Chapter 16
Regions, Nationalities, Nations? Contemporary Geographic Images of Spain's Regional Diversity

Jacobo García-Álvarez

Abstract This contribution aims to review the ways in which geographers have represented Spanish regional diversity and cultural plurality since the 1870s, as well as the relationships between these geographical representations and the evolution of the territorial organization of the Spanish State. The chapter will focus on four different images and periods: (1) the contributions from the first modern regional geography (1876–1936); (2) the geographical image of Spanish regions during Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975); (3) the Spanish transition to democracy and the shaping of the Autonomous Communities map (1978–1983); and (4) the geographical perception of Spanish regional organization and the 'national' question in the face of the ongoing politico-territorial crisis linked to the rise of Catalan pro-independence movement. Within the framework of this last section, I raise several proposals for advancing a critical geopolitics of the State of the Autonomies.

Keywords Spain · Cultural plurality · National identities · Geographical imaginations · Regional geography · Territorial organization · Critical geopolitics

16.1 Introduction

The subject of this chapter is no minor issue, neither intellectually nor politically. On the contrary, the question of contemporary geographical images of Spain's regional diversity is inextricably linked to one of the greatest controversies in Spanish history and our current political situation: the problem of territorial

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organization. This problem here in Spain is usually referred to as the regional, national or simply territorial problem—the question, ultimately, of what the national identity of the Spanish people consists of and how that identity has been articulated, is being articulated or can be politically articulated into a State and sovereignty model that will be as widely accepted as possible. Whether Spain is a nation composed of nationalities and regions or is a plurinational State or, in the end, a nation of nations is not a purely academic or nominalist debate but one of the most crucial and relevant issues in today's political landscape, as the great—and still ongoing—crisis associated with the rise of Catalan pro-independence movement illustrates in exemplary fashion (Núñez-Seixas 2010, 2018; Morales-Moya et al. 2013).[1]

However, the purpose of this chapter is not to review the current Spanish political landscape, but to assess the way in which geography has represented Spain's internal cultural diversity since its emergence as a modern scientific discipline and its academic institutionalization, which in some European countries (though not in Spain) began during the last-third of the nineteenth century. More precisely, this contribution will address not only the manner in which geographers have explained and represented Spain's regional plurality but also the consequences of these representations for the evolution of the territorial organization of the State. I firmly believe that the history of geography in general, and that of geographical representations of territory in particular, can help us to comprehend the origins and evolution of the Spanish territorial problem, and I also believe that geographical thinking can and must contribute to the current debate on the national question in Spain by clarifying the country's spatial dimensions, making proposals and implementing actions that can help to resolve the current tensions, mitigate them or at least put them into perspective.

Given the breadth of the subject, my attention will focus on four issues and periods particularly relevant to the way in which geography has perceived Spanish cultural diversity, namely: (1) representations built by the first modern regional geographers of Spain (1876–1936), marked by environmentalistic or even deterministic approaches; (2) the geographical image of the Spanish regions during Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975); (3) the Spanish transition to democracy and the shaping of the Autonomous Communities map (1978–1983); and (4) the geographical perception of Spanish regional organization and the regional/national question in the face of the ongoing politico-territorial crisis (García-Álvarez 2002, 2016; García-Álvarez et al. 2000).[2] Within the framework of this last section, and to conclude this rapid and selective journey through the geographical imaginations of Spain's regional diversity, I will raise several proposals for advancing a critical geopolitics of the State of the Autonomies.

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[1] Two useful introductions to the 'national question' in Spain are: Núñez-Seixas (2010) and (2018). For a comprehensive historical review, see Morales-Moya et al. (2013).

[2] For a detailed analysis of the first three issues and periods mentioned above, see García-Álvarez (2002). For an overall review of the geo-history of the territorial organization of Spanish State, García-Álvarez (2016). Some ideas of the present chapter were firstly presented in García-Álvarez et al. (2000).

16.2 Representations of Regional Diversity in Modern 'Environmentalistic' Geography (1876–1936)

The first modern geographical image of Spain, that is, the first regional description of Spain inspired by modern geographical conceptions along the lines of Humboldt and above all of Ritter, can be found in the first volume of Élisée Reclus' *Géographie Universelle*, which covered southern Europe and was published in 1876.[3] Reclus was the first geographer to apply to the description of Spain two of the key principles of modern geography: the comprehensive vision of the landscape promoted by Humboldt and a characterization of the country in which, following Ritter's inspiration, the natural features are profoundly interwoven with the human, the physical environment with the social and geography with history. This interpretation is framed within a broader worldview of the relationships between society and nature, which can be considered as basically environmentalistic (rather than deterministic). According to this perspective, humans are a part of nature and, though ultimately a free beings, should not distance themselves from nature or disobey the laws and terms nature offers; instead, they should try to follow these and make the most of them, where possible, for the benefit of society.

Nature does not determine history but contributes significantly towards explaining it. According to Reclus, for example, the identity of a people, their material creations and their character and collective psychology are reflected in the landscape. Reclus also introduced a way of interpreting Spanish geographical diversity, which was to provide a kind of model or canon followed by many academic geographers, both Spanish and foreign, until practically the end of Franco's dictatorship. This is an approach that on the scientific level took the 'natural region' (or the 'historico-natural region') as a basis for geographical description of the country and on the political level supported the reform of Spain's territorial organization into a federal model based on the political recognition of the historical–natural regions.

Before explaining Reclus' regional vision in more detail, we should take into account that at the time this geographer was writing, Spain was divided administratively into 49 provinces constituted in 1833 as a part of the establishment of the liberal State, which was the political system that governed Spain (apart from a few brief interludes) from 1833 to 1931 (Burgueño 1996, 2011). Those provinces (50 since 1927), still in existence today, were essentially drawn up by subdividing the provinces of the Old Regime, which mostly coincided with the realms and principalities that from the Middle Ages onwards had gradually united to form the Spanish kingdom. For example, the 1833 division split the old principality of Catalonia into four provinces, the kingdom of Galicia into four, that of Aragon into three, that of Valencia into three and those of Andalusia and Granada into a total of eight. The division into provinces of 1833 (inspired by the departmental system of revolutionary France) established the main territorial foundation of the liberal State model, strongly centralist, and the former kingdoms and principalities were stripped of any

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[3] Reclus (1876). This work has been studied by Ortega-Cantero and García-Álvarez (2006).

