Sub-National Movements and the Politicization of NAFTA and the EU

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Introduction

Despite the growing interest among political scientists and sociologists in comparing regional

trade agreements (RTAs), very few scholars have turned to the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU) as cases worthy of joint investigation. This

may be due to the assumptions that the two RTAs are so different in design that little can be

gained from comparing them. The assumption, it turns out, is not accurate (Sbragia 2008;

Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010). For one, NAFTA and the EU are certainly different, but

instructively so: they represent two important paradigms – heavy reliance on mutual recognition

and minimal institutional support as opposed to regulatory harmonization and significant

bureaucratic machinery – for regional integration. As such, they have served as blueprints for

many other RTAs and should therefore be comparatively analyzed. Secondly, NAFTA and the

EU may actually share certain important features. Both, for instance, promote at least on paper

environmental protection and a certain degree of good governance (Richardson 1998). Both have

encouraged some degree of regionalization in the administrative branches of their member states (Aspinwall 2009). And both represent highly legalized efforts to liberalize trade (Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010, 573).

We propose that NAFTA and the EU may be similar in another important respect: both have been appropriated rhetorically by separatist and autonomous movements in their struggles against their respective nation states. Our analysis is in line with recent calls for more comparative analyses that pay attention to questions of identity, norms, and cognitive processes (Acharya 2012, 9; Hay and Rosamond 2002) and specific dynamics in RTAs rather than grand design (Warleigh-Lack and Langenhove 2010, 549). More specifically, we argue that in both NAFTA and the EU movements have politicized with positive or negative rhetoric regional integration so as to articulate for their audiences who they are, the grievances they face, and how their communities could thrive in the future. Movements from the left and right ends of the political spectrum have employed versions of each form of politicization. This has resulted in a complex discursive pattern that at times calls into question, and other times underscores, the legitimacy of the two RTAs. We suggest that several factors – from institutional to interest-based – have shaped the rhetorical approaches of movements.

We outline our argument in Section I of this paper. We present empirical evidence in Section II on four case studies: Convergència i Unió (CiU) in Spain, the Parti Quebecois (PQ) in Canada (PQ), the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Mexico, and the Lega Nord (LN) in Italy. In Section III, we summarize the findings and consider their implications for our understanding of RTAs worldwide.

I. Movements and the Politicization of NAFTA and the EU

Much of the literature on the relationship between regional integration and separatist or autonomous movements has concerned the EU. With the exceptions of a few scholars such as Hepburn (2008, 2010) and Elias (2008), researchers have taken a top-down approach and concluded that the EU has done little to support those movements, even in the case of the Committee of the Regions (Neshkova 2010, 1197; Piattoni 2010, 129-30). Work on other types of sub-national entities, such as mid-level political and administrative units in certain nation states (such as the Länder in Germany), points to some empowering effects of the EU (Bauer 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2001). But these effects appear confined to those entities that are part of, and do not challenge, the existence of member states.

Matters might look different if we adopt a more bottom-up and comparative approach, and assign more agency to sub-national movements. Rather than focusing on initiatives stemming from the institutions of an RTA, we should consider the ability of movements to capitalize on the opportunities created by regional integration. We know from existing research that business, labour, environmental, and other associations have used RTAs to advance their agendas. Much of the same can be said for separatist and autonomous movements: these movements across RTAs have capitalized on regional integration in their struggles against their respective nation states.

More specifically, separatist and autonomous movements have politicized regional integration in their efforts to define their identity, grievances, and visions for their communities' future. We identify two forms of politicization. In one form, movements have put forth *positive images* of RTAs to paint an image of themselves as cosmopolitan actors, cast their respective nation states as excessively confining, and describe how their communities could compete

successfully on their own regionally and globally. This approach has emphasized the legitimacy of RTAs. In a second approach, movements have painted *negative images* of RTAs to present themselves as protectors of local identities and traditions, highlight the corrupt nature of their national governments, and articulate how their communities could thrive if shielded from external influences. This approach has called into the question the legitimacy of RTAs.

We argue that movements from the *left and right ends* of the political spectrum have employed different versions of each form of politicization. It follows that we should observe four rather different types of politicization – positive and negative rhetoric by leftist movements, and positive and negative rhetoric by rightist movements – and therefore related variations in the way the legitimacy of RTAs has either been affirmed or questioned.

