**Making democracy safe for tribal homelands? Self-determination and political regionalism in Weimar Germany[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Abstract:

This article adds to the literature on political regionalism in the Weimar Republic at the end of the First World War. After four years of hardship at the hands of the central government proponents of reform were prepared to countenance the dismemberment of Prussia – Germany’s largest state – in favour of autonomous tribal (*stammlich*) entities under the federal umbrella of the *Reich*. However, contemporaries soon learned that instead of acting as a catalyst of emancipation, the Wilsonian discourse of self-determination frustrated genuine change because the latter’s appropriation by ethno-regionalists threatened to unravel many of the viable compromises reached in the imperial period. The resulting inability to keep all parties engaged in dialogue generated verbal as well as physical aggression. The article suggests that these phenomena shed revealing light not only on the way in which ideas of space and the ‘othering’ of fellow Germans based on tribal allegiance shaped political conflict but also challenge more broadly the assumption prevalent in some parts of the historiography that when ethnic movements make demands for their own state, they automatically turn nationalist. Empirical evidence from the province of Hanover shows that regionalists could well make violent demands for secession from Prussia while at the same time affirming their identification with the German nation.

Keywords: Political violence, secessionism, regionalism, politics of space, *Stämme*

Shortly after the end of the First World War an American visitor arrived in the disputed Polish-Ukrainian border town of Lwów/L’viv, which had recently been declared the capital of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic before being seized by the Polish army in a successful counter-coup. ‘You see those little holes?’, a local resident asked the American. ‘We call them here “Wilson’s Points”. They have been made with machine guns; the big gaps have been made with hand grenades. We are now engaged in self-determination, and God knows what and when the end will be.’[[2]](#endnote-1) Indeed, the impact of the ‘Wilsonian moment’ with its promise of emancipation for oppressed minorities and nations-in-waiting cannot be overstated. The novelty of the self-determination discourse that gained currency towards the First World lay in the subordination of all other sources of political legitimacy to ‘the people’. Henceforth no government could claim full acceptance by the international community if it did not pay homage in some form to the will of the collective it claimed to rule. Yet it was often not so clear who ‘the people’ actually were, as the criteria for membership (such as ethnic descent, language, religion or the will to belong) remained variable. If anything, the lack of consensus spurred on militants, who focused on implementing their subjective visions of nationhood at the expense of states weakened by the war. Much recent scholarship has focused on the interethnic violence that ensued in the ‘shatter-zones’ of eastern Europe’s disintegrating empires and due to the rise of anti-colonial independence movements.[[3]](#endnote-2) These studies have highlighted the radical potential for the glorification of collectivist values and the concomitant ‘othering’ of opponents through the rhetoric of self-determination, despite or because of the fact that the ‘discourse substantially outweighed new state formation’ in the immediate post-World War I period, as Uriel Abulof notes.[[4]](#endnote-3)

What has been more rarely considered is the impression which the Wilsonian language of self-determination made on regionalists throughout Europe. There exists an assumption, which is exemplified by the work of the eminent theorist of nationalism Thomas H. Eriksen, that when ethnic movements start to make demands for their own state, they become ‘by definition’ a nationalist movement and thus render an analysis of their regional characteristics redundant.[[5]](#endnote-4) The case of Germany presents an interesting corrective to this perspective because the collapse of the *Kaiserreich* and military defeat at the end of the First World War prompted a resurgence of strong ethno-regional movements that, with the exception of short-lived attempts to establish an independent republic in the Rhineland, did not seek to secede from Germany. Rather, their aim was independence from the most powerful state in the *Reich*, Prussia, and a complete overhaul of the nation’s federal structure along ‘tribal’ (*stammlich*) lines.[[6]](#endnote-5) Although the interdependence of Prussian and national politics makes the German case somewhat special, an investigation into the resurgence of ethnic regional movements after 1918 can help answer larger questions about the extent to which regionalism can be distinguished from nationalism on the basis of claims for sovereignty and ethno-spatial self-identification.[[7]](#endnote-6) For instance, did the discourse of self-determination differ when applied to delineate distinctions between countrymen? How did regionalists adapt cultural and political tropes from the pre-war period to the brave new world of Wilsonian self-determination? In approaching these questions, it is necessary, first of all, to acknowledge a paradox. Contrary to President Wilson’s bold objective to spread democracy by empowering the people, appeals to self-determination were just as likely to play into the hands of *völkisch* thinkers with monarchical or authoritarian predilections as proponents of parliamentarism. Sometimes the two groups even merged. As Eric Kurlander has demonstrated, many liberals saw no contradiction between their commitment to Weimar Germany’s republican constitution and their belief that a ‘community of race’, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, formed the bedrock of the German polity.[[8]](#endnote-7) That was because they placed the freedom embodied in provincial self-administration and the power of the national collective to determine its own fate above the citizenship rights of the individual. Other parties also engaged with this logic, even if merely to counter it. The case of East Central Europe shows just how ubiquitous the pull of ‘ethnicism’ was: confronted with the disintegration of the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov empires, activists commonly pressured indifferent citizens into choosing one communitarian identity over another so as to bolster (or discredit) the legitimacy of the successor states.[[9]](#endnote-8)

This article contends that in order to fully understand the convergence of the Wilsonian self-determination discourse and *völkisch* ideologies in Germany, close attention must be paid to spatial concepts that prevailed at the subnational level, as well as their semantic change over time. Alon Confino, Celia Applegate, Jennifer Jenkins, Siegfried Weichlein, Eric Storm and others have showcased the successful harmonisation of municipal, regional and national identities during the *Kaiserreich*.[[10]](#endnote-9) The expansive term *Heimat* became the glue that held these tiers together by implying that membership in the national collective required an emotional attachment to one’s local community, and vice versa. Germany was a nation constituted through unity in diversity, according to this interpretation. Yet no sooner had the First World War ended than activists invoked the same markers of ‘cultural intimacy’ (to borrow Michael Herzfeld’s phrase) to mobilise popular support for the dismemberment of Prussia and greater regional autonomy.[[11]](#endnote-10) Intriguingly, the politicisation of the *Heimat* idea to attack Prussian territorial integrity while affirming the nation-state contrasted with the former Habsburg Monarchy, where distinctions between regionalism and nationalism tended to be more fluid because the leaders of regional minorities like the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia couched their demands for self-government in national terms.[[12]](#endnote-11)

Research into the political violence that plagued the Weimar Republic from the start has only just begun to examine how space shaped people’s choices in response to the chronic sense of crisis, rather than treating it as a mere corollary of ideological, class or racial self-legitimation strategies. Intriguing work in this vein has highlighted how the cultural imaginary of the cityscape served to constrain people’s perception of revolution and counter-revolution during the Communist uprisings of 1918/19.[[13]](#endnote-12) The present article adds to this literature by zeroing in on the political instrumentalisation of Germany’s putatively tribal composition and intra-ethnic enmities. The discussion proceeds on the assumption that neither tribes (*Stämme*) nor their ‘homelands’ were self-evident entities but were instead subject to constant social and cultural negotiation. Boundaries are ‘not a spatial fact with sociological consequences’, as Georg Simmel succinctly reminds us, ‘but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially.’[[14]](#endnote-13) The first section follows up this insight by teasing apart the formative significance of space before turning to the pre-First World War antecedents of regionalism to establish whether and, if so, why the Wilsonian moment marked a historical watershed. The second part of the paper will then draw on evidence from the Prussian province of Hanover to explore the implications of Simmel’s statement for the language of regionalism.