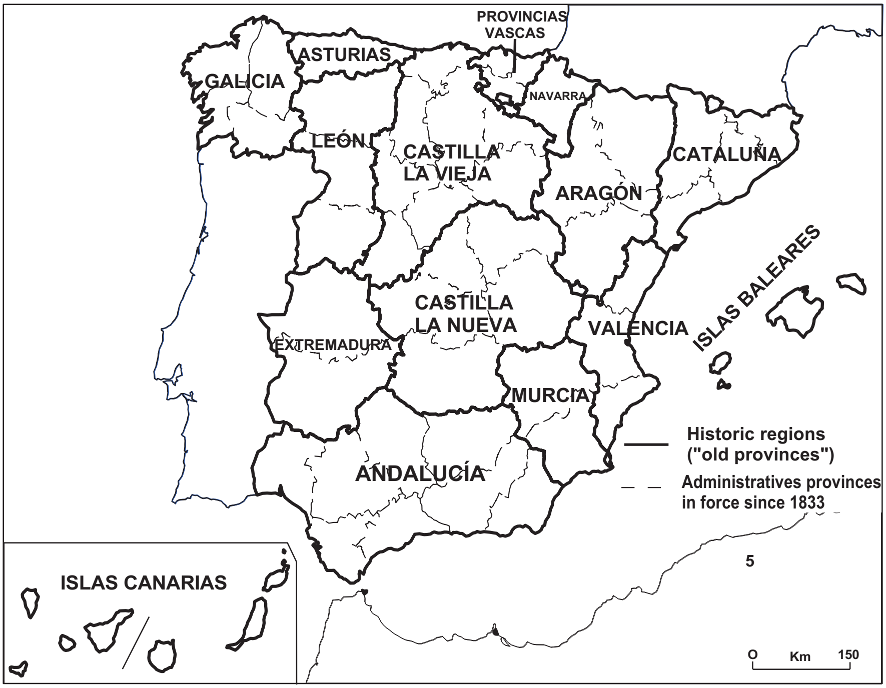
PROVINCIAS VASCAS
GALICIA
ASTURIAS
NAVARRA
LEÓN
CASTILLA LA VIEJA
CATALUÑA
ARAGÓN
ISLAS BALEARES
CASTILLA LA NUEVA
VALENCIA
EXTREMADURA
MURCIA
ANDALUCÍA
Historic regions ("old provinces")
Administratives provinces in force since 1833
5
ISLAS CANARIAS
O Km 150

Fig. 16.1 Historical regions (or 'old provinces') of Spain, according to the criterion used by the Royal Decree of 30 November 1833, which established the current provincial division

kind of administrative body they might previously have possessed save military organization. However, the liberal State either could not or would not entirely extinguish the memory of those old provinces whose administrative bodies it had suppressed. On the contrary, the images of the old provinces were maintained and even socially extended through the geography taught in schools, and these, towards the end of the nineteenth century, began to refer to the old divisions as 'historical regions' (Fig. 16.1).

More precisely, Reclus distinguished seven 'natural regions' in continental Spain, which really arose from the grouping together of the historical regions into the Iberian Peninsula as big morphotectonic and physiographic units, and to these natural regions he attributed more or less homogenous climates and landscape types (Fig. 16.2). As the outer limits of the large natural regions and those of the historical regions rarely coincide, Reclus and later geographers adopted an eclectic criterion, half historical half naturalistic, by means of which the old historical map was corrected on a local or provincial level to fit in with the large-scale units defined by physical geography.

> Populations seek their natural balance, and one of the main conditions of such a balance is respect for the boundaries drawn between provinces by the differences of terrain and climate, as well as the diversity of their customs which are the consequence of the former. It is therefore necessary to study each of these natural regions of Spain separately without

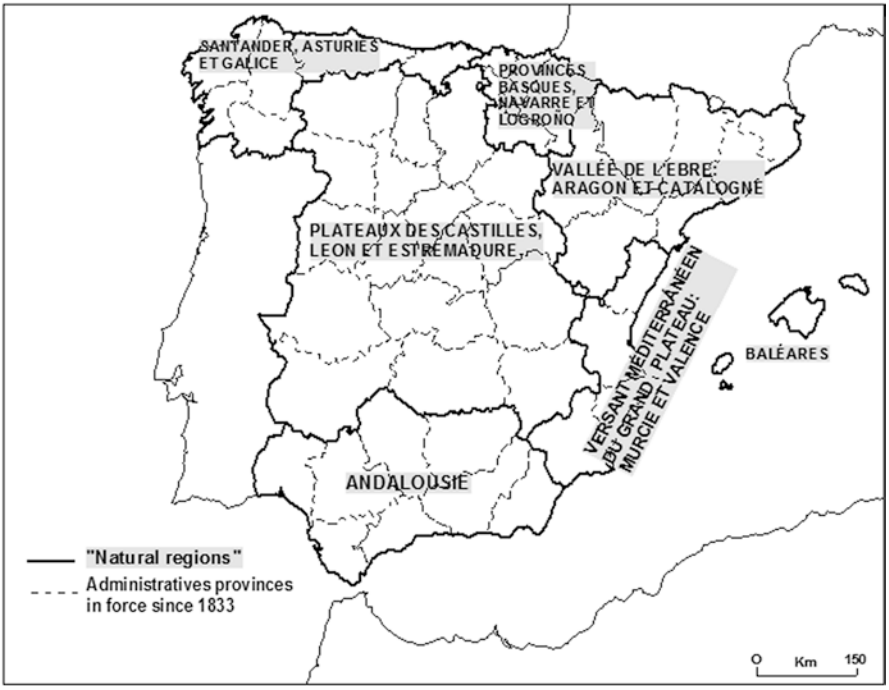
SANTANDER, ASTURIES ET GALICE
PROVINCES BASQUES, NAVARRE ET LOGROÑO
VALLÉE DE L'EBRE: ARAGON ET CATALOGNE
PLATEAUX DES CASTILLES, LEON ET ESTRÉMADURE,
VERSANT MÉDITERRANÉEN DU GRAND PLATEAU: MURCIE ET VALENCE
BALÉARES
ANDALOUSIE
"Natural regions"
Administratives provinces in force since 1833
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Fig. 16.2 Natural regions of Peninsular Spain, according to the division followed by Élisée Reclus (1876)

> taking into account the political and administrative divisions of the official provinces which have been drawn clumsily, neglecting the lines separating watersheds and the frontiers between communities speaking different dialects (Reclus 1876, p. 666).

