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# The Geography of Friedrich Ratzel and Paul Vidal de la Blache: A Comparative Analysis<sup>(1)</sup>

Guy Mercier

## ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates the great convergence between the geographical conceptions of Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) and Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). Despite their differences, each shared a common vision on several major issues, especially their general vision of the Man-to-Nature relationship and that, all things considered, led them up to very similar theoretical concepts of region and state.

**Key Words:** Paul Vidal de la Blache, Friedrich Ratzel, Region, State, History of Geography.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'article démontre que la pensée géographique de Friedrich Ratzel et celle de Paul Vidal de la Blache partagent une même conception du rapport Homme-Nature. De plus, il est expliqué comment les deux auteurs ont développé, à partir de cette base commune, des théories de la région et de l'État largement comparables.

**Mots clés :** Friedrich Ratzel, Paul Vidal de la Blache, région, État, histoire de la géographie.

## INTRODUCTION

When comparing the works of Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) with that of Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), the trend was once to contrast the "possibilism" of the former to the "environmentalism" of the latter. Today, there remains no doubt that this opposition is based on an excessively reductionist interpretation of Ratzel's geography (Hunter 1983, Claval 1998, Sanguin 1990). Further, it shows disregard for the debt Vidal himself acknowledged to his German colleague<sup>(2)</sup>. In both English- and French-speaking countries, Ratzel's thought has become better known<sup>(3)</sup>, enabling a more judicious comparison between the ideas of these two famous and influential geographers.

This study demonstrates the great convergence between the geographical conceptions of both authors. We do not intend to deny their differences. It seems relevant, however, for the sake of a just accounting of one aspect of the history of geography, to show how Vidal de la Blache and Ratzel shared, despite their differences, a common vision on several major issues (Buttimer 1971: 46 and 58). We wish particularly to stress that both geographers shared the same general vision of the Man-to-Nature relationship and that, all things considered, they end up with very similar theoretical concepts of region and state.

This approach may be contrary to a certain epistemology which would prefer to ask why and to what extent Vidal de la Blache's thought was different from that of Ratzel. Indeed, the history of a discipline is often considered as a series of more or less obvious breaks<sup>(4)</sup>. It should be recognised that this epistemological standpoint, by emphasizing what differentiates an author or a trend of thought from another, provides analysts with a powerful and useful classificatory tool<sup>(5)</sup>. The risk of aberration

nevertheless exists when the search for distinctiveness is not linked to a necessary analysis of the continuous series of events which, from a certain perspective, appear to be distinct in the history of science (Montigny 1992: 35-36, Goldlewka 1993: 15-17).

## A SHARED POSTULATE

Vidal de la Blache is known for having initiated a long tradition in geography based on a conception of the Man-to-Nature relationship which Lucien Febvre called "possibilism" in 1922. According to this historian, Vidal's possibilism is different from the so-called ratzelian environmentalism which brings the Man-to-Nature relationship down to "a mechanical action of natural factors on a purely receptive humanity" (Febvre 1922: 283). However, even when considering the relative influence of natural factors, possibilism would have the benefit, according to Febvre, of "showing how and to what extent Man is a geographical agent who works and changes the face of the Earth" (*idem*: 439).

On the basis of our current knowledge, it is impossible to support such an interpretation which definitely does not reflect Ratzel's ideas. The German geographer does not, as was mentioned by Hunter (1983), Claval (1976 1984) and Bassin (1984), give into blunt natural environmentalism, like many of Febvre's followers suggested. Of course, Ratzel's theory is based on the principle that Man does not break free from his "profound dependence on Nature" (1896a, t. 1: 87), since human beings must take from Nature what is necessary for their survival and development. Thus, the German geographer states that "society's ties are always conditioned by two necessities : shelter and food", especially food, which is "the most urgent need for both the individuals and the community" and, therefore, the most determining one (1900: 3-4)<sup>(6)</sup>. These requirements for survival act like forces that bind human societies to the soil and that mould their establishment in the shape of their environment's natural conditions<sup>(7)</sup>. But for Ratzel, this principle does not mean that natural conditions alone determine the modes of existence and the establishment models of human societies.