We propose that these dynamics have been clearly at work in the EU and NAFTA, and that a comparative analysis of these two RTAs can therefore be very useful. We consider the following movements for empirical investigation: CiU in Spain, the PQ in Canada, the EZLN in Mexico, and the LN in Italy. These are 'intrinsically important' cases (Odell 2004): they are some of the most prominent secessionist and autonomous movements in those two RTAs. They have also been especially vocal in their politicization of RTAs and, as such, provide us with particularly revealing case studies.

Figure 1 depicts in diagrammatic form our argument, matches the four selected movements with their relevant form of politicization of NAFTA and the EU, and identifies the implications of positive and negative politicization for the legitimacy of RTAs:

Figure 1. Sub-National Movements and the Politicization of RTAs
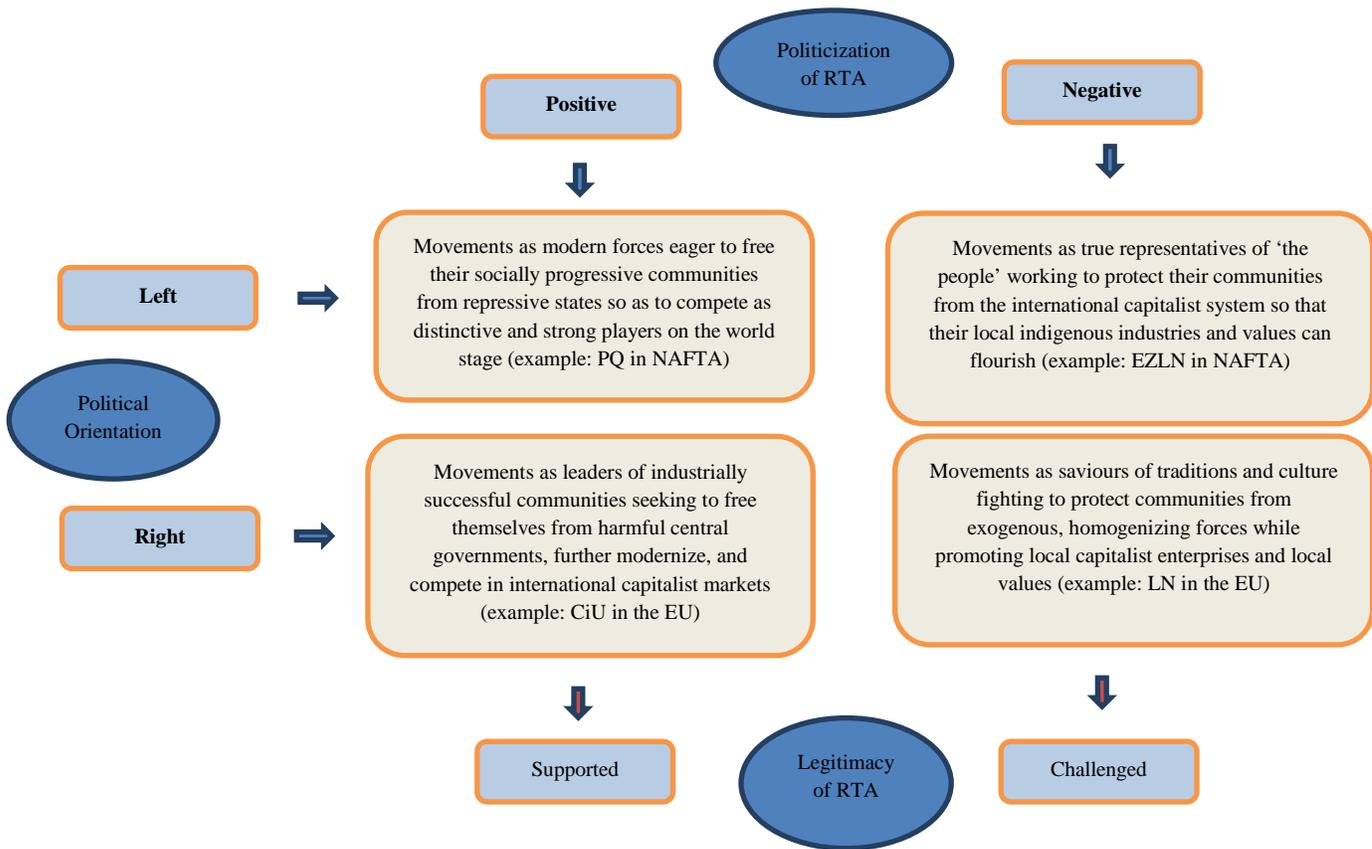
A complete account of movements' politicization of RTAs would identify the factors driving

the observable differences in rhetoric across those movements. Certainly, the right-versus-left

leanings of a movement make a difference. But this cannot be all, since we also see differences

across movements belonging to the same ends of the political spectrum. What else might be at

work? We draw from existing sociological research on social movements for insights. Four

factors seem especially important, and we shall see them at work in the four cases studies from

NAFTA and the EU.