**Construct of the mind: space as historical artefact**

Since the ‘spatial turn’ it has become widely accepted that the landscapes of human habitation fit into multiple spatial frameworks. Major waterways such as the Rhine may be shared between communities because they facilitate the exchange of goods, people and ideas. Concomitantly they serve as foci of regional identity and customs (*vide* the Rhineland’s carnival traditions) while, finally, they often symbolise the ‘natural’ frontiers of nations (as exemplified by the historical Franco-German antagonism over control of the Rhine).[[15]](#endnote-14) Territory – be it plains, mountains and cities - can undergo similar processes of isomorphism. David Blackbourn has shown, for instance, how race was mapped onto the land by early twentieth-century German ecologists, who claimed ‘verdant’ areas of cultivation for their own nation and identified Slav culture with ‘deserts’ and ‘wilderness’.[[16]](#endnote-15) The imbuing of the landscape with cultural significance in this manner requires a conscious act of interpretation. Put another way, one might say that space signifies the proximate disposition of features in the lived environment relative to each other in the human imagination. As an artefact of the mind space is therefore not self-evident but reflects the mores, aspirations and self-image of a society.[[17]](#endnote-16)

To complicate matters further, ‘mental maps refer a priori not to one but multiple spaces’ since they ‘presume the existence of as many spaces as there are ways of seeing, sensing and experiencing the world.’[[18]](#endnote-17) If the semiotic evocations of space are inherently pluralist since it is in the eye of the beholder to choose and match spatial associations, so are their sociological and political uses. Charles A. Maier helpfully distinguishes here between ‘identity’ and ‘decision space’. The former denominates geographies of powerful collective loyalties, whereas the second represents an arena in which the state seeks to create physical, economic, and cultural security for its citizens.[[19]](#endnote-18) In both instances spatial imagery benefits from the existence of palpable borders that are maintained by institutions exercising jurisdiction over a given territory. The connection of space with sovereignty introduces hierarchies of power into the organisation of space, although these are often highly contested, as shall become clear below in the examination of Hanoverian political regionalism. The manifold tensions between as well as within communities make the affective dimension of space therefore an important determinant of societal cohesion. The extraordinarily rich vein of literature on *lieux de mémoire* inspired by Pierre Nora has thrown into relief how places can become repositories of memory which buttress communities’ claims about their distinctness based on deep historical ties to certain geographies and their entitlement to unhindered, self-determined use in future. This seeming constancy of place and its residents mentally transforms non-contiguous facts into an unbroken continuum that raises the quest for ‘spatial justice’ to an even higher level, especially as the spread of modern globalisation and periodic crises such as the First World War have blurred localities’ actual uniqueness.[[20]](#endnote-19)

It is debatable whether disputes over spatial resources are more serious and enduring in federations with de-centred power structures than unitary states, as has sometimes been posited, but there can be no doubt that German-speaking central Europe has an unusually complex political history.[[21]](#endnote-20) There were few indications up to the eighteenth century that the motley conglomerate of semi-autonomous bodies, specially defined communities and principalitiespeculiar unto themselves would develop into a nation-state with relatively uniform law codes and political institutions.[[22]](#endnote-21) At no time during its long existence did the Holy Roman Empire (962-1806) possess clearly defined boundaries or encompass a single ethno-linguistic group. Later nationalists found it easy to condemn the fragmented sovereignty of the Empire, which consigned it to a largely passive international role, and implanted this bias in the minds of generations of schoolchildren through atlases that visually recorded the Empire’s disintegration into hundreds of micro-territories.[[23]](#endnote-22) However, recent historiography has done much to correct this one-sided assessment by drawing attention to the Empire’s longevity, successful frameworks for the co-existence of the major Christian denominations and legal mechanisms that protected the vast body of stakeholders against predators. What bound Germans into a community, Joachim Whaley contends, were the rights and liberties they gradually acquired in the Empire.[[24]](#endnote-23) Small wonder that the Empire continued to exercise the German imagination long after its dissolution at the hands of Napoleon.

Several discursive reference points are worth singling out for the purpose of our discussion. First, the Holy Roman Empire came to an end just as Romanticism and its fascination with the Middle Ages were taking root. A broad range of actors like the painter Caspar David Friedrich and the conservative historical associations that sprang up in the Pre-March period found inspiration in the cultural traces of the Empire, including the notion of *stammlich* geographies bequeathed by the subdivision of the ‘imperial circles’ (*Reichskreise*).[[25]](#endnote-24) Second, defenders of the Empire’s federal legacy warned that the creation of a centralised nation-state (*Staatsnation*) was inimical to the flourishing of Germany as a cultural nation (*Kulturnation*). The poet and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe memorably summed up this position in 1828 when he asked rhetorically: ‘What makes Germany great but her admirable popular culture (*Volkskultur*) that has evenly penetrated all parts of the empire? Is it not true that the separate princely capitals are its carriers and patrons?’[[26]](#endnote-25) Still unsettled by the upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars, even reform-minded Prussian officials prioritised the consolidation of a harmonious state-community over German nation-building writ large at the time.[[27]](#endnote-26) Third and following on from the last two points, dynastic state-builders in the post-1815 German Confederation readily appropriated federalists’ argument that Germany did not require a strong national government. On paper, the German Confederation was even more polycentric than the Holy Roman Empire because the member states (i.e. the princes and free cities) rather than an elected emperor held supreme authority. Thus, to prevent Austria or Prussia from seizing control, the smaller monarchical states – who received the pejorative moniker ‘particularists’ from their opponents – found it useful to re-invent themselves as the guardians of Germany’s tribes. The many territorial transfers that had taken place in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars made them even more determined to promote the fiction that each larger state was an advocate for the concerns of discrete *Stämme* such as the Swabians, Bavarians or Lower Saxons, who had come about through the synergy of common memories, lifestyle and dynastic leadership. This state-sponsored tribalism developed considerable traction in the first half of the nineteenth century, and as a result the term ‘nation’ acquired a double meaning in some states, denoting patriotic sentiments focused on the abstract fatherland of all Germans as well as the dynastic territories in question.[[28]](#endnote-27) A similar discourse also took shape in the Habsburg Monarchy, where national politicians appropriated imperial symbols and deployed a rhetoric of dynastic loyalty to promote claims for greater rights within the state structure.[[29]](#endnote-28)

The true test for particularist state-building in Germany came in 1866 when Bismarck’s bid to unite the country under Prussian leadership set the Confederation on the path of civil war. The conscript armies on all sides duly mobilised and fought for their respective sovereigns, but Prussian military planning prevailed in the end. The defeat of the Confederal forces precipitated Prussia’s annexation of her most troublesome enemies in northern Germany, including the kingdom of Hanover, the electorate of Hessen-Kassel, the duchy of Nassau and the city of Frankfurt am Main. Unlike several of his cabinet colleagues, Bismarck voted to preserve existing institutions and corporate rights wherever possible in a bid to mollify particularists in these states. Tailor-made ‘provincial estate charters (*provinzialständische Verfassungen*) authorised the Hanoverian provincial diet to raise special taxes and borrow money for the maintenance of estate-based self-governing bodies, while the province of Hessen-Nassau, being an amalgam of the other three formerly sovereign states, received two separate ‘communal diets’.[[30]](#endnote-29) These concessions fit in well with Prussia’s long-standing practice of ‘quasi-federalism’ (Christopher Clark) at the provincial level, but Berlin’s appetite for expansion was nevertheless greeted with mixed feelings in the annexed territories.[[31]](#endnote-30) Despite liberals’ welcoming the removal of customs barriers and the creation of a national parliament in the newly minted North German Confederation (which was joined by the southern German states to form the *Kaiserreich* in 1871), even they expressed regret at the loss of their statehood. This outcome hit particularists harder still. Sombre poetry proliferated in Hanover which bemoaned movingly the disappearance of the fatherland and the death of its citizens in battle. Perhaps as many as half a million signatures had been collected to stop the annexation, but all to no avail.[[32]](#endnote-31) Supporters of the deposed royal house – the Guelphs – harnessed the undercurrent of discontent to start their own movement, which in 1869 led to the founding of the German Hanoverian Party (*Deutsch-hannoversche Partei* or in short DHP). For two decades the DHP gave the pro-Prussian National Liberals a run for their money in *Reichstag* elections, and even though its popularity dwindled towards the end of the century until only a core base of supporters remained, the effect of the DHP’s lobbying for the restoration of Hanoverian independence throughout the *Kaiserreich* cannot be grasped by studying election results alone.[[33]](#endnote-32)