Moreover, says Ratzel, the way Man uses Nature should be taken into account in his *Völkerkunde*. Indeed, Nature does not provide shelter, food and other goods or facilities without Man's efforts. Thus, says Ratzel, the form of his action, as well as its effectiveness, depend mainly on Man himself, on his will and on the stage of development of his ability to take advantage of the elements (Hunter 1983: 96). This is why, according to Ratzel, the Man-to-Nature relationship depends on the type and on the level of development of the various groups living on Earth: "Doubtless there never was a time when man could, without trouble, acquire food, shelter, livelihood, by drawing upon Nature. Nature nowhere brings the food to his mouth, nor roofs his hut adequately over his head. Even the Australian who, in order to get his victuals, does no more than prepare a sharp or spade-ended stick to grub roots, or chop nicks in the trees with his axe to support his feet in climbing, or make weapons, fish-spear, net, or hook, or traps for smaller animals, pitfalls for larger even he must take some trouble, and that not entirely bodily, to help himself. Even in his case the various artifices by which he manages to exploit what Nature freely gives indicate a certain development of the faculties" (1896a, t. 1: 87-88)<sup>(8)</sup>.

With that respect, the German geographer makes an anthropological distinction between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*<sup>(9)</sup>. Owing to progress, the latter would have developed more efficient technical means that allowed them, unlike the *Naturvölker*, to break free, to a greater extent, from immediate natural limitations. As for progress, it would originate, according to Ratzel, in the human faculty to develop processes allowing an ever greater and more efficient exploitation of the various natural resources: "The gifts of Nature [...] are bound up with certain external circumstances, confined to certain zones, particular elevations, various kind of soil. Man's power over them is originally limited

by narrow barriers which he can widen but never break down by developing the forces of his intellect and will. His own forces, on the contrary, belong entirely to him. He cannot only dispose of their application but can also multiply and strengthen them without any limit that has, at least up to the present, been drawn" (*idem*: 27).

These technical innovations would then be distributed around the world through never ending migrations which, according to Ratzel, strongly characterize mankind. "Restless movement is the stamp of mankind" (*idem*: 9). Thus, exchanges and contacts between peoples are also, in Ratzel's mind, powerful means for sharing progress: "The close connection between every country and the whole earth's surface [...] determines the forms of contact and the mutual relations of these lands, so that, in spite of all differences and boundaries, they are never to be thought of as quite isolated existences. Herein lies one great cause of the progress of humanity" (1897a: 297)<sup>(10)</sup>.

Ratzel's statement on the general Man-to-Nature relationship is in complete accord with Vidal's point of view. Like Ratzel, Vidal suggests that Man is part of Nature: "Old language habits can often lead us to consider Nature and Man as two opposite terms, two opponents challenging one another. But Man is not like an empire within an empire; Man is part of the live creation, and its most dynamic actor. He only acts on Nature from within Nature and by Nature" (1903b: 222)<sup>(11)</sup>. This is why, according to Vidal, "it is obvious that (Man), through his breathing, feeding and secretory organs, remains, just like the animals, impregnated with the influences of his environment" (1921: 108)<sup>(12)</sup>. These influences would create a "link" between natural conditions and geographical facts. However, as Vidal continues, "this link [...] is not an absolute necessity on which time has no effect" (1904c: 343). Man, who is aware of his needs and gifted with ingenuity, is himself capable of drawing upon Nature's possibilities: "Nature provides Man with materials which have their own requirements, their particular properties as well as their limitations, which are suited for some uses rather than for others; with that respect, Nature is suggestive, sometimes restrictive. However, Nature only plays the role of a guide. Man is aiming at something when he creates an instrument; as he improves his weapons, his tools [...], he is guided by an increasingly precise desire of appropriation with regard to a specific goal. In any environment he may be, his first concern is to survive, and he channels all of his skills and ingenuity towards this goal [...]. Of course, there are differences and various levels in the quality of the inventions; but ingenuity is always mentioned in ethnographical literature, even in a limited sphere of ideas and needs" (1921: 200-201)<sup>(13)</sup>.