First, the membership basis of a movement is likely to matter (Gamson 1992). We expect

some correspondence between what the members of a movement want – their actual goals and

aspirations – and how its leaders appropriate and make use of RTAs in their rhetoric. Changes in the membership base of a movement, in turn, should lead to changes in rhetorical approach. Elias's recent work on the EU suggests as much (Elias 2008, 574). Second, from an institutionalist perspective, RTAs have different regulatory and bureaucratic profiles (Duina 2007). While some rely mostly on tariff-reduction and mutual recognition with little supporting administrative apparatuses, others pursue free trade with significant legislative and administrative initiatives and structures. Institutional complexity is seldom seen as a good thing. We can accordingly expect complexity to inform the rhetoric of those movements intent on politicizing RTAs in a negative fashion (Hepburn 2008). A leaner institutional profile may prove attractive, for rhetorical use, to those movements who view their nation states as constraining and are looking for a freer political order.

Third, the ideology, symbols, and values of a movement (Elias 2008; Gorlach, Lostak and Mooney 2008, 163; Woods 2003, 315) likely play an important role. Key in this case are cosmopolitan versus populist-indigenous differences in outlooks and objectives. Movements – whether progressive or conservative – which see themselves and their constituents as active players on the world scene are more likely to depict RTAs in a positive light. By contrast, it seems logical to assume that movements with more inward and isolationist agendas tend to paint a negative picture of RTAs.

Fourth, the degree to which a sub-national movement sees its member state involved with an RTA is bound to make a difference. If the movement sees the member state as heavily involved (as a strong promoter, central actor, or agreeable partner) in the project of regional integration, it may be tempted to bundle that state and the RTA into one and the same problem, and hence use RTAs in a negative fashion in its rhetoric. If the movement sees only a loose relationship

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between the member state and the RTA (so much so that the movement can envision itself thriving in that RTA), it may be more inclined to paint the RTA in a positive light.

Of course, not all of these factors are at work when it comes to any given RTA or movement. Additional variables, such as the position of the movement in question in relation to other political movements and parties (for instance, whether they share power or not in some sort of coalition) (Elias 2008), also can surely play role. Our intention here is to identify some of the most influential factors.

To carry out our empirical investigation of the politicization of RTAs by CiU, the PQ, LN, and EZLN, we analyzed primary documents (official movement documents, party manifestos, press releases, etc.), newspaper articles, scholarship (itself containing excerpts of original documents, public statements, and interviews), and interviews with selected movement officials from the PQ and LN in Canada and Italy during 2009-2010. We examined materials in French, Italian, Spanish, and English – as relevant and necessary. Given that there exist English translations of most key primary documents, we used those translations for our quotations in this paper.

II. Evidence from NAFTA and the EU

We consider first the conservative CiU in Spain and the more left-leaning PQ in Quebec as examples of movements that have politicized integration with positive rhetoric and thus affirmed the legitimacy of NAFTA and the EU. We then turn to the leftist EZLN in Mexico and right-leaning LN in Italy for evidence of movements that have politicized integration with negative rhetoric and thus undermined the legitimacy of NAFTA and the EU.

Positive Politicization

CiU

CiU, a centre-right coalition comprised of the CDC (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya) and the UDC (Unió Democràtica de Catalunya), is a prominent political party in Catalonia, having run the Catalan government for twenty-three consecutive years, from 1980 to 2003. CiU has had a history of actively politicizing European integration in positive ways, often by showing that the party itself is strongly pro-EU, for instance through its support of the proposed EU Constitutional Treaty (Irish Times 2005) as well as the later Lisbon Treaty. This form of politicization has allowed it to better articulate, firstly, the uniqueness of its regional Catalan identity, especially its language (Castells 2004, 52; Khalitov 2008, 271-2), secondly, its grievances against the Spanish government, which it feels has 'victimized' Catalonia in favour of the country's other poorer regions (Giordano and Roller 2001, 118), and, finally, its vision of increased autonomy (Guibernau 2000, 62-3) and modernization (Llobera 2004, 126) for Catalonia. Out of the four factors discussed earlier, the ideology of the movement, which sees Catalonia as cosmopolitan and more European than Spanish, as well as its strong industrialist membership base appear particularly influential in determining the coalition's form of politicization and its *de facto* legitimation of the EU.