Secondly, despite his identification of these large natural regions, Reclus also defended the value of the historical regions they contained, not only to attain a better geographical understanding of the country but also from the perspective of the politico-administrative organization of the State. Further, just as in other parts of his work he strongly criticizes the drawing of the political borders of the time, when describing Spain Reclus disregards the administrative provinces established by the liberal State, considering these to be as artificial from the geographical point of view as the departments in France.

In his opinion, which is quite in line with the territorial views of the Spanish federalism of the era, the country's political division into provinces stemmed from a most unfortunate and ill-judged centralism. This he held to be the enemy of local and regional freedoms, and a thing that concealed the true 'geographical nature' of the Iberian Peninsula, diverse naturally as well as culturally and economically, and that he thought should be reflected in a highly decentralized state model. Because, for Reclus, 'the geographical conditions of the Peninsula have so far opposed any free grouping of the inhabitants into a compact, solid national body', and, despite increasing progress in the process of national unification facilitated by the political system, the progress of exchange, transport and communications, or the gradual replacement of regional languages by a single one, he found that 'Andalusians and Galicians, Basques and Catalans, Aragonese and Madrilenians are still very far from merging into one single nationality' (Reclus 1876, p. 665).

But, according to Reclus, the internal regional diversity of the country might give rise to one final and conceivably more dangerous phenomenon: the growing opposition between the inland regions and the coastal regions, in his opinion largely due to their different natural potentials. He considered that this opposition would set the Spanish Inner Plateau (the *Meseta Central*) with its harsh climate and poor soil, subject to depopulation, against the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastal areas favoured with natural advantages and well suited for modern economic life and population growth:

> On the oceanic and Mediterranean shores of the Peninsula all advantages have been bestowed: the climate is gentler, the fertile land more abundantly covered with vegetation, the ease of communications encourages men to travel and make exchange; thus it is that farmers, merchants and sailors gather on the coast and there most of the great cities have been established. Inland, by contrast, the arid plateaus, naked rocks and rough roads, dreadful winters and lack of varied produce have made life difficult for the inhabitants and often many young people, attracted by the bountiful plains stretching at the feet of their wild mountains, emigrate (Reclus 1876, pp. 663–664).

Moreover, for Reclus, this disparity between 'the plains of the coast and the plateaus of the interior' not only explains the distribution of the population at the time ('in ring-shaped areas of density') but also the 'unfolding of Peninsular civilization into an outer area and a central core', with significant implications for general Spanish history. The most important consequence is the periodic tendency of the maritime provinces, the most wealthy and important ones, 'to isolate themselves from the other parts of Spain and live an independent life'. Ethnic diversity and territorial inequalities of wealth and population, both underpinned by the differing potentialities of the physical environment, thus represented barriers to national unity and in some way formed the geographical bases of peripheral regionalisms (the expression 'provincialisms' was then still in use.). Accommodating these, according to this author, would involve a reform of the territorial–administrative organization then in force. Consequently, in Reclus' opinion, the 1873 constitutional project for a Spanish Federal Republic structured around regional states—which was never implemented—was 'quite justified by the geographical form of the country and the history of its inhabitants' (Reclus 1876, p. 665).

As I observed earlier, the way in which Reclus interpreted Spanish geographical diversity, in addition to his political proposals in favour of a federation or the regional decentralization of the country, established a precept for the major modern geographers in Spain prior to the Civil War. Authors like Ricardo Macías-Picavea (1847–1899), Juan Dantín-Cereceda (1881–1943), Leonardo Martín-Echeverría (1894–1958) and Gonzalo de Reparaz-Rodríguez (1860–1939), among others, contributed many scientific arguments from a naturalistic perspective in favour of regionalization and even federalism (García-Álvarez et al. 2013), or, in a few cases, Iberism, notably supported by the Gonzalo de Reparaz-Rodríguez, who contrasted the vitality of Atlantic and Mediterranean Spain with the decline of central Spain in his defence of the 'Confederation of Peninsular historic-geographical Regions' (Ferretti and García-Álvarez 2019). Some geographers were deeply involved politically in two of the main substate nationalist movements active during the Spanish Second Republic (1931–1939), such as Miquel Santaló (1887–1962) in Catalan nationalism (García-Ramón and Nogué 1994; Hernando 2000) and Ramón Otero-Pedrayo (1888–1976) in Galician nationalism (García-Álvarez 1998, 2003). For all these writers, federalism and political regionalism in Spain were rooted in the physical geography of the Peninsula as well as in the ethnic or racial variety associated with it. And this same idea was to crop up as a kind of 'scientific argument' in the discourses of many politicians who expressed support for decentralization during the 1920s and 1930s.

As a matter of fact, political regionalism and nationalism in some of those historical regions, particularly in Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, was a powerful matter of discussion during this period, and in order to solve the vindications claimed for those political parties, the Spanish Second Republic established a new territorial model that allowed the political autonomy of the regions that demanded it. In 1932 the Autonomy Statute of Catalonia was promulgated and in 1936, a little time after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the Statute of the Basque Country was also promulgated, although the outbreak of the Civil War, as well as the victory of Franco's Army, did not allow its implementation indeed.

