec, 'Histoire du mouvement breton', in: *Que faire*, 8/9 (1971) 6-13; 'Colonialisme intérieur et minorités nationales', in: *Que faire*, 8/9 (1971) 65-80; G. Millour, 'La question nationale bretonne', in: *Critique socialiste*, 11 (1973) 31-37.

- ²³ R. Roudaut, 'Histoire du mouvement breton', in: *Les temps modernes*, no. 324-326 (1973) 170-194. In this special issue on 'Minorités nationales en France', see also the article by P. Doridam, 'La Bretagne et le socialisme', 223-233.
- ²⁴ D. Chatelain & P. Tafani, *Qu'est-ce qui fait courir les autonomistes* (Paris, 1976); Y. Guin, *Histoire de la Bretagne: contribution à la critique de l'idéologie nationaliste* (Paris, 1977).
- ²⁵ See for instance J.-Y. Guiomar, 'Essai sur la production du signe idéologique "Bretagne"', in: *La taupe bretonne*, no. 3 (1972) 69-94, no. 4 (1973) 155-166; A. Le Guyader, 'La Bretagne et ses idéologues', in: *La taupe bretonne*, no. 2-5 (1971-1973).
- ²⁶ Chatelain & Tafani, *Qu'est-ce qui fait courir*, 306.
- ²⁷ Guin, *Histoire*, 9.
- ²⁸ Guin, *Histoire*, 317.
- ²⁹ H. Le Boterf, *La Bretagne dans la guerre* (Paris, 1969-1971) 3 vol.; A. Youenou, *Fransez Debauvais de Breiz Atao et les siens* (Rennes, 1972-1980) 6 vol.; O. Mordrel, *Breiz Atao. Histoire et actualité du nationalisme breton* (Paris, 1973); R. Caerléon, *Le rêve fou des soldats de Breiz Atao* (Quimper, 1975); Y. Fouéré, *Histoire résumée du mouvement breton* (Quimper, 1977).
- ³⁰ H. Fréville, *La presse bretonne dans la tourmente (1940-1946)* (Paris, 1979).
- ³¹ Y. Didro & Y. Fouéré, *L'Histoire du quotidien 'La Bretagne' et les silences d'Henri Fréville* (Les Cahiers de l'Avenir de la Bretagne) (Saint-Brieuc, 1981).
- ³² H. Fréville, *Archives secrètes de Bretagne, 1940-1944* (Rennes, 1985).
- ³³ A. Déniel, *Le mouvement breton, 1919-1945* (Paris, 1976).
- ³⁴ M. Denis, 'Mouvement breton et fascisme; signification de l'échec du second *Emsav*', in: C. Gras & G. Livet (eds.), *Régions et régionalismes en France du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 1977) 489-506. See also B. Frelaut, *Les nationalistes bretons de 1939 à 1945* (Maulévrier, 1985).
- ³⁵ Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement breton*; Nicolas, *Le séparatisme*.
- ³⁶ A. Touraine & F. Dubet, *Le pays contre l'État* (Paris, 1981).

³⁷ R. Dulong, *La question bretonne* (Paris, 1975); L. Quéré, *Jeux interdits à la frontière. Essai sur le régionalisme* (Paris, 1978).

³⁸ M. McDonald, *We are not French! Langage, culture and identity in Brittany* (London, 1989) 303-316.

³⁹ Simon, *La bretonnité*.

⁴⁰ F. Elegoët, 'Bilinguisme ou domination linguistique?', in: *Les temps modernes*, no. 324-326 (1973) 213-222; Simon, *La bretonnité*.

⁴¹ S. Berger, 'Bretons and Jacobins. Reflections on French regional ethnicity', in: J. Esman Milton (ed.), *Ethnic conflict in the Western World* (Ithaca - London, 1977) 157-178.

⁴² Dulong, *La question bretonne*; Berger, 'Bretons and Jacobins'; Quéré, *Jeux interdits*; McDonald, *We are not French*.

⁴³ Frelaut, *Les nationalistes bretons*; Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement breton*; Nicolas, *Le séparatisme*; McDonald, *We are not French*; Guillourel, 'Problème breton', 83-102; H. Guillourel, 'The social bases of regionalism in France. The Breton case', in: J. Coakley (ed.), *The social origins of nationalist movements. The contemporary West European experience* (London, 1992) 147-164.

⁴⁴ M. Nicolas, *Bretagne, un destin européen* (Rennes, 2001); E. Chartier & R. Larvor, *La question bretonne. Enquête sur les mouvements politiques bretons* (Plougastell - Daoulaz, 2002).

⁴⁵ Roparz Hemon (1900-1978), linguist, grammarian, writer and activist, leader of the *Gwalarn* generation (named after their journal), is largely considered the father of the Breton cultural movement. He was sentenced to 'national indignity' in 1946, especially for cultural collaboration with the occupant. See R. Calvez, *La radio en langue bretonne. Roparz Hemon et Pierre-Jakez Hélias. Deux rêves de la Bretagne* (Rennes, 2000). Controversy arose when his name was given to the first Diwan College which was renamed in May 2000.