Beginning with its identity, CiU considers Catalonia as being more European than the rest of Spain (Nagel 2004, 61), and in order to establish and better define this sense of identity it has relied on its positive language concerning the EU. As former party leader Jordi Pujol has asserted, 'Catalonia's personality cannot be expressed within Spain alone since Catalonia has much stronger historical links with Europe than does the rest of Spain' (McRoberts 2001, 67-8). In addition, for many of Catalonia's political elite, being Catalan is equated with 'being

European, being democratic, and being free' which, to them, is simultaneously 'experienced as an overcoming of being Spanish' (Miley 2002, 62).

Culture constitutes an important part of CiU's identity and, in trying to define it, CiU has pointed to the EU, and its support of Catalonian language and history, as evidence of that identity's existence and relevance (Giordano and Roller 2001, 122). CiU officials have stressed that EU institutions like the European Parliament have passed resolutions officially recognizing Catalan as a state language and supporting cultural and linguistic minorities like the Catalans (Hoffmann 1999, 67). They have also noted that the Council of Ministers has the power to boost the standing of Catalan by recognizing it as an official language of the EU for EU-sponsored cultural and educational programs (Giordano and Roller 2002, 104).

While invoking the EU in its efforts to define its identity, CiU has also leveraged the EU to demonstrate its dissatisfaction with the Spanish state, which it sees as deficient and parochial. More specifically, by lionizing the EU, CiU has sought to present 'a radically different example of a political entity, even of statehood, to that of the Spanish state,' highlighting by comparison the '"shortcomings" of the Spanish model' (Giordano and Roller 2002, 104-5). Indeed, the Spanish government would have to take important steps in favour of recognizing Catalonia's unique identity in order for it to gain any kind of credibility with CiU. As Castells (2004, 53) has pointed out:

> Only a Spain that could accept its plural identity – *Catalunya* being one of its
> most distinctive – could be fully open to a democratic, tolerant Europe. And, for
> this to happen, Catalans have first to feel at home within the territorial sovereignty
> of the Spanish state, being able to think, and speak, in Catalan.

Finally, and linked to its discontent with the Spanish state, CiU has two particular goals for Catalonia's future that it has publicized via positive messages about the EU. First of all, CiU sees European integration as the path through which Catalonia can become more modernized and competitive (Llobera 2004, 126). CiU believes, in other words, that 'joining European "high civility" and becoming European citizens' will enable Catalonia to become 'a modern and democratic society' (Giordano and Roller 2002, 104). In fact, to Pujol, 'modernisation means Europeanization' (Llobera 2004, 126).

Secondly, and perhaps even more prominently, European integration has also functioned as the means by which CiU can attain greater autonomy from the state (Keating 2001, 197; Nagel 2004, 66), especially by establishing a direct route, or *vía directa*, to Europe (Roller 2004, 86). Tied to its grievances with the Spanish government, CiU sees Europe as 'an alternative campaigning ground to Madrid and an opportunity to further Catalan interests with another authority', and thus has claimed that 'it has always "turned towards Europe"' (Edwards 1999, 675). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Pujol early on proposed 'a vision of Europe in which member states coexist with sub-national authorities on an equal level' (Giordano and Roller 2002, 104) and, similarly, strove to make the EU's Committee of the Regions designed exclusively for regions (Hoffmann 1999, 66). Likewise, Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (one of CiU's two constituent parties) has also claimed that 'as nationalists, we believe that our nation has the same right as other European nations to be represented in Europe' (as quoted in Roller [2004, 86]). Even more recently, CiU leader Artur Mas has made it a point to appear at CiU campaign rallies with an EU flag, knowing that membership in the EU will play an important role in any future prospective Catalan state (Catalan News Agency 2012).

All this has meant a positive politicization of the EU. In so doing, CiU has granted legitimacy to European integration. In contrast with its views on the relatively deficient model of the Spanish state, CiU has portrayed the EU as contemporary, relevant, and progressive – the future not only for Catalonia and its interests but also for subnational regions all over Europe.

