

International Conference

‘Big Emotions’ in the Fight for a ‘State of One’s Own’

Regional Movements of Independence from the Perspective of the History of Emotions

11/12 November 2022

National independence movements and regional separatisms are phenomena that resolutely pave their way in parallel with the European unification process and the alleged loss of significance of nation-state sovereignty. Especially over the course of recent years and decades (old and new) nationalisms and regionalisms have become very popular and attracted major international media attention – think of well-known hotspots such as Catalonia and Scotland or several eastern and south-eastern European regions. The increasingly radicalizing demand for independence, or rather sovereignty, massively challenged the imperative of state integrity and related instruments of control and disciplining. Moreover, separatisms of any kind caused internal social conflicts and political polarization that resulted in deep social rifts and the emergence of new social front lines.

These developments present a challenge for historiography, too. Historians must give long-term, medium-term and short-term explanations and they have to combine them to show convincingly how ethno-political conflicts rekindled in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. In the second half of the twentieth century, the nation state seemed to be an end-of-range model, squeezed between ‘local’ and ‘European’ references. Today, it is internal regional rivals that threaten to become the nation state’s undoing. That development requires to reconsider the cohesion of nation states, their structural defects and centrifugal forces as well as their relations to the EU. Furthermore, historiography must react to substantial efforts to instrumentalize history for the legitimization of independence movements. In light of ever flourishing myths, historians have to step up and make use of their expertise in fact checking. Regional separatisms and independence movements have largely been discussed by historians from political historical and diplomatic historical perspectives as well as in the context of the history of minorities and research on nationalism. Accordingly, structural, organizational and (rather conventional) political historical approaches prevailed for a long time. They focused on interests and demands of independence movements, on structures, contents and discourses of (often violent) separatist protests and the success or failure of their causes.

In contrast, this conference concentrates on the crucial role emotions play in the thoughts and actions of those involved as well as in the public’s perception of separatist efforts. Demands for self-determination or independence are predominantly part of the political programme of

individual national and regional minorities or of imagined communities, which as ‘nations without state’ strive for independence. Hence, the conference deals with the complex interplay of emotions and interests, of mediatized messages and political (protest)activisms in the context of autonomist and separatist, or rather secessionist ambitions.

We welcome contributions which address one of the following three main topics:

1 The nature of the actors, or rather groups of actors, that represent or are sympathizers of separatism as a (political or social) movement. What role do emotions play for an independence movement as protest movement – for instance for the mobilization of supporters or the internal communitarization in order to create an ‘emotional community’ (Barbara Rosenwein)? Which short-term, medium-term and long-term factors bolster dispositions in favour of separatism? Which practices and situational events result in groups and individuals being emotionally charged? In what way does this emotionalization cause the radicalization of separatist initiatives and projects?

2 Contents, techniques and media of emotionalization in the context of an emotion-centred analysis of separatist endeavours and their conceptual worlds. Which institutionalized (e.g. language policies), discursive (e.g. history of politics and memory, interpretations from the perspective of the culture of remembrance), performative (e.g. marches and demonstrations) and visual-medial (e.g. press and PR campaigns) means are used to create certain moods, provoke, form and stabilize emotional communities? How can we assess the significance of emotional components for escalations – also as ‘moments of separatism’? It is striking that the ‘emotional energy’ of regional independence movements is particularly amplified through visual protest communication. Therefore, rituals, symbols, emblems, pictures as well as (visual) historical references and projections of the past play a crucial role in the process of emotionalization.

3 Regional autonomy projects and separatisms seen through the lens of comparative history, entangled history (‘Histoire Croisée’) and the history of transfers. What is the relationship between regional independence movements? Which similarities and differences can be identified in terms of entanglements and reciprocal transfers, particularly in regard to practised strategies of emotionalization? What is the (often critical) relationship between autonomy and independence movements and high-ranking state institutions or supranational representatives such as the EU?

The conference will take place at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Free University Bolzano/Bozen at the campus Brixen/Bressanone (South Tyrol, Italy) on 11 and 12

November 2022. It is organized by the Competence Centre Regional History of the Free University Bolzano/Bozen (Prof. Oswald Überegger) and the Chair for 19th Century European History of the History Department at Humboldt University Berlin (Prof. Brigit Aschmann). The organizers of the conference will cover accommodation (2 nights in Brixen) and travel expenses (max. 250 €).

Please send an abstract (300 words) outlining your potential contribution and a brief CV by March 15 to: regional.history@unibz.it. Abstracts can be submitted in German or English. Conference languages are German and English. Simultaneous translation into both languages will be provided.