For a start, the aims of the DHP converged in crucial respects with other political camps. Like the Catholic Centre Party, the Social Democrats and acolytes of the Augustenburg claimants to the ducal crowns of Schleswig-Holstein, it lambasted the preponderance of military interests in Prussian politics and condemned Berlin for the destruction of Germany’s federal heritage.[[34]](#endnote-33) This cooperation with other parties was not merely ideological but extended to a tactical alliance with the Centre while Ludwig Windthorst, a former Hanoverian justice minister with close ties to the exiled Guelph court, led the Catholic parliamentarians until his death in 1891.[[35]](#endnote-34) Furthermore, the Guelphs counted sympathisers in many influential positions, ranging from the orthodox wing of the Lutheran Church to innocuous organisations such as the Historical Association for Lower Saxony. The problem became acute around the turn of the century when the *Heimat* movement took root. To stave off their party’s electoral decline, DHP activists redoubled their efforts to emphasise the integral role of the Guelphs in Hanoverian history and culture by initiating the establishment of singing and sports clubs in the countryside with suggestive names like ‘Lower Saxon horse’ that evoked myths relating to the region’s primordial past.[[36]](#endnote-35) Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War radicals led by the journalist Georg Friedrich Konrich managed to split the *Heimat* League of Lower Saxony in pushing for the ‘protection of Lower Saxony’s racial purity’. Startled moderates broke away to form the Old Saxon Association dedicated to the League’s original objectives of landscape and cultural heritage preservation because they saw in Konrich’s actions a poorly executed grab for publicity at the expense of the multi-ethnic Hohenzollern state.[[37]](#endnote-36)

This sometimes latent and at other times overt politicisation of *Heimat* activism in Hanover is noteworthy because it showcases the double-edged ontology of the ‘homeland’ principle in Wilhelmine Germany. On the one hand it enabled believers to bond over the notion that every distinctive place contributed something larger to the nation and that the failure to celebrate every region’s uniqueness was conversely tantamount to not having any significant history. On the other hand the very imagining of difference introduced divisions into how space was used and socially coded.[[38]](#endnote-37) The imagery of quaint villages, bucolic landscapes and the ‘vernacular modernism’ of urban architecture, which took inspiration from local folkloric influences, could not hide that the *Heimat* idea was ‘inherent’ in societal conflicts as a ‘reservoir of all positively expressed protest values.’[[39]](#endnote-38) To be sure, the ire of disaffected heimatlers was in the first instance not directed at fellow Germans but perceived outside threats in the shape of other language groups and ethnic minorities like Slavs and Jews. It was far from coincidental that campaigns to protect local culture and the environment of the *Heimat* took off at about the same time as ethno-cartography. Map-makers translated data derived from the census about the demographic composition of central Europe into visual images for general audiences; Paul Langhans’ *German Colonial Atlas* (1897) was emblematic of publications that matched peoples to their place of settlement in order to foreground Germany’s ‘civilising mission’ in the East. The reasoning behind this approach was made explicit in the writings of the prominent geographer Friedrich Ratzel, who drew a direct correlation between a people’s degree of ‘rootedness’ (*Bodenständigkeit*) and their level of cultural attainment. The higher both were, he maintained, the better stood a people’s chances of survival against lesser races. Rootedness therefore required that the *Stämme* of the German nation inhabit their rightful territories of settlement. Inspired by Ratzel, Willi Ule’s *Ethnographic and Linguistic Map of Central Europe* (1915) made a point of indicating in fairly bold letters where each tribe resided.[[40]](#endnote-39)

Ethnographers’ pre-occupation with the mutual conditioning of territory and its occupants can only be painted in broad brushstrokes here, for the circle of participants in the debate extended far beyond Germany. Revealingly, the committee of academic experts tasked by President Wilson’s close adviser Colonel Edward Mandell House to work out the practical implications of self-determination made it a priority to draw up economic and social maps which, they hoped, would suggest viable boundaries for the new nations in the Baltic and the Middle East.[[41]](#endnote-40) At the core of their approach lay the belief popularised by the late nineteenth-century doyen of French geography, Paul Vidal de la Blache, that every space had a metaphysical ‘personality’. Based on an analysis of Hanover, the next section will explore how the discursive valorisation of space as a political factor in its own right during the ‘Wilsonian moment’ reconfigured German regionalism when the existing national framework of reference disintegrated at the end of the First World War.

**The trials of *Reichsreform* in interwar Germany**

The imperial government’s disastrous management of human and material resources in the First World War threw into doubt many of the compromises which had previously constrained the centrifugal momentum of regionalism. In Hanover, 14.2 percent of all men aged 18-45 died from war-related causes, not counting those listed as missing in action.[[42]](#endnote-41) Moreover, misplaced attempts on the part of the authorities to regulate the war economy and agricultural production exacerbated the acute shortages arising from the Allied blockade of German ports. The Hanoverian cattle industry suffered especially and contracted to one third below the Prussian average. By 1918 the nervous affirmation of national unity at the start of the First World War had therefore long given way in many regions to surging socio-political tensions, which fuelled dissatisfaction with the central government in Berlin and the monarchy.[[43]](#endnote-42) Martina Steber’s study of Bavarian Swabia shows deftly how the decline of traditional authority figures was offset by a valorisation of *Heimat*.[[44]](#endnote-43) This conclusion chimes with the findings of Thomas Lekan, who contends that the *Heimat* aesthetic became militarised to rouse the national community in defence of the homeland. By the same token ‘[c]onstructing *Heimat* as a bounded, organic whole rooted in the landscape required ever sharper differentiation from ethnic Others’ who did not share the same cultural sensibilities or posed an obstacle to the survival of one’s own group.[[45]](#endnote-44) Demands from within the Hanoverian *Heimat* movement for the annexation of Belgium and England to preserve the superiority of the Germanic race followed the same general pattern.[[46]](#endnote-45)

Steber’s and Lekan’s arguments underscore that even though activists’ heightened pre-occupation with *Heimat* sprang from the same source, namely a search for reassurance in the purity and immutability of local culture, their objectives were not always the same. Facing outwards, the language of *Heimat* could be used to reinforce German unity against foreign enemies, whereas, in a domestic context, commentators were increasingly prepared to assert the needs of their *Stamm* and region vis-à-vis the state and other communities. Perhaps this development was not all that surprising, because Benjamin Ziemann’s sophisticated study of war letters has revealed how much the thoughts and emotions of front soldiers remained trained on home affairs.[[47]](#endnote-46) The Jewish writer and veteran Victor Klemperer evocatively described the effect on his comrades: ‘No, there was a separating wall between tribes. And the segregation of groups went further still because one did not only identify with a region but every town and village had its own sense of belonging, aspirations and antipathies towards other towns and villages.’[[48]](#endnote-47) Even if Klemperer’s memoirs played up the divisions in German society for dramatic effect, they nonetheless paint a telling picture of the strong regional attachments that have come to the fore during moments of crisis in German history.

In the province of Hanover, the collapse of the *Kaiserreich* added grist to the mill of Guelph demands for secession from Prussia. In late 1918 the DHP held meetings with the representatives of other parties who had before then shown little interest in such a proposition. The Prussian government’s poor management of the war economy, fears of a Communist revolution emanating from Berlin and President Wilson’s Fourteen Points had at last convinced mainstream politicians to give the option of statehood under the umbrella of the *Reich* their serious consideration. As Paula Müller-Otfried, one of the founders of the German Protestant Women’s Association and a future *Reichstag* deputy for the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP), admitted: ‘the words chosen by Wilson about the self-determination of peoples’ had nourished a desire for independence even among peers ‘who did not belong to the old Guelph party and would not share its views on Prussian injustice and the oppression of Hanover.’[[49]](#endnote-48) Indeed, a pro-independence petition managed to secure some 600,000 signatures and the 1921 elections for the Hanoverian Provincial Diet returned the DHP in second place behind the Social Democratic Party (SPD).[[50]](#endnote-49) Unfortunately for the Guelphs, however, the interest of the other parties in the project waned fast since the anticipated revolutionary disturbances did not materialise and the negotiating parties disagreed on the expediency of Prussia’s dismemberment. The DNVP realised, for instance, that its electoral strength in an independent Hanover would have been weaker than it currently was in Prussia; the Right therefore soon concluded that gaining leverage over the political executive in Berlin was the real prize.