PQ

The PQ is a pro-separatist and left-leaning party that is characterized both by its commitment to neoliberalism and, at the same time, its social democratic characteristics. It has led the Quebec government on three occasions, first from 1976 to 1985, then 1994 to 2003, and then 2012 to 2014. Although on the opposite side of the political spectrum compared to CiU, the PQ has also continually supported regional integration, in this case in the form of NAFTA (Polèse 2000, 189). Moreover, in a manner similar to CiU, the PQ has used its positive politicization of regional integration to communicate to its audiences its modern and cosmopolitan identity, the grievances it has had against the overextending arm of the federal government (Lemco 1994, 13), and, finally, its vision of securing Quebec's independence and sovereignty by seceding from the rest of Canada. This goal, though having lost some of its urgency and intensity in the PQ's rhetoric more recently, nevertheless has periodically been affirmed by the party (e.g. The Gazette 2008). Among the four factors discussed earlier, the PQ's cosmopolitan ideology – one that sees countries becoming increasingly interconnected across regional networks – is of particular importance.

This forward-looking ideological component is most prominent in the PQ's communication of its identity through its pro-NAFTA language. As a party which has explicitly identified sovereignty as its number one goal (The Gazette 2008), the PQ has sometimes been accused by

its opponents of being insular and outdated in its thinking. In order to counter this image, the PQ has sought to demonstrate that it is the exact opposite of these accusations by showing that it supports and encourages regional trade and NAFTA. In an interview with the authors, Scott McKay (2009), a member of Quebec's National Assembly for the PQ between 2008 and 2014, explained that the PQ has sought to cultivate better relationships with Quebec's continental trade members like the United States in order to counter claims that the party is comprised of 'close minded' people who 'live in a utopia'; in contrast, by embracing regional trade and NAFTA more generally, the PQ has shown itself to be 'cosmopolitan and not provincial'.

Due in part to this cosmopolitan identity as well as the rising proportion of Quebec's trade that takes place at an international rather than an interprovincial level (Shulman 2000, 376), the PQ, and Quebecers more generally, have held strong grievances against the federal government for imposing itself on Quebec's ability to make its own decisions (Oliver 1999, 79). Once again, relying on its positive leveraging of regional integration and trade has allowed the PQ to make this grievance clear. Thus, early in the 1980s, then-Premier René Levesque criticized the Canadian government's protectionism against international trade that, according to him, 'no longer responds to Quebec's needs' on account of how 'North America and the whole world are now Quebec's market' (Hero and Balthazar 1988, 258-9). As such, to the PQ, regional integration has functioned as a vital 'counter-balance' to the rest of English-speaking Canada and the Canadian state (Griffiths 2009, 446).

In light of its decades-long history of grievances with the Canadian government (Pavković & Radan, 2007, 83-4), the PQ's long-term goals have therefore pointed unequivocally toward increased economic and political autonomy for Quebec. The objective here is what the PQ calls 'sovereignty-association' – an approach that would allow it to separate politically from Canada

while still maintaining economic ties with it (Lemco 1994, 62). To this end, the PQ's positive

view of regional integration has been key. In the most direct sense, the PQ has specifically

declared that 'free trade and a common North American market with the United States as well as

Canada go hand in hand with the [party's] sovereignty objectives' (Hero and Balthazar 1988,

259). Thus, the PQ has officially associated regional economic integration with its goals for

political autonomy in Article 15 of its sovereignty bill:

> In accordance with international law, Quebec shall assume the obligations and
>
> enjoy the rights set forth in the relevant treaties […] to which Canada or Quebec
>
> is a party on the date on which Québec becomes a sovereign country, in
>
> particular, in the North American Free Trade Agreement.

In line with such rhetorical support for regional integration, the PQ has also taken concrete

pro-integration steps, associating itself increasingly with other regional trading partners so as to

reduce Quebec's economic dependence on English-Canada (Shulman 2000, 376). For example,

in 1983, the PQ attempted to set up its own U.S.-Quebec Free Trade Agreement. When that

effort failed due to lack of enthusiasm from the U.S. side, the PQ then supported and helped

solidify a Canada-US free trade agreement instead (Polèse 2000, 189). As Shulman (2000, 376)

goes on to say, Quebec sovereigntists 'support free trade and investment because they strengthen

the economy for making the transition from province to sovereign state.'

Like CiU, then, the PQ has supported the continued existence of regional integration,

specifically as it manifests itself in NAFTA. To the PQ, NAFTA is the picture of what regional

interconnectedness should look like as well as a legitimate means by which Quebec, as a member

of this regional trading network, can escape from the unwelcome control of the federal government and emerge as its own sovereign nation.