Thus, Man's ability to act upon Nature is linked, for both Vidal and Ratzel, to the level of development of human societies, that is, to the level of progress they have reached in acquiring useful knowledge for the proper use of natural resources. In this regard, Vidal adopts the term *Naturvölker* (1921: 9) and uses it to designate developing societies which are "subjugated to customs acquired under the influence of their environment" (*idem*: 46). According to Vidal, from such primitive conditions some peoples have been able, as they improved their skills and adapted inventions and ideas from the peoples with which they were in contact, to rise to a higher level of civilization<sup>(14)</sup>, and to progressively break free from environmental dependence. Of course, Vidal admits, "Man does not escape the influence of his local environment" (1903b: 235). Nevertheless, he insists, this influence is "very difficult to untangle in our highly developed societies", for these are "the infinitely complex results of a long term accumulation of human activity" (*idem*: 236). In these "superior" societies, the influence of the local physical environment is much weaker because it is overwhelmed with "masses of external influences which, for centuries, have steadily contributed to the heritage of civilizations" (*ibid.*)<sup>(15)</sup>.

Vidal, like Ratzel, concedes however that, despite all the technical skills that Man is apt to acquire, "there is, and will always be, something fixed, something permanent, which represents, through the greater than ever multitude of changes brought about by our times, the never ending and the powerful influences of the soil" (1904c: 343)<sup>(16)</sup>.

## MERGING REGIONAL AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES

Thus, Ratzel and Vidal shared a common general understanding which viewed the influence of environmental conditions on human establishment as being mediated by the actions of humans themselves. From this shared postulate, both authors have thus developed regional and political geographies that are highly convergent from a theoretical standpoint.

Ratzel states that "in order to understand the role of Man and his destiny", it is necessary "to picture him on the land where is set the scene of his action" (1900: 13). To understand Man like any other living species for that matter, one then has to refer to his *Lebensraum*, that is "the geographical surface area required to support a living species at its current population size and mode of existence" (Smith 1980: 53)<sup>(17)</sup>. On the basis of this general principle, Ratzel suggests that occupation of the land by human societies "always carries inside something from the land where it takes place" (1903: 107).

This fundamental principle of Ratzel's geography "gives the land a critical role in the [spatial] differentiation process of human establishment" (*idem*: 106). According to Ratzel, when humanity is technically underdeveloped, this differentiation acts through "reduction and separation of the parts" (*idem*: 107). At this stage, human societies would be deprived of sufficiently developed technical means to secure their expansion on vast territories. Poorly equipped, each group would rather tend to stick to a limited piece of land on the surface of the Earth<sup>(18)</sup>. Moreover, due to undiversified technical skills, each group would adapt more easily to a homogeneous region specific to its own abilities (*idem*: 159). This is why, any community that is poorly developed "tends to become a natural entity and to aspire [...] to sovereignty over a territory [...] characterized by a certain unity" (*ibid.*). The typical "geographical autonomy" of civilizations at a primitive stage of development thus calls, according to him, for extended political parcelling (*idem*: 160). These political bodies, which are extensively submitted to natural conditions and barriers, would indeed tend, in this case, to remain small, numerous and often isolated<sup>(19)</sup>.

However, Ratzel adds, political and geographical parcelling progressively fades away as neighbouring "natural entities" develop closer links between them. At first, he notes, the type of exchange taking place between regions reflects the exact distribution of the resources which defines the type of natural regional division of labour (1903: 107, 1902: 66 and 104). Thus, spatial differentiation of natural space, which favoured parcelling of human establishment at a low stage of civilization, now becomes, as a result of increasing exchanges, a unifying factor between regions and their inhabitants. According to Ratzel, this closer relationship creates a "national feeling" among masses of individuals coming from different regions and "who are not necessarily kin related with regard to their origins and languages" (1903: 13)<sup>(20)</sup>. In spite of their differences, individuals recognize the existence of their "common interests" (*ibid.*) through the regional interdependency experience. From this soon emerges a people which develops, as Ratzel says, "from the hereditary habit of living together, from shared tasks in labour and from the need for mutual defence against outsiders" (*idem*: 22)<sup>(21)</sup>. At the same time, Ratzel continues, the increasing rate of exchange contributes to the creation of trade and communication networks in which cities play a critical role. As a crossroad, where converging and expanding inputs meet, cities would therefore become interregional centres where circulation is organized (1876b: 3-10 and 15-19, 1902: 85).