16.3 Geographical Images of Spanish Regions During Franco's Dictatorship (1939–1975)

The dictatorship of General Franco removed the original territorial model that had been introduced in the Second Republic. Catalonia's and the Basque Country's Statutes of Autonomy were abolished and the processes for creating other autonomous regions, that were open in several territories of the State (and almost completed in Galicia), were closed up. The Franco system practised an extreme, unitarian and excluding Spanish nationalism, based on National Catholicism, where any kind of substate regionalism or nationalism was considered and punished as 'separatism'. For some decades the use of non-Castilian languages—at least in the official life—was punished or repressed, and the State came back to a centralistic territorial model, in which the provincial divisions established in 1833 remained in force.

Under National Catholicism, recognition and even praise of Spanish regional diversity continued, but did so under a unitarist schema that placed that diversity firmly within the sphere of folklore or historicism with no concessions whatsoever to the possibility of political decentralization. Significantly, General Franco himself, when writing the prologue of lieutenant colonel José Díaz-Villegas' *Military Geography of Spain*, published shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, stated

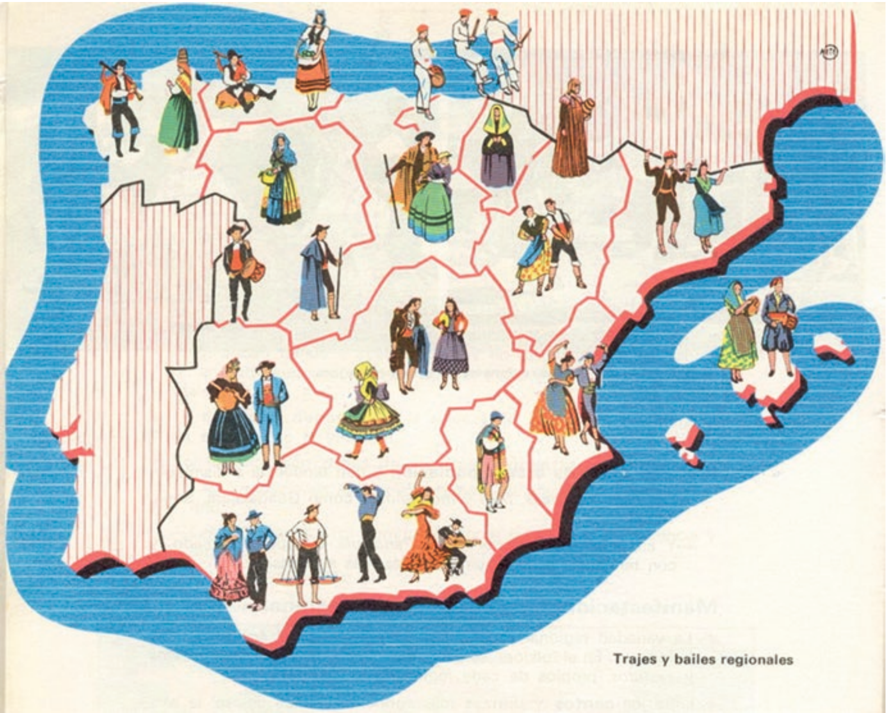

Fig. 16.3 A typical representation of Spanish regional diversity in a secondary school geography textbook of Francoist period: 'Spain's regional costumes and dances'. Characters are represented on the framework of historical regions, except for the Canary Islands, which are omitted in the picture. (Reproduced from Zubia 1962)

that 'the study of Geography reveals the way that criminal, traitorous separatisms are forged, behind its back and against nature' (Franco-Bahamonde 1936, p. 18).

School textbooks most closely related to National Catholicism faithfully reflected this folkloristic (or at any rate apolitical) interpretation of regionalism and regional identities that reinforced the unitarist vision of the country (Crespo-Redondo et al. 1995; García-Álvarez 2013; García-Álvarez and Marías-Martínez 2002; Rodríguez-Lestegás 2006). In these, Spanish cultural diversity was framed above all in banal terms: the school books of that period are full of quaint photographs, drawings and maps showing typical regional costumes and dances, and these books survived until the 1970s even though such manifestations had by then been mere relics for decades (Fig. 16.3). In fact, the teaching of geography in schools during Franco's regime was mainly based on the naturalistic regional schemas dating from the period before the Civil War, which broke up the unity of the historical Basque and Catalan regions, although the regional historical schema did not disappear from school teaching. Paradoxical as it may seem, the secondary school programmes of Franco's period introduced in the geography school books a chapter about the organization of the State, in which the list of Spanish provinces was taught within the frame of the historical regions. This way, without any political or administrative existence, the historic regions old map survived once again, as it had done in the nineteenth century, like a sort of 'mental popular map', systematically memorized by the Spanish children until the end of Franco's dictatorship.

With regard to the regional divisions used by academic geography in Spain during Franco's regime, two issues should be remarked (García-Álvarez 2002). Firstly, the study of the political geography of Spain became a sort of taboo and was openly abandoned, except for some historical geography matters (Gómez-Mendoza 1997). The critics to the province and the defence of the regional decentralization, that were so common on the handbooks before the war, almost completely vanished. Environmentalistic views of political history and Spain's national problem, so frequent before the Spanish Civil War, were also abandoned and replaced by possibilistic approaches, very much influenced by the French 'classical' or Vidalian school of geography (Ortega-Cantero 2013; Riudor-Gorgas 1987). Secondly, academic geography during Franco's time did not break with the regional partition models from the period before the Civil War. The main synthetic works on Spanish geography elaborated on this period were relatively late, and, despite the fact that in many aspects they brought a remarkable renewal of previous approaches, in the question we are dealing with they hardly introduced modifications on the eclectic natural–historical model that was dominant among Spanish modern geographers prior to Civil War, that is: big regions based on physiographic or landscape criteria (now called 'geographic regions'), inside of which appear, with provincial or local corrections, the Spanish historic regions. That is the case of the Regional Geography handbook authored by Manuel de Terán-Álvarez (1904–1984) and Lluís Solé-Sabarís (1908–1985), two of the most prominent Spanish geographers of that period, and published in 1968 (Fig. 16.4 [Terán-Álvarez and Solé-Sabarís 1968]). In the introductory chapter of his book, Solé significantly affirms that 'the greater part of the traditional historic regions coincides to geographic regions, at least in their main aspects, though in some cases small changes might be required at a local scale' (Solé-Sabarís 1968, p. 19).[4]

16.4 Spanish Transition to Democracy and the Shaping of the Autonomous Communities' Map (1978–1983)

After Franco's death (November 1975), there begins in Spain a complex, though relatively fast, process of transition to democracy. In June 1977 the first free general elections since 1936 took place, and in December 1978 the prevailing Constitution was promulgated. The determination of a new territorial model of the State was the most polemic and discussed aspect of the constitutional text. Although the political

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[4] On this particular book and, more broadly, on Terán's contribution to the regional geography of Spain, see Marías-Martínez (2007).