Negative Politicization

EZLN

In contrast to all the other three movements, the left-leaning EZLN operates outside of the primary political structure of the country in which it finds itself. Also unlike CiU and the PQ, the Zapatistas have portrayed regional integration, especially NAFTA, in a negative light in order to express their identity as an indigenous movement representing local Mexicans in the hardships they face – such as malnutrition, poverty, and exploitation (EZLN 1994, 30), their grievances against not only the national government but neoliberalism more broadly (Amparán 2003), and their vision of a world that should be free of the hardships Mexicans currently face. Such a world would be built on the universal principles of 'independence, democracy, liberty, and justice' (de la Luz Inclán 2008, 1331) and reach local communities in Mexico and beyond (Barmeyer 2008, 146). For the EZLN, three factors in particular seem to have influenced its rhetoric: its ideological view of itself as more indigenous than cosmopolitan, its membership basis in the people of Mexico and Chiapas and the desire to safeguard their indigenous rights, and finally its belief that the Mexican government has been in collusion with NAFTA in prioritizing international capitalist interests over local ones. Most of our analysis concerns the 1990s and 2000s – the time when EZLN was most active.

The EZLN has made a number of bold statements against regional trade to articulate to the world its identity and especially who it represents. First and foremost, it began its insurgency on January 1, 1994, the day on which NAFTA was launched. This public and symbolic act of

defiance against NAFTA was followed by a press conference in which the EZLN's

Subcomandante Marcos asserted that 'the treaty comes into effect [...] and supposedly it is the

skilled labor in the companies that are going to compete. And we [local Mexican people] don't

know how to read and write. What possibility do we have of competing in the world market?'

(EZLN 1994, 220). To the EZLN, NAFTA has promoted the interests of big businesses without

giving any consideration to the poor, uneducated, and small-time indigenous people. As the

Zapatistas clarified more recently in their Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle of June 2005

(Part IV: How We See Our Country), laws introduced by the Mexican government such as

NAFTA have left 'many Mexicans miserable, like *campesinos* and small producers, because they

are eaten up by the big agro-industrial companies.' Given all this, the EZLN stands to represent

the common, indigenous people of Chiapas and, more generally, all those oppressed by

international capitalist activities.

    The EZLN's sense of injustice is accordingly closely tied to anyone or anything that gets in

the way of the wellbeing of the locals. With this in mind, the EZLN has used NAFTA as 'a

pretext' to the many complaints the movement has against the Mexican government (Munoz

2006, 256). For example, citing NAFTA as one example of the unfavorable 'laws' the Mexican

government enacted, the EZLN, again in its Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (Part IV:

How We See Our Country), stated that

> What we see is our country being governed by neoliberals […] [O]ur leaders are
>
> destroying our nation, our Mexican motherland. And the work of these bad
>
> leaders is not to look after the well-being of the people, instead they are only
>
> concerned with the well-being of the capitalists.

This declaration thus also revealed the EZLN's grievances with the other perceived source of the problem: neoliberalism. To this end, the EZLN has treated its uprising in Chiapas as 'a massive publicity campaign directed against neoliberalism, with NAFTA as the bogeyman' (Rich 1997, 74). Along these lines, Marcos, in an interview by *La Jornada*, declared that it was 'NAFTA that really directed the reforms of Article 27' (Barry 1995, 157) – reforms that resulted in poor Mexican farmers unwillingly forced into selling their land to larger agricultural corporations (Cavise 1994, 3; Hansen 2001, 774). Furthermore, in a later communiqué sent to *Le Monde Diplomatique* (1997), Marcos went beyond NAFTA to include the EU in his critique of neoliberalism as well:

> As a world system, neoliberalism is a new war for the conquest of territory […]
> The defeat of the 'evil empire' [socialism] has opened up new markets, and the
> struggle over them is leading to a new world war – the fourth […] The European
> Union is a result of this fourth world war.

Finally, in part because it has no official electorate, the EZLN has had to depend on more than itself in defending the rights of the poor and oppressed – by relying, for instance, on the aid of external solidarity groups and influential international allies who can pressure the Mexican state (Johnston and Laxer 2003, 65; Jones and Trujillo 2005, 115). Seeing its efforts as part of a larger battle, the EZLN has therefore used its negative framing of regional integration and trade to justify its vision of a world in which its citizens can live with dignity, autonomy, and equality, free from the coercive and harmful clutches of powerful neoliberal interests. Unsurprisingly, the

EZLN has seen the oppressive effects of neoliberal policies like NAFTA as a threat not only to Mexicans but people all over the world (De Angelis 2008, 139; Paulson 2001, 285).