Perhaps the most crippling obstacle to territorial reform in 1918/19 stemmed from the lack of agreement on who held the authority to carry it out. The swift transition from monarchy to democracy called for a re-configuration of sovereignty, which Article 1 of the constitution defined as emanating from ‘the *Volk*’. But who constituted this mercurial collective? At least three different interpretations were put forth. Commentators on the Far Left identified the term with the interests of the lower orders while democrats maintained that ‘the people’ were coterminous with the holders of legal citizenship. The third approach, finally, centred on ethnic qualifiers like language and culture. Despite the discrepancy between pluralist/changeable and monolithic/immutable conceptions of *Volk* that characterised the latter two positions, the constitution ended up pandering to both. Article 113 protected minorities’ freedom of cultural expression provided they were citizens, yet the preamble also referred to the existence of the *Stämme* as the bedrock of the body politic.[[51]](#endnote-50) The fusion of ‘voluntarist’ and ‘ethnic’ elements was a deliberate attempt to anchor Germany’s federal heritage and its emphasis on ethno-cultural peculiarities within a modern democratic system. In keeping with that ambition Prussia’s provinces received autonomous representation in the *Reichsrat*, the upper chamber of the German parliament, and Article 18 allowed territorial revisions if two thirds of the population wished to secede from one of the federal states. Since the constitution did not stipulate on what grounds independence could be sought, this omission left regionalists free to lobby for tribal self-determination.[[52]](#endnote-51)

In the volatile political climate of the early 1920s, appeals to regional solidarity had the capacity to reach voters on a deeper level than nationalism or even ethnicity. A case in point are the plebiscites mandated by the treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain to decide the national affiliation of northern Schleswig, the Allenstein and Marienwerder districts on the Polish border, Upper Silesia, Carinthia and the Burgenland. Lobbyists’ electioneering techniques cleverly subordinated national interests to the pursuit of local patriotism in portraying plebiscites as the best way to preserve regional identity. The deployment of regional symbols and economic incentives proved so effective in the Carinthian case that 33 of the 51 electoral districts in the southern zone voted for Austria, notwithstanding the fact that two-thirds of these districts were home to a majority population of Slovene-speakers.[[53]](#endnote-52) Even in Upper Silesia, one of the hottest flashpoints of Polish-German antagonism after the First World War, regional concerns such the rivalry between proclerical and anticlerical forces or the policies of *Reichskommissar* Otto Hörsing’s ‘Red Hakatist’ regime influenced people’s choices to an extent that at times equalled, if not exceeded, national considerations. By way of response to the plebiscite campaign of 1921 a rhetoric of regional unity emerged which, in some instances, called for the recognition of full-blown Upper Silesian nationhood. Such representations of Upper Silesia as an indivisible whole were an open protest against the premise of the plebiscite that the ethnic affiliations of the region’s population could be neatly pigeonholed.[[54]](#endnote-53)

The attractiveness of political regionalism in the aftermath of the First World War makes clear why the Guelphs – like other anti-Prussian movements in Schleswig and the Rhineland – continued their quest for secession in spite of initial setbacks. Under the slogan ‘Hanover to the Hanoverians and not the Russian Bolshevists!’ they began as early as January 1919 to arm their supporters and to organise them in civil guards that at their height counted 50,000 members, according to some estimates.[[55]](#endnote-54) Barely a year later the DHP saw an opening to accomplish its goal by force during the so-called Kapp Putsch when the DHP’s paramilitary affiliate, the Hanoverian Legion, launched a secondary coup to seize control of key government offices in the provincial capital. Although army units caught wind of the plan before the Guelphs could fully put it into action, the failure of what would half-mockingly become known as the Welfenputschwas more the result of poor execution than a lack of commitment on the part of the separatists because subsequent house searches turned up several hundred rifles, machine guns, and a howitzer. Moreover, in one village near the city of Hanover the police discovered that civil guardsmen had dug trenches and stockpiled provisions in anticipation of clashes with police forces. The perhaps most intriguing detail of the affair is the suggestion advanced by one historian that the monarchist Guelphs did not operate in isolation but acted with the tacit approval of Iwan Katz, a leading spokesman for the extreme Left. The possible collusion of Guelphs and communists offers further proof that manifestations of civil war in the Weimar Republic were fuelled as much by spatial as by ideological antagonisms.[[56]](#endnote-55)

The militancy of Hanover’s secessionists has direct bearing on the question raised in the introduction whether demands for self-determination rest on some notion of nationality. Brian Girvin contended not long ago that most secessionists ‘[have] employ[ed] nationalist arguments in support of their claim’ since the French Revolution.[[57]](#endnote-56) This verdict needs qualifying when applied to Germany in the interwar period because the Guelphs had no desire to emancipate themselves from their compatriots or to become a national movement in their own right. On the contrary, they proclaimed that the empowerment of the tribes within a federal framework served the interests of the entire nation, including Prussia. Yet, in order to buttress their case against Berlin, propagandists incongruously chose to construe the former Hohenzollern monarchy as a not fully German ethnic ‘other’. They did so by highlighting Prussians’ supposed racial inferiority due to the miscegenation of German settlers with indigenous eastern European populations during the Middle Ages. This accusation possessed a familiar ring: Guelph legitimists had been known to hurl it at the conquering Hohenzollerns in 1866, and the invective attracted wider attention still during the *La race prussienne* controversy at the start of the 1870s. The eponymous publication by the French anthropologist Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau charged the ‘Prussian race’ with a lack of culture because of pseudo-ethnological indicators that it combined the worst traits of East and West. Although German anthropologists were able to demolish Quatrefages’ conjectures easily enough, political regionalists in the Weimar Republic nonetheless did not miss the opportunity to flog this dead horse back to life.[[58]](#endnote-57) The *Landespartei* of Schleswig-Holstein informed voters that the presence of the Prussian ‘mongrels’ since 1866 had prevented the two duchies from being a cultural mediator between the Germanic peoples of northern Europe. The poet Börries von Münchhausen meanwhile penned a commentary for the Guelph flagship newspaper, the *Hannoversche Landeszeitung*, in which he contrasted the ‘sober blond heads’ of Lower Saxony and ‘Berlin’s human refuse (*Menschenspülicht*)’.[[59]](#endnote-58) In very much the same spirit Rhineland separatists like the Nassauvian agrarian leader Peter Kirchem condemned the ‘Russians, Poles, Galicians, Wends, Czechs, and God knows what members of other eastern tribes’ that allegedly ran the Prussian capital.[[60]](#endnote-59)

The racial othering of Prussia derived its potency from spatial metaphors which centred on the river Elbe. The Low German lands west of this ethno-cultural border were held up in pro-independence literature as the power-house of German national self-assertion since the days of Arminius the Cheruscan. This teleological narrative wove together the tribesmen of the Teutoburg Forest fighting against the Romans with Duke Widukind’s opposition to the universal monarchy of Charlemagne and the patriotic fervour of the King’s German Legion for the liberation of the Hanoverian fatherland during the Napoleonic Wars. In addition to the theme of resistance against foreign oppressors, authors praised the creative energy of the Lower Saxon tribe, which they saw expressed in Henry the Lion’s pioneering contribution to the German colonisation of eastern Europe and the commercial success of the Hansa.[[61]](#endnote-60) The Prussian core provinces east of the Elbe were by contrast described in terms of a civilisational wasteland worthy of their countrymen’s charity. One treatise on the geographical distribution of the tax burden stated quite simply: ‘That Hanover, like all of Prussia’s western provinces, needs to subsidise the poorer Old Prussian provinces with their surplus, if only because the cultural foundations are completely different in the German East from those in the German West and South, should be apparent to objective observers.’ Tellingly, the author finished his philippic with a call to arms by admonishing his readers that despite this need for generosity the time had come to get rid of the selfish Prussian ‘guardian and asset manager’.[[62]](#endnote-61) Exponents of the *völkisch* Far Right, who opposed the dissolution of Prussia for tactical reasons, did their best to turn this critique on its head: they countered that since Lower Saxons had settled in Prussia during the Middle Ages, the colonisers had an obligation not to desert their colony. Of course, *völkisch* nationalists’ image of Prussia was hardly more flattering than the Guelphs’, and when publicists started to liken the beleaguered state to a sick person in need of healing, they only added fuel to biopolitical anxieties about degeneration in the imagination of Weimar eugenicists.[[63]](#endnote-62)