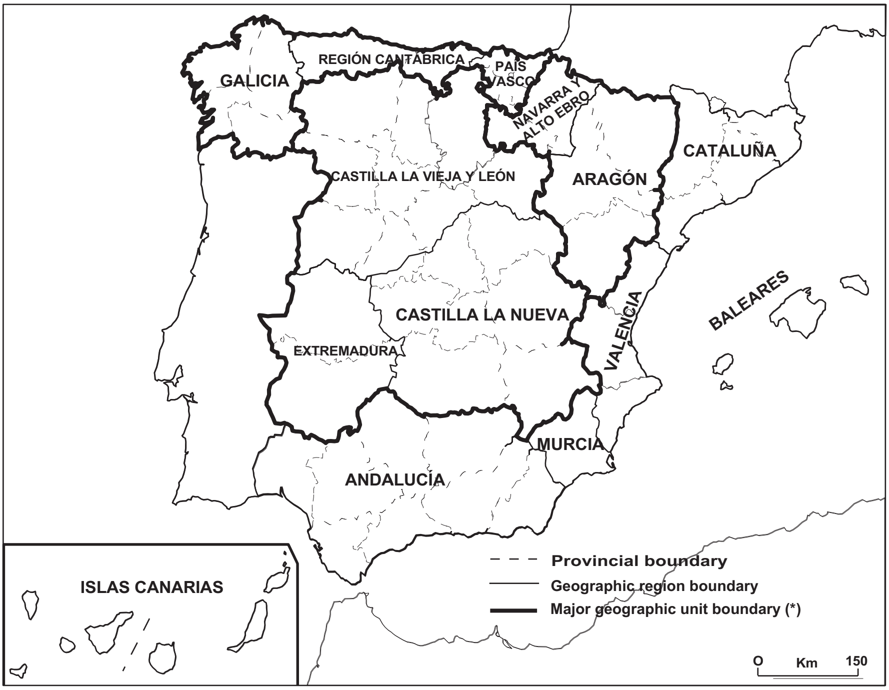
GALICIA
REGIÓN CANTÁBRICA
PAÍS VASCO
NAVARRA Y ALTO EBRO
CATALUÑA
CASTILLA LA VIEJA Y LEÓN
ARAGÓN
BALEARES
CASTILLA LA NUEVA
VALENCIA
EXTREMADURA
MURCIA
ANDALUCÍA
ISLAS CANARIAS
Provincial boundary
Geographic region boundary
Major geographic unit boundary (*)
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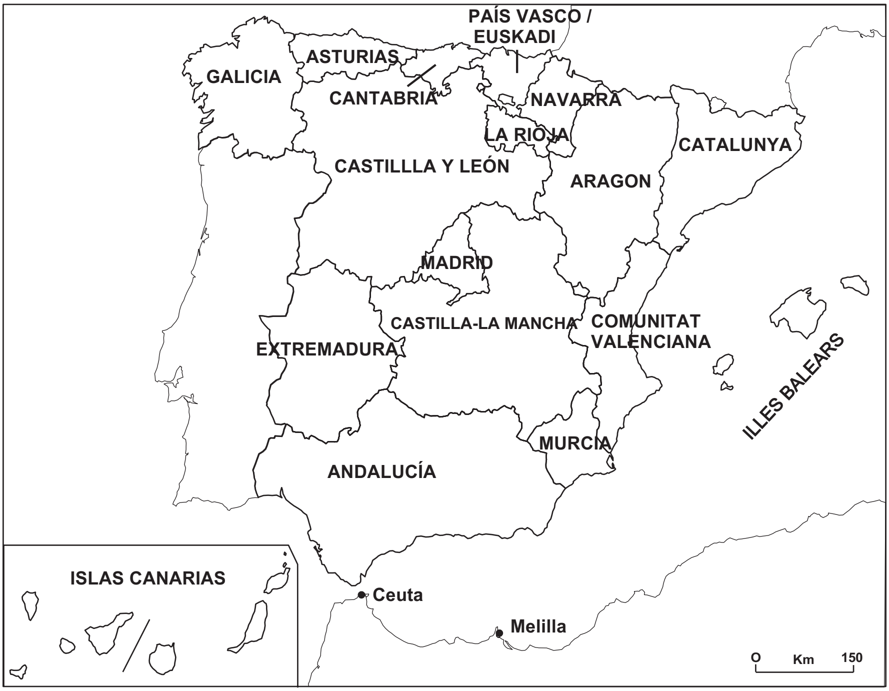
Fig. 16.4 Geographic regions of Spain. (Reproduced from Terán-Álvarez and Solé-Sabarís 1968) (*) Major geographic units (*grandes conjuntos geográficos*) considered are: (1) Northern (made up by three geographic regions—Galicia, Cantabric Region and Basque Country); (2) Central Plateau (three geographic regions—Old Castile and Leon, Extremadura and New Castile), (3) Aragon and Navarre (two geographic regions—Aragon and Navarre-Upper Ebro); (4) Mediterranean (five geographic regions—Andalusia, Murcia, Valencia, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands); and (5) Canary Islands and African towns and provinces.

order in Spain is a Parliamentary Monarchy, the organization model of the 1978 Constitution is essentially inspired by the model of the 1931 Republican Constitution. As in the Republican age, the question of Catalonia and the Basque country, where there was a general claim for restoring regional autonomy abolished by Franco's regime, was again of considerable importance to the Government and the Constitution makers.