Accordingly, in its first declaration of *La Realidad*, the Zapatistas made clear that their message was directed at 'all who force themselves to resist the world crime known as "Neoliberalism" and aim for humanity and hope to be better' (Ruggiero 1998, 14). Those who side with the EZLN, whatever their country of origin, are therefore taking part in the EZLN's encompassing vision. They are takings sides in a war 'not between the EZLN and the Mexican government, but between neoliberalism and a dignified existence' (Paulson 2001, 286).

In sharp contrast with CiU and the PQ, then, the EZLN has challenged the legitimacy of regional integration and trade efforts through its negative portrayal of NAFTA and, more broadly, neoliberalism, which will lead to a new global war and thus 'destruction and ruin' in its wake (Le Monde Diplomatique 1997). The EZLN is calling on those willing to fight for justice and equality to rise up and take their place in the coming confrontation.

LN

The LN is a right-wing Italian party that was part of the former centre-right coalition led by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi from 2008 until 2011. Compared to the other three movements, the LN has changed its political strategies and rhetoric the most, first seeking federalism, then secessionism, and more recently devolution (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 954; Giordano 1999, 217; Giordano 2001, 29). Initially praising the EU, the LN has now become critical of it, for instance by supporting the actions of the French who voted against the proposed Constitutional Treaty in 2005 (BBC Worldwide Monitoring 2005) and celebrating the ratification failure of the Treaty of Lisbon in Ireland in 2008 (BBC Worldwide Monitoring

2008). Through such actions and its criticisms of the EU, the LN has described itself as the guardian of Northern Italian interests (Woods 2009, 162), expressed its grievances internally against the South and the national government (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 969) and externally against perceived threats to the North's culture especially from immigration (Gold 2003, 128; Woods 2009, 170), and spelled out its vision of a Europe that is catered to the autonomy and sovereignty of regions (Rolfi 2010). Three of the four factors identified at the beginning of the paper seem influential in this regard: a membership base comprised of discontented capitalists that has become increasingly populist and intolerant of the Italian South and immigrants (Passarelli 2013, 65), the belief that the EU works with the member states to serve national interests at the expense of regional ones, and the institutional profile – and in particular bureaucratic reach – of the EU.

The LN sees itself as a defender of Northern interests. Like the EZLN, the LN has used negative language about regional integration to convey this identity, which it sees as intricately connected to 'Padania' – the name the LN gave to the northern region of Italy (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001, 127). For instance, when Italy was included in the European Monetary Union, the LN made no qualms about criticizing the Euro for undermining the competitiveness of Padanian entrepreneurs (Huysseune 2006, 182). By arguing that the EU has become a 'Trojan horse' for globalization, the LN has 'styled itself as the North's shield against unfair trade' from abroad (Woods 2009, 177).

At the same time, the LN also sees itself as very different from the South, which it considers to be reliant on state handouts, lazy, and guilty of having 'exploited productive northern citizens' (Spektorowski 2003, 62). Thus, first when it was a part of the *Casa delle Libertà* (CDL) and later within Berlusconi's Freedom Party – or *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL) – the LN maintained its

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Eurosceptic position to distinguish itself from the 'pro-South, paternalistic, more moderate instincts of the "professional politicians" of the UDC [*Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro*] and AN [*Alleanza Nazionale*]' (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005, 969) who were more favourably inclined towards European integration.

Concerning its grievances, due in part to its belief that the Italian government has prioritized the interests of the South (Huysseune 2006, 107), the LN has also developed a strong aversion to the state and used the EU to frame its discontent. Initially, the LN believed that identifying itself more closely with the EU would allow it to distance itself from Rome (Giordano 2003, 222). One LN official argued that the Italian government had 'allowed corruption in southern Italy at the expense of the northern producer' and that decisions made by the state therefore had to be 'undermined by stronger EU regulations in order to truly protect "honest" producers' (Chari, Iltanen and Krtizinger 2004, 427). More recently, however, the LN has taken to arguing that the EU benefits national governments rather than regions. Former party leader Umberto Bossi, in particular, is known for likening the EU to 'a Stalinist European superstate' and 'the Soviet Union of Europe' (Gold 2003, 128), seeing it as 'a plaything of big government, multinational corporations and paedophiles' (The Economist 2003).

In addition, the LN believes that the North's cultural identity has come under fire, in part due to the actions of the EU. Speaking unofficially as the 'intellectual voice of the Lega Nord', Gilberto Oneto called economic globalization a 'wholesale assault on the region's cultural identity, architecture and pristine Alpine environment' (Woods 2009, 170). Likewise, Fabio Rolfi (2010), an LN party member and deputy mayor of Brescia, said in an interview with the authors that the LN considers the EU to be 'the wrong kind of integration – one that pushes for

immigration, the deletion of genuine cultural differences, [and] indefensible bureaucratic overreach'.