The response of the socialist-led government of Prussia was not so much to acknowledge or deny these diatribes as to deflect public attention to more pressing issues. Chief among them were Germany’s precarious international situation after the Treaty of Versailles, the crushing national debt and the Allied occupation of the Rhineland. When the DHP tried to mobilise voters for an independence referendum in accordance with Article 18 of the constitution in May 1924, news media loyal to Berlin emphasised the further destabilisation to be expected from territorial reform at this difficult time. Behind the scenes politicians voiced genuine concerns throughout the 1920s that Weimar’s democratic system was inadequately equipped to deal with the challenge of political regionalism. One parliamentarian warned Chancellor Gustav Stresemann that should the federal government appear weak in foreign affairs, the army might switch its allegiance to a federalist party willing to ‘unfurl the battle banner’.[[64]](#endnote-63) Several years later the then federal interior minister, Walter von Keudell, complained that Germany’s many socio-economic problems were also fuelling separatism, and that even where plebiscites for independence failed, the ‘risks to Prussia and by extension the *Reich* were not to be dismissed out of hand.’[[65]](#endnote-64) However, Prussia’s long-serving minister-president, Otto Braun, had no intention to sacrifice the parliamentary majority of the Social Democrats and the relative stability of the Prussian administration to the champions of tribal autonomy. In answer to the question whether ‘Prussia must die so that the nation can live’, he declared before the state parliament as early as June 1922 that ‘today the ideal of unity expresses itself most strongly […] in the large, cohesive, well-governed state edifice of Prussia. We should therefore preserve Prussia if we want to make a cohesive, uniformly governed German *Reich*.’[[66]](#endnote-65) To give point to his words, Braun and his chief lieutenant in Hanover, the provincial governor Gustav Noske, were prepared to spend gold marks to buy politicians’ loyalty, influence public opinion and to remove suspected separatists from positions of influence, even where their measures did not benefit the democratic process.[[67]](#endnote-66)

Celia Applegate’s verdict that political theorists and politicians were unable, in the final analysis, to ‘articulate a link between an “old” politics of community and a “new” politics of party and state’ is borne out by the stalemate in debates about how to ‘right-size’ Germany’s federal states.[[68]](#endnote-67) Despite the obstacles that stood in the path of a thoroughgoing *Reichsreform*, few commentators openly questioned the validity of the tribal paradigm. Starting with the establishment of the ‘Central Office for the Organisation of the German Empire’ in 1920,a series of governmental commissions, semi-official advisory bodies and economic pressure groups for years traded proposals back and forth without reaching firm decisions about the future of Prussia, let alone the even thornier question whether a unitary state with a strong central executive was preferable to the devolution of authority. The elusiveness of progress in turn generated pent-up frustrations and outbursts of verbal aggression. Characteristically, one representative of the Schleswig-Holstein separatist movement counselled at a conference of the like-minded Rhenish-Republican People’s Party in 1921 to smack Prussians ‘in the kisser’ – advice that was greeted with cheers from the audience and calls of ‘Sadly there’s too little of that!’[[69]](#endnote-68) Although the DHP eschewed physical violence since the ignominious failure of the Welfenputsch, some members were not averse to sending ‘storm troopers’ to the election rallies of their opponents in order to shout down the speakers. More importantly, the Guelph press lost no opportunity to attribute the defeat of the 1924 plebiscite to the Prussian authorities’ ‘terrorist’ intimidation tactics.[[70]](#endnote-69) The other side knew how to make damaging accusations, too, because in the lead-up to the referendum virtually all the parties hostile to independence issued a joint communiqué which advised citizens not to vote for the initiative on the grounds that the Guelphs had allegedly called for Noske’s assassination.[[71]](#endnote-70)

The imponderability of *Reichsreform* drove not only secessionists and unionists to distraction but also split the defenders of tribal rights themselves. The more *stammlich* identitieswere subjected to critical scrutiny, the more their ethnological, historical, economic and political heterogeneity became evident. Since ‘today’s political entities correspond little with old tribal connections’, as Kurt Brüning, one of the chief campaigners for Lower Saxon independence, had to admit, he and his colleagues were hard-pressed to pinpoint the exact borders of tribal homelands.[[72]](#endnote-71) In the Prussian province of Hessen-Nassau, for instance, a number of proposals made the rounds that alternately suggested the fusion of the former Hessen-Kassel with Nassau, the People’s State of Hessen and the tiny ex-principality of Waldeck in one ‘tribal community’; the concentration of the historic ‘Chatti’ lands in a Greater Hessen; the creation of a Greater Nassau rounded off with pieces from the province of Westphalia; and, finally, the merger of the Rhineland and Nassau.[[73]](#endnote-72) In northwestern Germany the search for solutions was just as heated. Brüning and Hermann Aubin, a professor of historical geography at Bonn University, engaged in a veritable ‘pamphlet war’ during the second half of the 1920s over where Lower Saxony’s tribal homeland left off and Westphalia’s began because the allegiance of Osnabrück was in dispute, whose historical association with Hanover the Lower Saxons were reluctant to sever.[[74]](#endnote-73) To secure victory, the regional historians Georg Schnath and Wilhelm Peßler supplied Brüning with evidence showing areas of primordial Lower Saxon settlement, all the while failing to realise that their recourse to spatially deterministic arguments made compromise for the sake of *Reichsreform* well-nigh impossible. Unsurprisingly, therefore, tribal federalists never failed to roundly condemn the status quo at national gatherings but were at the same time unable to agree on a common course of action.

The absence of a unifying vision among Germany’s political regionalists bore testament to the inherent contradictions of the Wilsonian moment. The American president’s full-bodied promise to fight for ‘democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations’ served to suggest a natural harmony between democracy and minorities’ entitlement to self-expression where none existed.[[75]](#endnote-74) In truth, few theorists of modern liberalism have espoused an absolute commitment to maximal democracy, given the difficulty involved in meeting this benchmark without the blatant manipulation of elections. Moreover, if two groups (or more accurately their self-appointed spokespersons) stake claims to the same space and have equally good reasons for doing so, as in the case of competing tribal ideologies, who possesses the legitimate authority to adjudicate? Wilson’s guarantees for the protection of ‘a universal dominion of right’ only exacerbated this conundrum, for they dis-incentivised compromise and gave ‘oppressed’ communities a justification to pursue secession.[[76]](#endnote-75)

The Guelphs, for their part, sensed the effect their secessionist politics were having on the democratic process but preferred to keep their options open. In 1930 another, and what turned out to be the last, opportunity for a referendum presented itself when Noske dismissed three county administrators for endorsing a Nazi-sponsored motion in the provincial diet. Poisoned against the SPD by the bitter *Reichstag* elections that year, virtually all right-of-centre parties closed ranks to condemn what they depicted as the provincial governor’s high-handed interference in local affairs to punish political opponents. Due to Noske’s ‘mistreatment of Hanover’ and calls for the reorganisation of Germany in accordance with tribal principles, it seemed briefly as if the DHP might win enough backing to carry a plebiscite. Party representatives promptly initiated negotiations with Braun’s most implacable detractors at the time, the League of Front Soldiers (*Stahlhelm*). Despite the powerful nationalist pressure group’s endorsement for a tribal re-ordering of Germany, the negotiations soon petered out because DHP functionaries grew concerned that their prospective partner was becoming too authoritarian and bent on the establishment of a fascist dictatorship. ‘The DHP is no more bound unconditionally to parliamentary-democratic means for the realisation of its goals than the *Stahlhelm* or other parties’, clarified local notables in Bremervörde, ‘yet as a party of justice and out of a sense of responsibility it prefers not to pursue a politics of collapse and ruin (*Zusammenbruchs- und Katastrophenpolitik*) and rather to remain true to the constitution.’[[77]](#endnote-76) In contrast to the first half of the 1920s, in which the Guelphs had been more likely to use homeland imagery as a way of emphasising ethnological differences in Germany, they were now coming back to the pre-war notion that a ‘vibrant love of *Heimat*’ represented a ‘victory of pure reason, which does not abuse or possibly even kill a dissenting German brethren and instead endeavours to plant him [sic] with both feet on the soil of the forefathers.’[[78]](#endnote-77)