⁴⁶ A notable attack on the movement was that by Françoise Morvan, especially in her *Le Monde comme si. Nationalisme et dérive identitaire en Bretagne* (Arles, 2002).

⁴⁷ R. Le Honzec & R. Sécher, *Histoire de Bretagne des origines à nos jours* (Acigné, 2002) 10 vol.

⁴⁸ M. Denis, 'Le mouvement breton pendant la guerre: un bilan', in: Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 151-166.

⁴⁹ See M. Bergère, 'Les usages politiques de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Bretagne: Histoire, mémoire et identité régionale' (unpubl. paper, 2003).

⁵⁰ Cf. Calvez, *La radio*.

⁵¹ K. Hamon, *Les nationalistes bretons sous l'occupation* (Ar Releg - Kerhuon, 2001); K. Hamon, *Le Bezen Perrot. 1944. Des nationalistes bretons sous l'uniforme allemand* (Fouesnant, 2004).

⁵² See also G. Cadiou, *L'hermine et la croix gammée. Le mouvement breton et la collaboration* (Paris, 2001).

⁵³ Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*.

⁵⁴ Denis, 'Le mouvement breton'; R. Calvez, '1941: le breton, langue d'Etat', in: Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 207-221; L. Boissou, 'L'Allemagne et le nationalisme breton (1939-1945)', in: Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 321-336.

⁵⁵ D. Le Couédic, 'Les étranges destinées de Dézarrois et Lebesque ou la complication de la guerre mise à nu par ses intellectuels, même', in: Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 177-206; L. Capdevila, 'Le mouvement breton face à l'Épuration', in: Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 337-351.

⁵⁶ Bougeard, *Bretagne et identités régionales*, 393-399.

⁵⁷ P. Le Stum, *Le Néo-druidisme en Bretagne. Origine, naissance et développement, 1890-1914* (Rennes, 1998); J.-D. Giraud & M. Giraud (eds.), *Émile Masson, prophète et rebelle* (Rennes, 2005).

⁵⁸ F. Le Squer, *Les espoirs, les efforts et les épreuves du mouvement breton catholique de 1891 à 1945* (Lille, 1997).

⁵⁹ D. Le Couédic & J.-Y. Veillard (eds.), *Ar Seiz Breur 1923-1947. La création bretonne entre tradition et modernité* (Rennes, 2000).

⁶⁰ Kernalegenn, *Drapeau rouge*; T. Kernalegenn, *Une approche cognitive du régionalisme. Identités régionales, territoires, mouvements sociaux en Bretagne, Écosse et Galice dans les années 1970* (PhD diss., Université de Rennes 1, 2011).

- ⁶¹ E. Chartier & A. Cabon, *Le dossier F.L.B. Plongée chez les clandestins bretons* (Spézet, 2006).
- ⁶² A. Croix & J.-Y. Veillard, *Le dictionnaire du Patrimoine Breton* (Rennes, 2000).
- ⁶³ C. Bertho, 'L'invention de la Bretagne. Genèse sociale d'un stéréotype', in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 35 (1980) 45-62; G. Nicolas (ed.), *La construction de l'identité régionale. Les exemples de la Saxe et de la Bretagne, XVIII^e-XX^e siècles* (Rennes, 2001).
- ⁶⁴ Nicolas, *Bretagne*.
- ⁶⁵ A. Croix (ed.), *Bretagne 2100. Identité et avenir* (Rennes, 2001).
- ⁶⁶ R. Le Coadic, *L'identité bretonne* (Rennes, 1998); Simon, *La bretonnité*.
- ⁶⁷ R. Le Coadic (ed.), *Diversité culturelle et mondialisation. Repenser la démocratie* (Rennes, 2003); N. Dugalès, R. Le Coadic & F. Patez (eds.), *Et la Bretagne? Héritage, identité, projets* (Rennes, 2004); N. Dugalès, Y. Fournis & T. Kernalegenn (eds.), *Bretagne plurielle. Culture, territoire et politique* (Rennes, 2007).
- ⁶⁸ R. Pasquier, *La capacité politique des régions. Une comparaison France/Espagne* (Rennes, 2004); A. Cole, *Beyond devolution and decentralisation. Building regional capacity in Wales and Brittany* (Manchester, 2006).
- ⁶⁹ Y. Fournis, *Les régionalismes en Bretagne. La région et l'État (1950-2000)* (Brussels, 2006).
- ⁷⁰ Kernalegenn, *Une approche cognitive*.
- ⁷¹ M. Nicolas, *Histoire de la revendication bretonne* (Spézet, 2007).
- ⁷² Let us mention though the book of Henry on the journal *L'Avenir de la Bretagne*: L. Henry, *Le retour du mouvement breton après 1945 à travers le journal L'Avenir de la Bretagne* (Fouenant, 2003); or on the CELIB: J.-P. Cressard, *CELIB (1950-2000). Quand la Bretagne s'est réveillée* (Spézet, 2000).
- ⁷³ A conference was devoted to the UDB in April 2013, organised by Tudi Kernalegenn and Romain Pasquier. About the CELIB, a PhD thesis is now being prepared.