Without prejudice to affirm the 'unbreakable unity of the Spanish nation', the 1978 Constitution allows a wide level of political decentralization and guarantees 'the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions of which [the Spanish nation] it is composed' (Article 2). From 1978 to 1983, the 17 current Autonomous Communities were created (seven of which are formed only by one province); and in 1995, Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish cities in the north coast of Africa, obtained the category of Autonomous Cities. After these changes, the Spanish territory was completely regionalized (Fig. 16.5).

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 does not specify which Communities are nationalities and which are regions; instead, it leaves this definition to be established


PAÍS VASCO /
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ARAGON
MADRID
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA
COMUNITAT
VALENCIANA
EXTREMADURA
ILLES BALEARS
MURCIA
ANDALUCÍA
ISLAS CANARIAS
Ceuta
Melilla
O Km 150

Fig. 16.5 Spain's autonomous communities and cities

by their respective Statutes of Autonomy. Thus, the Statutes of the Basque Country, Andalusia, Galicia, Aragon, the Valencian Community and the Canaries, in addition to the first Statute of Catalonia (1979), defined their communities as *nationalities* or *historical nationalities*. Others Autonomous Communities (Murcia, Cantabria, La Rioja and Castile-La Mancha) have defined themselves as *regions* or *historical regions* in their respective Statutes, while a few have omitted this kind of definition altogether. However, if we look beyond the symbolic dimension, the legal consequences of defining themselves as nationalities or regions are in practice nil, as all the Autonomous Communities have attained a very similar ceiling of powers, with the exception of what are generally known as 'differential facts' (*hechos diferenciales*) such as the use of a co-official language other than Spanish, the recognition of the special tax regime of Navarre and the Basque provinces, or that of the singularity of the island territories (Aja 2007, 2014a, b).

The biggest controversy concerning the definition of an Autonomous Community as a territorial collective (as region or nationality) arose from the 2006 reform of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy, the preamble of which refers to Catalonia as a *nation* (a term that in the Constitution is reserved exclusively for the Spanish nation). This reference to Catalonia as a nation as well as some other articles of the Statute were the subjects of an appeal lodged by the People's Party (*Partido Popular*) before the Spanish Constitutional Court. In June 2010, the Court ruled that the term *nation* might be maintained in the preamble to the Catalonian Statute of Autonomy but stated that the term lacked 'interpretative legal effectiveness' and had no other meaning but that given for *nationality* under Article 2 of the Spanish Constitution, and that the 'indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation' was not to be questioned thereby. This ruling, which also removed or shortened other articles of the Statute, generated broad political dissatisfaction in Catalonia and is considered to be a milestone in the beginning of the Catalonian territorial crisis and the drift of conservative Catalan nationalism towards pro-independence attitudes, though not necessarily the only cause of that swing (Blanco 2016; Cuadras-Morató 2016; Muñoz 2014; Tortella 2017). Otherwise, it should be noted that, since the restoration of the regional powers at the end of the 1970s, the use of the term *nation* applied to Catalonia is very widespread in the Catalan autonomous administration and legislation, including—very significantly—the school history and geography syllabuses (García-Álvarez and Marías-Martínez 2002).

The formation of the Autonomous Communities map took place at an impressive speed, and produced many conflicts that came to threaten the viability of the incipient democratic system (García-Álvarez 2002).[5] The most important and general territorial requirement established by the 1978 Constitution was that the autonomy right, except for some exceptional cases specified in the Article144, could only be executed by 'bordering provinces that had historic, cultural and economic common characteristics; the insular territories, and the provinces with a historic territorial identity' (Article 143.1).

Twelve of the seventeen Spanish Autonomous Communities were created on the basis of the historic regions map, that, as we have seen, was hegemonic in school teaching from nineteenth century onwards and, therefore, was the regional mental map more popular among the politicians of that time. Only in five cases this historic and mental map was not followed. To begin with, this was the case of the former provinces of Logroño and Santander, which were separated from the historic region of Old Castile to finally become, respectively, La Rioja and Cantabria Autonomous Communities. By contrast, the rest of Old Castile joined the historic region of León, to create the biggest Autonomous Community in Spain (Castile and León). Finally, from the historic regional area of New Castile, two Autonomous Communities were created: Castile-La Mancha and Madrid; whereas the province of Albacete was separated from the historic region of Murcia and its deputies decided to join Castile-La Mancha. The formation of the Autonomous Communities map constituted a process built mainly by the political elites during the transition, especially by the members of the Parliament elected in 1977. For reasons examined in other contributions (particularly García-Álvarez 2002, pp. 657–675), the role of academic geographers and other academic experts was definitely secondary in this process, despite the fact that the five Autonomous Communities that did not follow the historical map have an undeniable geographical logic, as long as they reflect physical, landscape or functional spatial realities, recognized by the geographers since the last decades of the nineteenth century until the arrival of the State of the Autonomies.

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[5] Among English-language references, the Spanish regionalization process and the main polemics associated with its implementation have been well summarized by Schrijver (2006).

Be that as it may, and apart from the role played by geography and geographical arguments in the building or legitimization of the Autonomous Community map, it is undeniable that the State of the Autonomies has profoundly influenced the recent evolution of geography in Spain and that geographers too have much to contribute to the problems and debates related to the crisis of the territorial model of the State. The last part of this chapter will be devoted to this question.

16.5 Regional Geography in the Face of the Recent and Current Politico-Territorial Crisis in Spain: Reflections for a Critical Geopolitics of the State of the Autonomies

Despite the fact that geographers were largely absent from the regional debate, or at best came into it late and played a minor role compared to other academic specialists, the impact of the State of the Autonomies on the evolution of Spanish geography was decisive as I have examined in previous works (García-Álvarez 2004, 2009). Spanish geography has seen spectacular growth both quantitatively and qualitatively under the new territorial model introduced in 1978. The emergence of the 'applied' and professional dimensions of our discipline in Spain from the 1980s onwards is inseparable from the possibilities offered by the political decentralization of the State (as well as integration into the European Union) in fields such as land use, urban planning, environmental policy and management or local development (Lois-González 2009).