The change of heart in favour of tolerance was far from disinterested. Such a development reflected the desperation of a party that stood on the verge of extinction in the face of competition from more ruthless anti-establishment parties like the National Socialists. Polling more than 40 percent among Hanoverian voters in the last free *Reichstag* elections in November 1932, this ‘people’s party of protest’ managed to absorb much of the anti-Berlinism and discontent with the glacial pace of territorial reform.[[79]](#endnote-78) The decisive blow against the ‘socialist bastion’ Prussia was not dealt by Hitler, though, but rather by the ambitious national-conservative chancellor Franz von Papen, who carried out a ‘forced *Reichsreform*’ in July 1932 when he subjugated Prussia’s ministries to a *Reich*-appointed commissioner. Hitler’s seizure of power half a year later allowed the Nazis to build on this precedent to pass the ‘*Reich* Commissar Laws ‘(1933/35) and the ‘Law on the Reorganization of the *Reich*’ (1934) that abolished the sovereignty of individual state governments and placed them under national ‘viceroys’ (*Reichsstatthalter*) and regional Nazi party heads (*Gauleiter*).[[80]](#endnote-79)There is perhaps some irony in the fact that Prussia, the trailblazer of national unification through conquest in 1866, would fall victim in this way to its own creation – the *Reich*.

**Conclusion**

At the end of the Second World War the exiled high-ranking former Prussian official Arnold Brecht reflected on the errors of the past. He criticised that

‘[m]ost observers of the federal set-up in Germany have concentrated upon divergencies of views between the north and the south. They have overlooked the fact that the most serious conflicts during the last hundred years have been those between the west and the east. They were less visible, because they were settled not by public controversies between different states but by decisions made within the one state government of Prussia, the only state in Germany that included both eastern and western sections. During the monarchical period such decisions often went in favour of eastern views. After 1918, however, the democratic cabinets in Prussia decided most questions of political philosophy in favour of the west against the east. This trend was not reversed until democracy was overthrown unconstitutionally and replaced by an authoritarian regime in 1932.[[81]](#endnote-80)

This passage deserves to be quoted at length because it offers a powerful answer to a question that overshadows the present article and indeed the special issue: to what extent did the ‘Wilsonian moment’ bring forth truly novel ideas and modes of collective self-expression? According to Brecht the introduction of a republican constitution entailed a transfer of power while the old structural problems of nation-building for the most part remained the same. He was not a lone voice in the wilderness. Fritz Rickhey, a young political scientist who wrote his PhD thesis on the Hanoverian/Lower Saxon independence movement in 1926, likewise concluded that ethno-regionalists’ obsession with the creation of tribal states just ‘re-introduced the blockages and polarities’ of the pre-unification period.[[82]](#endnote-81) Although there can be no doubt that the ‘omnipresence of the past’ (Robert Gerwarth) explains many of Weimar politics’ travails, the Brecht quote speaks subtly to a profound transformation in the way Germans negotiated spatial conflict after President Wilson’s plea for self-determination.[[83]](#endnote-82) The citizens of the *Reich* thought about, debated and contested ethno-territorial borders which had merely existed in a state of latency. The *Heimat* discourse - hitherto a cultural resource to contain tensions within society - became radicalised when political actors appropriated its emotive imagery to justify (violent) action against the democratically elected Prussian government. The Guelphs did so in the name of regional autonomy, whereas more opportunistic parties jumped on the tribalist band-waggon from time to time to unsettle the socialist-led coalition in Prussia. However, it would be misleading to associate this politics of space merely with partisan agendas. Despite the bitter ideological clashes of the interwar period, which have been the focus of much recent research, the Guelphs’ covert talks with DNVP and communist politicians in 1918/20 suggests that the issue of territorial reform struck a nerve with contemporaries irrespective of their political creed. DHP strategists and like-minded writers realised that Hanoverian independence from Prussia could only succeed if voters across the board supported a plebiscite.[[84]](#endnote-83)

This militant turn of regionalism owed much to a palingenetic re-conceptualisation of nationalism, which saw in the strengthening of ethnoregional diversity a cure to restore the national ‘community of people’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Although the DHP was at heart a party of monarchists that never warmed up to the radical agenda of the Nazis, its rhetoric and tactics tapped into the same *völkisch* current that carried other ethnoregional movements to success. Take Konrad Henlein’s ‘Sudeten German Homeland Front’ (est. 1933). The Homeland Front’s early programme – much like the DHP’s – was vague, combining a commitment to the *Volksgemeinschaft* with demands for regional autonomy while publicly rejecting pan-Germanism and the overthrow of the Czechoslovak state. Henlein managed to galvanise the Sudeten German community all the same, thanks in part to his clever promotion of an ecumenical vision of homeland, ‘which signalled an ambition to overcome party-political divisions’. He did so by arguing that all Sudeten Germans were special because they occupied a ‘common space’ of unique mountains, valleys and forests that linked up with a wider Germanic ‘common space’. In contrast to the DHP Henlein had no compunction in the final resort to put political regionalism at the service of a ‘politics of ruin and collapse’, and in 1938 presented demands for autonomy to the Czechoslovak government that served to justify Germany’s annexation of the ‘oppressed’ Sudetenland.[[85]](#endnote-84)

Sobering as the abandonment of democracy by political regionalists like Henlein was, the failures of the Wilsonian moment in the interwar period form part of a longer learning curve. A comparison of the (dis-)continuities in the way Germans related to *Heimat* after the First and Second World Wars sheds revealing light on this process. Just as in 1918, the collapse of the Third Reich engendered a flurry of competing plans for the kind of society that was to follow and once more local identities rose to the fore as a vital cultural resource through which Germans imagined their place in the new post-war order. The flight into the familiar discourse of *Heimat* as primary point of reference let the dislocation caused by the war fade away and permitted citizens to cast aside doubts about their responsibility for the horrors of the Nazi regime.[[86]](#endnote-85) The first Social Democratic prime minister of Lower Saxony, Hinrich Wilhelm Kopf, readily attended ‘Lower Saxony Days’, subsidised the state’s *Heimat League* to the tune of 35,000 marks per year and threw his weight behind the establishment of a ‘State Agency for Service to the *Heimat*’ because the very vagueness of the terminology appealed to the heterogeneous electorate in different ways.[[87]](#endnote-86) To native Lower Saxons it promised protection from ‘foreign infiltration’ (*Überfremdung*) while for the millions of displaced persons and refugees it evoked the landscape of their lost homelands in eastern Europe.[[88]](#endnote-87) Hanoverian tribalists perhaps found it easier than most compatriots to accept the Allies’ arbitrary zoning of Germany because in 1946, almost eighty years to the day after Hanover’s integration into the Hohenzollern monarchy, the British military government fulfilled their wish to see Lower Saxon statehood revived at last.