Finally, when it comes to the LN's vision of the future, political and economic autonomy for regions like Padania lie at the forefront. Just as with its grievances, the LN initially sought EU intervention and welcomed the Maastricht Treaty of 1991, believing that it would enable the 'self-development' of regions in Europe (Tarchi 2007, 190). Now, however, the LN has come to consider the EU to be 'a centralist institution and an antagonist of the aspiration for self-government of the Padanian and other European peoples' (Huysseune 2010, 69). Rolfi (2010), likewise, asserted in his interview that the LN seeks 'a Europe of regions' in which the North can exist as 'an independent, traditionalist, economically wealthy' region, free from 'immigrants and gypsies' and from the impositions of European integration and globalization that have caused a 'loss of control over our [the North's] finances.' Bossi (1998, 144) himself, in his book *Processo alla Lega*, warned against increased competition from big European producers undermining the North's commerce and agriculture.

Like the EZLN, then, the LN has challenged the notion of regional integration as the way of modernity and the path to the future. Once the party realized that European integration was not quite the solution the North needed to protect itself from the state and the South, the LN was only too eager to switch its framing, painting the EU as a bane to the cultural, political, and economic integrity of regions like the Italian North.

Conclusion

Separatist and autonomous movements have politicized regional integration as they have sought to define for their audiences their identity, grievances, and visions for the future. Movements

from both the left and right ends have done so with either positive or negative language. This has helped either affirm or challenge the legitimacy of RTAs. We identified a number of factors – from the membership basis to the institutional make-up of RTAs – that helps us understand the observable differences in rhetorical approaches across movements.

Our evidence concerned four movements in NAFTA and the EU. We contend, however, that movements in many other RTAs have politicized regional integration to their advantage, and that a similar pattern of positive and negative variation across movements of different political inclinations is likely to be in place in those RTAs. This has obvious implications for the legitimacy of RTAs. Movements have followers, and the continued existence of RTAs depends in part on popular support. How sub-national movements are leveraging RTAs therefore matters. But there are also at least three additional reasons for why these dynamics should be investigated and understood – all of which have to do with our broader understanding of RTAs.

First, and most obviously, RTAs may be helping sub-national movements undermine the very member states that formed those RTAs. EU scholars – especially those adopting supranational or neofunctionalist perspectives – have warned for some time that the EU may be undermining the integrity of its nation states. The dynamics described here point in the same direction: they highlight how the supranational level may be combining with the sub-national to 'squeeze' the existing nation states out of the picture (Bottery 2003). Whether positively or negatively inclined towards RTAs, movements are using integration to challenge the *raison d'être* of particular nations. This has obvious implications for life in those nations, and for policymaking at the national and transnational levels.

Second, and related to the above, the findings underscore the importance of seeing RTAs as dynamic opportunity structures – as creating new spaces, relationships, and possibilities (Hooghe

2008). Scholars have tended to study either the design of RTAs (along with the variables responsible for that design) or the impact of RTAs on various actors and structures. A far less common approach has been to view RTAs as places of undefined opportunities, where actors themselves capitalize on the new openings by creating something unexpected or, at the very least, not directly reducible to the activities and policies stemming from RTAs (Van der Heijden 2006). A focus on sub-national movements, and the various ways in which they creatively use – and politicize – integration, should encourage us to rethink our analytical approach to RTAs.

Third, we would do well to note that RTAs are seldom *faits accomplis* and are instead reified over and over again, so that what they really are is much more than what appears on paper. Indeed, recent scholarship suggests that rhetoric about transnational contexts matters by shaping life in particular localities and the very structure and policies that influence those contexts. As Hay and Rosamond (2002, 150) put it when reflecting on globalization, the EU, and other international contexts, the 'discourse' of actors 'may play a crucial independent role in the generation of the effects invariably attributed' to those contexts. Put differently, it is through discourse that broader contexts sometimes have their impact. Moreover, because discourse is not identical across places and actors, that impact itself varies (Schmidt 2002). Thus, to return to our case studies, the politicization of RTAs by different movements may be one way in which those very RTAs affect matters differently on the ground. In addition, discourse can also influence the very architecture and policies of those RTAs. This means that we should not view RTAs as objective and unequivocally defined realities, but instead approach them in part at least as phenomenological entities – as continuously experienced and reconstructed.

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