Similarly, Spanish geography accepted—very comfortably—the Autonomous Community map as the main territorial framework for describing the country. The geographies of the historical–natural regions characteristic of the main university handbooks of the Franco era were superseded by geographies of the politico-administrative territories, that is, the Autonomous Communities, or by regional geographies of Spain based on the Autonomous Communities that conceptually and methodologically conserve the format of the traditional geographies. Of course, this choice for the Autonomous Communities may be understandable and reasonable in some aspects, but it also suggests a certain laziness or even involves some difficulty when it comes to tackling certain logics of regional organization where the spatial framework of these does not coincide with the map of the Autonomous Communities. This is true, for example, of the forms of regional differentiation and organization arising from certain policies, strategic alliances or economic–productive changes, which in many cases transcend the Autonomous Community or State scales and are conceived at European level: axes of development; emerging, central or declining spaces; or arcs, diagonals and other transnational areas envisaged since the 1990s in some key documents for the spatial planning and regional policy of the European

Union, such as *Europe 2000* (1991), *Europe 2000 plus* (1994) or the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (1999).[6]

But let us return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: how can geography contribute to the debate on the regional (or national, or territorial) question in Spain? How can geography help to find ways out of this politico-territorial crisis? I believe that our contribution as geographers might take two main directions.

Firstly, geography both can and should help to analyse the spatial dimensions of this debate and this crisis from a critical viewpoint—a critical viewpoint aiming at favouring scientific argument over ideological or purely emotional ones and aiming at enabling us to dispel the prejudices, myths and falsehoods of certain arguments and (geo)political discourses that feed the victimhood of some and incomprehension of others, or, in short, the confrontation between nationalisms. Within this process, geography can help to detect what, from the 1970s onwards, some well-known Anglo-American scholars (such as James Anderson, Edward Soja or Derek Gregory) defined as 'spatial fetishism' (or 'fetishism of space'), an expression that refers to 'the idea that space is somehow separate, pre-given, or autonomous from social processes' (Flint 2012, p. 294) and 'possesses causal power […] *per se* in determining human action' (Castree et al. 2013, p. 483) so that 'the social relations between people come to be represented as the relation between places; here, the places become fetishized' (Smith 2004, p. 11). To put this in the context of the 'regional', 'national' or 'territorial' question, either in Spain or elsewhere, spatial fetishism implies the self-serving use of territorial concepts for camouflaging interests or conflicts that are really of another kind, for instance social or party-political.

In order to dismantle and debunk that powerful fetishism, geographical analysis (carried out to various scales) can make at least three important contributions: (1) from the politico-electoral perspective, geography could help to map and interpret the territorial reorganization proposals made and their possible consequences, and also analyse the changing maps of territorial identities, of support for nationalist and regionalist parties or of pro-independence demands; (2) from the viewpoint of economic geography, we could analyse how much truth and fairness (and how much untruth and demagoguery) there is in the complaints and demands related to the policy of large infrastructures or, more broadly, the policies theoretically designed to correct the territorial imbalances and to improve the territorial cohesion and levelling of the country; and (3) from the perspective of cultural geography, we might contribute to the analysis of collective representations of territories (and in particular how Spain and its Autonomous Communities are represented in each one) as well as to analysing the linguistic diversity of the country, a crucial question in a multicultural (and for some authors, plurinational) State like Spain.[7]

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[6] Though exceptional in the Spanish academic context, a regional handbook that to a great extent follows this kind of spatial divisions based in the above-mentioned documents is the one edited by Farinós-Dasí (2002).

[7] A significant collective effort to advance in some of these research topics from a geographical perspective has been made in Gómez-Mendoza et al. (2013). Other interesting approaches have been made in *Limes. Rivista italiana di Geopolitica* (2012). Special Issue: La Spagna Non è

Secondly, geography can and should propose measures and solutions that make it possible to rethink the territorial model of the State and relieve its internal tensions. Accustomed for scientific (and geopolitical) reasons to 'discovering' and transmitting the unity of states starting out from the diversity of their component parts, in the Spanish context geography should now provide arguments to persuade the various parts of the State to prolong a union (more than a unit) based on respect for their differences. For instance, trying to respond to the sovereignty claims in Catalonia, as well as to reduce public spending and improving the functioning of the territorial administration, Jesús Burgueño has proposed an asymmetric (but not necessarily federal) reform of the State of the Autonomies based on the distinction of three different territorial communities (Burgueño-Rivero 2012, 2013).[8] Other Spanish geographers have explicitly advocated a constitutional reform that would turn the State of the Autonomies into a *de jure* federal State based on the free will of the different peoples making up the State (whether called nations, nationalities or regions), on the principles of subsidiarity and territorial cohesion and on solid coordination and cooperation mechanisms between the different levels of territorial administration.[9] And, similarly, several authors have supported the need to build a (new) politico-regional geography of the Spains (note the plural) that would foster a federal culture among their citizens (Mata-Olmo 2013; Romero-González 2006).

I will end this contribution by addressing a question that—among the different challenges that the ongoing politico-territorial crisis has (in some cases dramatically) posed—seems to me to be vitally relevant: the teaching of Spanish geography at non-university levels. As I have already mentioned, I think we should pay special attention to the territorial images and ideas of the country and its regions transmitted within each Autonomous Community through the geography taught in their schools—not only for the educational and scientific interest this may have but also, and more importantly, because most citizens have no further contact with geography in their lives beyond that which they receive at non-university education levels. And because this also has to do with a central question in the debate that concerns

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L'Uganda, *4*; *Limes. Rivista italiana di Geopolitica* (2017). Special Issue: Madrid a Barcellona, *10*; Baron and Loyer (2015); Trépier (2015). For a state of the question of the geographical research on the political geography and geopolitics of the State of the Autonomies, together with a possible agenda for further investigations, see García-Álvarez (2009) and Lois-González (2009).

[8] For a shorter version of Burgueño-Rivero (2012), see Burgueño-Rivero (2014). Burgueño's proposal consists of dividing the Autonomous Communities into three different 'regimes' on the basis of 'the deep diversity of feelings and wills of self-government' existing in Spain (Burgueño 2014, p. 3), namely 'foral communities', which would benefit, as today, from the highest degree of autonomy (giving Catalonia this status, which already exists for the Basque Country and Navarre); 'autonomous communities' *strict* sensu (according to the author's proposal: Galicia, Andalusia, Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands), which would hold the same power as today; and 'provincial communities' (the rest of the current Autonomous Communities), with less level of autonomy.