Yet many potential and in some cases all too real sources of conflict inherent in the renewed commitment to ‘*Heimat* consciousness’ persisted. First, in the immediate post-war years concepts of race stayed at the core of how West Germans saw themselves and related to eastern Europeans, who were cast as a dangerous threat to Germany’s hard-working population.[[89]](#endnote-88) German refugees from the East asserted a ‘right to the *Heimat*’ and long held out the hope that they could one day return to the lands now occupied by Poles or Czechs.[[90]](#endnote-89) Second, regional movements like the DHP’s successor, the German Party, were not afraid to court right-wing voters when this strategy suited their interests.[[91]](#endnote-90) Even if these patterns of thought and behaviour seemed eerily reminiscent of the past, the regionalist rhetoric of 1918 and 1945 differed in one crucial respect. In contrast to their forebears, Guelph postwar politicians were led by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism to prioritise European international cooperation and democratic pluralismfrom the outset. ‘It is a step on the path to the exercise of true humanity’, Heinrich Hellwege, the chairman of the German Party remarked, ‘when the polarity of everything earthly is recognised and one no longer strives to destroy the antipole’.[[92]](#endnote-91) Tragically, the admirers of Wilson’s electrifying vision of self-determined communities had needed almost thirty years to take this lesson fully to heart.

1. This article benefitted from a EURIAS fellowship at the Paris Institute for Advanced Studies (France), co-funded by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, under the European Union’s 7thFramework Programme for research, and from a funding from the French State programme “Investissements d’avenir”, managed by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR-11-LABX-0027-01 Labex RFIEA+). I am very grateful to both institutions for their material support as well as the congenial intellectual environment I had the privilege to immerse myself in at the Institute for Advanced Studies during the 2017/18 academic year. Further thanks are due to the editors of this special issue, the two anonymous reviewers, the participants of the ‘Democratization and Nationalism in Europe’ workshop held at Leiden University (14-16 January 2016) as well as James Koranyi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, 66. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Cf. Gerwarth and Manela, eds., *Empires at War*; Gerwarth, *Vanquished*; Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*; Bartov and Weitz, eds., *Shatterzones of Empires*;Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination*;Heater, *National Self-Determination*;Watson, *Ring of Steel.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. Abulof, ‘We the Peoples?’, 542. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*,6. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Cf. Schlemmer, *‘Los von Berlin’*; Neumann, *Politischer Regionalismus und staatliche Neugliederung*; Gembries, ‘Krisenfall Pfalz’. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. Van Ginderachter, ‘Nationalist versus Regionalist?’, 210. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Kurlander, ‘Landscapes of Liberalism’, 125-27; Kurlander, *Price of Exclusion*, 185-94. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. On ‘ethnicism’ in the former Habsburg Empire and the growing pressure on ordinary citizens to choose sides, see King, ‘The Nationalization of East Central Europe’; Zahra. *Kidnapped Souls*. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. Confino, *Nation as a Local Metaphor*; Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*; Weichlein, *Nation und Region*; Storm, *Culture of Regionalism*; Umbach, *German Cities and Bourgeois Modernism*; Umbach and Hüppauf, eds., *Vernacular Modernism*; Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity*. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*,3. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. On this complex interplay between localism and ethnic identity politics, see King’s *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*, esp. ch. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. Aulke, *Räume der Revolution*;Szejnmann and Umbach, ‘Introduction‘, 7; Jerram, *Streetlife*; Reiss, ed., *Street as Stage*; Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies.* [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
14. Simmel cited in Schwerhoff, ‘Spaces, Places, and the Historians’, 431. Christopher Tilley has similarly argued that a ‘humanized space forms both the medium and outcome of action, both constraining and enabling it.’ Tilley, *Phenomenology of Landscape*, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
15. Cf. Tümmers, *Rhein*; Plonien, ‘“Germany’s River, but not Germany’s Border”’. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
16. Blackbourn, *Conquest of Nature*,9. Cf. Kopp, *Germany’s Wild East*. The juxtaposition of green German landscapes and Polish wastelands carried the unmistakeable stamp of eighteenth-century physiocratic thought, which held that the level of agricultural cultivation determined a nation’s wealth and thus level of development. The longevity of physiocratic theory is evident in its influence on later models of political economy developed by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx and others. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
17. Storm, ‘Spatial Turn and the History of Nationalism’; Warf and Arias, ‘Introduction’, 10; Donnan and Wilson, *Borders*,9. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*,243-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
19. Maier, *Once within Borders*,3; Maier, ‘Consigning the Twentieth Century to History, 808. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
20. Soja, *Globalization and Community*, introduction;Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, Gupta and Ferguson, ‘Beyond “Culture”’, 40; 10-11; Murphy, ‘Regions as Social Constructs’. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
21. Cf. East and Prescott, *Our Fragmented World*, 164. On the complexity of German history in its Central European context, see Ingrao and Szabo, eds., *The Germans and the East*. See also Livezeanu and Klimó, eds., *The Routledge History of East Central Europe Since 1700*. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
22. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866*, 24-5; Hagen, *German History in Modern Times*,parts 1 and 2; Breuilly, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Germany*; Smith (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*. On the game-changing ramifications of the French Revolution on conceptions of national sovereignty in Europe, see Kolla, *Sovereignty, International Law, and the French Revolution.* [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
23. Wilson, *Holy Roman Empire*,1-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
24. Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*,vol. 2, 647. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
25. Lent, ‘Niedersachsenbewußtsein im Wandel der Jahrhunderte’, 30-43. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
26. Goethe, *Goethes Gespräche mit Eckermann*, 428.On the impact of Goethe’s cultural nationalism on later generations of federalists, see Martius, *Reich des Geistes*. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
27. Cf. Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
28. Green, *Fatherlands*; Hanisch, ‘Nationalisierung der Dynastien oder Monarchisierung der Nation?‘, 71-92; Heinzen, *Making Prussians, Raising Germans*. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
29. Cf. Cole, *Military Culture and Popular Patriotism in Late Imperial Austria*,21; Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism*. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
30. On the flexibility of Prussian administrative integration in 1866, see the contributions in Baumgart, ed., *Expansion und Integration*. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
31. Wright and Clark, ‘Regionalism and the State in France and Prussia’, 285 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
32. Bukey, ‘Guelph Movement’, 45-6; Pitz, ‘Deutschland und Hannover’, 132. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
33. Cf. Riotte, *Der Monarch im Exil*; Schubert, ‘Verdeckte Opposition in der Provinz Hannover‘; Bösch, ‘Margin