[9] This federal reform has been particularly defended, among Spanish geographers, by Romero-González (2006) and Romero-González and Boira (2017). The same model has been advocated by several of the contributors to Gómez-Mendoza et al. (2013).

us here: ultimately, inter-territorial conflicts, inter-regional controversies and disputes, like many others, are frequently rooted in a deeper problem of mutual ignorance, unawareness and incomprehension, a problem that should make us, as geographers, stop and think.

Like school history, with which our discipline has traditionally gone hand in hand since its introduction into education in Spain, school geography is a vital element in the shaping of citizens' territorial identities, and can significantly condition their territorial perceptions, feelings, ideologies and attitudes. Whether we like it or not, this 'identity-forming' and 'socializing' potential, which largely accounts for the introduction and continued existence of both subjects in the national education systems, also makes them areas particularly sensitive to political and ideological instrumentalization on the part of educational institutions.

As is well known, since the introduction of the State of the Autonomies and more particularly since the Organic Law on General Organization of the Educational System (LOGSE) was passed in 1990, education in Spain has been considerably decentralized. In the case of geography and history teaching, especially at non-university levels, this has been accompanied by a strong 'regionalization' of the syllabuses for these subjects and, accordingly, of the textbooks and other teaching materials. A report commissioned in the year 2000 by the Spanish Geographical Association (AGE) on the geography contained in Spanish secondary school textbooks, to which I had the opportunity to contribute (García-Álvarez and Marías-Martínez 2001), showed that the syllabuses and teaching materials were designed in such a way that students who only completed the compulsory education cycle would learn more about their Autonomous Community than any other territorial level. And that unless students took geography in the Baccalaureate (the *Bachillerato*)— where the discipline was not a core subject but available in only one of the four possible branches existing at that time (the Humanities and Social Sciences branch)—they might well arrive at university with only a minimal knowledge of the geography of Spain or Europe as a whole.

If, in the exercise of their powers, the Autonomous Communities choose to give precedence in education to knowledge of their own territory, this can hardly be censured, on the contrary; and indeed, no objection was made to this in the report mentioned. But what did seem more questionable, and the Report did criticise, were certain risks and excesses linked to this regionalizing trend. One of the most widespread of these risks or excesses was one that could be described as the growing regional narcissism or autism of the geography syllabuses and textbooks. Contrary to the spirit of the general State regulations, in order to achieve that better knowledge of home territory the immense majority of the regional syllabuses and compulsory secondary education manuals used in each Community totally disregarded or reduced to a minimum knowledge of any other Autonomous Communities. This narcissistic or autistic position leads to two dangers: (1) that of ignoring the country's geographical diversity, which is one of the pillars of the autonomous system itself, and (2) that of reducing knowledge of Spain as a whole to a secondary position. After all, the country is not only the reference-point for the political State but also a common geographical and historical space, indispensable and inevitable for explaining certain elements and processes that affect each and every one of the Autonomous Communities.

Since that report was published, educational policy has gone through several turbulent years: three different education laws have been introduced (the Organic Law for the Quality in Education, LOCE, approved in 2002; the Organic Law of Education, LOE, in 2006; and the *Organic Law* on the Improvement of the Quality of *Education*, LOMCE, in 2013) together with various reforms in the contents of the primary and secondary education curricula. Unfortunately, we have no comprehensive comparative study (like the one the AGE commissioned in 2000), which might assess, among other things, to what extent those 'narcissistic' or 'autistic' trends in non-university geography teaching have been corrected, lessened or intensified.[10]

But what we must try to avoid above all is another of the hazards and excesses that the AGE report warned of: namely, the use of school geography (or, more broadly, school geography and history) for fostering peripheral nationalist conceptions that are incompatible or at least difficult to reconcile with the State general regulations governing minimum education requirements, with the need for non-dogmatic teaching or with due scientific and conceptual rigour—conceptions that in some cases almost completely ignore the existing state and autonomous framework, that select spaces that are partly defined by linguistics and partly purely ideological as the sphere for geographical and historical study and that, in the recent and current context, have contributed to fuelling the sovereignty-related territorial aspirations of certain parties. The case of the geographies (and histories) of *Euskal Herria*, which proliferated in the primary and secondary schools of the Basque Autonomous Community over the last decades, is perhaps the most serious and glaring in this regard but is not the only one.[11]

In brief, I believe that we geographers should denounce these excesses, from whichever quarter they come—whether from certain forms of Spanish nationalism or from the peripheral nationalisms. And I also think we should promote a geographical education that, by respecting the plurality of the territorial conceptions, ideologies and identities existing in Spain, fosters the cohesion, the consensus and the willingness to participate and include, and on which the constitutional system in force was constructed. It is not a question of playing down or concealing the fact that there are democratically elected citizens and parties that, in a legitimate way, do not believe in the State or the nation in its current constitutional conception; it is a question, above all, of preventing geographical education from becoming a weapon for politico-ideological division and manipulation, contrary both to constitutional values and scientific rigour.

In conclusion, not only do we need a regional political geography attentive to the processes of territorial construction, which identifies, maps, describes and analyses all these issues, but also we need a critical geopolitics that allows us to deconstruct and specify the ideological and power interests that guide territorial policies and territorial disputes; that investigates the spatial discourses and representations guiding the actions of the public and private powers and the discourses and representations that use territory as a strategy for attaining power; that dares to uncover and denounce such interests; and that, ultimately, contributes to building a more transparent, more democratic and collaborative, more cohesive, more supportive, more effective and, in short, a fairer territorial order.

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[10] Among other contributions on the topic published after the AGE's report, see Pérez-Garzón (2008); García-Álvarez (2009) and Romero-González and Alcaraz-Ramos (2015).

[11] On the polemics around the idea and maps of *Euskal Herria*, see Mansvelt Beck (2006) and Mari Esparza-Zabalegui (2011).

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