at the Center’. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
34. Anon., *Politische Briefe eines Hannoveraners*, 42-52; Ibs, *Politische Parteien und Selbstverwaltung*, 146-8; Neff, ‘“Dekorationsmilitarismus”’. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
35. Aschoff, *Welfentum und politischer Katholizismus*. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
36. On Guelph electioneering techniques, see Riotte, ‘”Seiner Majestät Allergetreueste Opposition”’. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
37. Hanke, *Niedersächsische Heimatbewegung*, 35-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
38. This point is well made by Bourdieu, ‘Identity and Representation’, 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
39. Ina Geverus cited in Blickle, *Heimat*, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
40. Fahlbusch, ‘Volk ohne Raum – Raum ohne Volk‘, 257-69; Pinwinkler, ‘“Grenze” als soziales Konzept: Historisch-demographische Konstrukte des “Eigenen” und des “Fremden”’, 31-48; Nagle, ‘Peripheries and Contested Regions in Nationalist Imaginations‘. On the rise of demographic information gathering and cartography as tools of nation-building, see also Hansen, *Mapping the Germans*; Herb, *Under the Map of Germany*; Mingus, *Remapping Germany after National Socialism*. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
41. Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*,55; Hagen, ‘Mapping the Polish Corridor’, 63-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
42. Oberschelp, *Stahl und Steckrüben*,44. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
43. The literature is vast. Cf. Schneider, *An der ‘Heimatfront’*; Buhr, *Celle im Kaiserreich und in der Phase des politischen Umbruchs 1918/1919*; Hermann and Weßels, eds., *Ostfriesland im Ersten Weltkrieg*. For an overview of the latest scholarship on the divisions caused in German society by the First World War, see Weichlein, ‘Schlafwandler und Mehlschieber’, 241-7. Cf. also Stibbe, *Germany, 1914-1933*;Bessel, *Germany after the First World War*; 1-48; Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*; Davis, *Home Fires Burning.* [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
44. Steber, *Ethnische Gewissheiten*;163-92. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
45. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*, 84. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
46. Hartung, *Konservative Zivilisationskritik*, 280-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
47. Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-23*. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
48. Klemperer cited in Langewiesche, ‘Gefühlsraum Nation‘, 207. See also Leonhard, *Büchse der Pandora*,551-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
49. Paula Müller-Otfried to v. d. Wense, 9 May 1919, Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover (hereafter NHStAH), VVP 17, Nr 204. On the alliance negotiations, see Prilop, ‘Vorabstimmung’, 237-56. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
50. Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 620. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
51. Gollwitzer, ‘Politische Landschaft in der deutschen Geschichte‘;.542-4; Retterath, ‘Volksbegriff in der Zäsur des Jahres 1918/19‘, 97-118. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
52. Biewer, ‘Preußen und das Reich in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik‘, 332-3; Reuling, ‘Reichsreform und Landesgeschichte‘, 258-9, 66-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
53. Jebsen, ‘Dividing Regions? Plebiscites and Their Propaganda – Schleswig and Carinthia 1920‘, 70-1; Jebsen and Klatt, ‘Negotiation of National and Regional Identity’. Cf. Laponce’, National Self-Determination and Referendums’, 40-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
54. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole*,265; Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland*; Judson, ‘When is A Diaspora Not a Diaspora?’. Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland.* [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
55. Neumann, *Politischer Regionalismus*, 310. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
56. Berlit-Schwigon, *Robert Leinert*,100-21. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
57. The quote comes from Girvin’s reply to Pavković ‘Secession and Secessionism’. By making the French Revolution his point of reference, Girvin of course argues from a western perspective that only imperfectly captures the motives for emancipation from Habsburg and Ottoman imperial rule in East Central Europe and the Balkans. The challenge was often how to find universally acceptable definitions of nationhood for multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual populations in the first place. Cf. Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
58. Manias, ‘*Race prussienne* Controversy’. For similar racialist arguments advanced by Guelph writers, see Hodenberg, *Sechs Briefe über die Gewissens– und Begriffsverwirrung in Politik, Kirche und Wissenschaft der Gegenwart*, vol. 3, 79-81; Lent, ‘Niedersachsenbewußtsein im Wandel der Jahrhunderte’, 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
59. Börries von Münchhaussen ‘Bekenntnis zum “weißen Sachsenroß der Heimat”’, *Hannoversche Landeszeitung*, 2 July 1922, front page. See also ‘Hannovers Schicksalskampf in völkischer Beleuchtung’, *Niedersächsische Volkszeitung*, 3 November 1925; ‘Eine Kundgebung zur hannoverschen Abstimmungsfrage’, *Volkswille*, 8 May 1924 (clipping in NHStAH, VVP17, Nr. 193). Like the debate concerning the mongrel origins of the Prussian people, the propagation of a special ‘Low German’ racial mission by ethnoregionalists in Hanover and Schleswig-Holstein can be traced back to the *völkisch* discourse of the late nineteenth century, in particular Julius Langbehn’s influential treatise *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
60. Schlemmer, *‘Los von Berlin’*, 484-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
61. Dr. von Campe, ‘Der 18. Mai: Die geschichtliche und politische Bedeutung der Welfenabstimmung in Hannover’, 14 May 1924 (clipping in NHStAH, VVP17, Nr. 193); Carl G. Harke, ‘Die niedersächsische Bewegung – eine großdeutsch-völkische Notwendigkeit’, *Hannoversche Landeszeitung*, 4 April 1925, front page. On the place of Arminius and the Saxon struggle against Charlemagne in völkisch memory politics more generally, seeWiwjorra, ‘Deutsche Vorgeschichtsforschung’; Lambert, ‘Widukind or Karl der Große?’ [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
62. Jacob, *Hannover im preußischen Etat*, preface. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
63. Wilhelm Henning, ‘Die hannoversche Frage’, *Hoyaer Wochenblatt*, 24 April 1924 (clipping in NHStAH, VVP17, Nr. 195); Dickinson, ‘Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy’. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
64. Hermann Schuster to Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, September 1923, Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BAB), R43 I/1846, fo. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
65. Interior minister to the Chancellery, 28 January 1928, BAB, R43 I/1846, fo. 90. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
66. Braun, *Von Weimar bis Hitler*, 356. Cf. Schulz, *Zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*,318-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
67. Bode, *Gustav Noske als Oberpräsident der Provinz Hannover 1920-1933*,373-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
68. Applegate, ‘Democracy or Reaction?’, 248. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
69. Schlemmer, *‘Los von Berlin’*,638. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
70. Cf. protocol of the federalist congress in Hanover on 12 September 1924, NHStAH, Hann. 122a, Nr. 2765, fo. 589. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
71. ‘Hannoveraner!’, in flyer collection ‘Volksabstimmung zur Abtrennung Hannovers von Preußen (18. Mai 1924)’, Stadtarchiv Göttingen. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
72. Brüning, *Niedersachsen im Rahmen der Neugliederung des Reiches*, 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
73. Klein, ‘Preußische Provinz Hessen-Nassau 1866-1944/45’, 354-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
74. John, ‘“Unitarischer Bundesstaat”, “Reichsreform” und “Reichs-Neugliederung” in der Weimarer Republik’, 361. See also Reeken, *Heimatbewegung, Kulturpolitik und Nationalsozialismus*, 54-98. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
75. The quote comes from Wilson’s famous ‘Safe for Democracy’ speech given to a joint session of the US Congress on 2 April 1917, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/> (accessed on 6 November 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
76. For a stimulating discussion of the fraught relationship between secessionism and democracy, see Buchanan, ‘Making and Unmaking of Boundaries’. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
77. ‘Der Klarheit entgegen!’, manifesto, August 1930, BAB, R72/2304, fo. 25. On the pervasive presence of the *Stahlhelm* in the Province of Hanover, see Fritzsche, *Rehearsal for Fascism*,167-89. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
78. ‘Der Klarheit entgegen!’, fo. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
79. ‘Percentage of votes cast in favour of the NSDAP’, in Noakes and Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*,vol. 1, 83. For the regional socio-political context and the Nazis‘ profitting from local hostility to SPD rule, see also Schmiechen-Ackermann, ‘Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft im “völkischen Kernland” des “Dritten Reiches”’, 210-26; Stegmann, *Politische Radikalisierung in der Provinz*, 83; Büttner, ‘“Volksgemeinschaft’ oder Heimatbindung‘, 96; McElligott, *Contested City.* [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
80. Noakes, ‘Federalism in the Nazi State’, 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
81. Brecht, *Federalism and Regionalism in Germany*,88. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
82. Rickhey, ‘Hannoversch-niedersächsische Freistaatsbewegung’, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
83. Gerwarth, ‘The Past in Weimar History’, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
84. Cf. Hodo von Hodenberg to Dr. Bingmann, 30 April 1930, NHStAH, VVP 17, Nr 182, fos. 2-4; von der Decken, *Bahn frei für ein reichsunmittelbares Niedersachsen*, 8-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
85. King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*,170; Cornwall, ‘The Czechoslovak Sphinx’, 214. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
86. Cf. Blickle, *Heimat*, 13-4, 20, 27; Waal, ‘Turn to Local Communities in Early Postwar West Germany’; Reeken, “Heimatbewusstsein, Integration und Modernisierung’. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
87. Nentwig, *Hinrich Wilhelm Kopf*,580-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
88. Ibid., 579; Alvis, ‘Holy Homeland’; Schroeder, ‘Ties of Urban Heimat’. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
89. D’Erizans, ‘Securing the Garden and Longings for *Heimat* in Post-War Hanover, 1945-1948’, 214; Fisher, ‘Heimat Heimstättensiedlung‘. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
90. Demshuk, ‘What was the “Right to the Heimat”?’; [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
91. Klein, *Westdeutscher Protestantismus und politische Parteien*, 293. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
92. ‘Das Gewissen entscheidet’, report to the 8th party congress of the German Party in Berlin on 7 June 1958, reprinted in Hellwege, *Heinrich Hellwege*, 160.

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