According to Ratzel, trade thus modifies the conditions of human establishment and political organization. By initiating the constitution of peoples and structuring circulation on a broader scale, trade has induced dynamism to the strength that contributes to "the joining of different spaces into larger units" (1903: 161)<sup>(22)</sup>. In Ratzel's mind, this is how, under the pressure of evolution in human establishment conditions, the concept of state has emerged.

For Ratzel, the state is thus defined as a "political organization" (*idem*: 14) which, in conformity with the "political consciousness" (1897b: 449) of a people, controls the territory where takes place the vital economical activity of this people<sup>(23)</sup>. Although it brings together several regions into a single political entity, Ratzel clarifies, the state, once constituted, does not eliminate the original spatial differentiation of the territory over which it establishes its sovereignty. Political unity, by encouraging increasing exchange, would rather enhance as it modifies the spatial division of labour and, consequently, regional differentiation. However, by bringing individuals together and permitting them to intermingle, this interregional dependence generates "internal links" which, in turn, strengthen the internal coherence that is essential to maintain the state's unity (1903: 167, 1902: 66). In other words, primitive spatial differentiation, although maintained by political unification, finds itself subsumed by a superior order of territorial organization which lies more on the configuration of the communication networks that link the parts to the whole than on the natural features of each one separately (*idem*: 318).

Finally, this geographical logic, which suggests the existence of the state, remains, according to Ratzel, fundamentally more important in the long term than historical circumstances. As a result, a state may very well be divided for a certain period of time. However, Ratzel insists, this does not mean that the people's "political consciousness" cannot remain a strength acting towards territorial reunification. For example, this is how he interprets the reconstitution of both the German and the Italian states in the middle of the nineteenth century: "The political territory which has [...] been acquired can be broken up [...], but the idea of its greatness endures, often to be brought down after centuries from the realm of political ideals and planted again in the awakened political consciousness as a new territorial conception, and so to bear fruit, as in the recent history of Germany and Italy" (1897b: 449).

Ratzel's conception follows a logical train of thought that begins with a general concept of the Man-to-Nature relationship, and leads to a geographical definition of the state. A closely merging train of thought can be found in Vidal de la Blache's works.

To study the influence of Man on Nature, Vidal first suggests the "*genre de vie*" concept. This expression refers to the "methodical and ongoing action" performed by human societies "on the shape of the countries" (1911-1912: 194)<sup>(24)</sup>. It seeks to express, in each case, the way this action is performed, with respect to natural conditions, in order to produce some specific kinds of human establishment. As Vidal says, "the links between Man and land do not take the form of a stringent and irrevocable contract. Geographical conditions are flexible enough to allow a wide spectrum of opportunities left to the initiatives, preferences and choices of Man. Nature does not set the stage for a series of urging demands to which Man would have to comply with meek obedience. A closer look reveals instead that Nature provides [...] numerous opportunities through which Man can impress and promote his action" (1904a: 311)<sup>(25)</sup>. Vidal's prime interest in this action concerns its economical and technical aspects (Sorre 1948). For instance, he basically relates the *genres de vie* to the collection of means developed by a given society in order to exploit the resources of the land it occupies.

According to Vidal, each *genre de vie* adapts<sup>(26)</sup> to a specific natural environment in accordance to a certain level of technical development which allows more or less intensive and diversified



exploitation of the different resources available (1904a: 312, 1911-1912, 1913a: 297, 1921: 106). "With the material and elements he takes from the surrounding nature, [Man] managed, not at once, but through hereditary transmission of processes and inventions, to develop something methodical that ensures his survival and provides him with an environment for his use. Making use of self-made tools which he has mastered and created through his own initiative, man can be hunter, fisherman or farmer" (1921: 115-116).

Although they may be rather rigid in nature<sup>(27)</sup>, these *genres de vie* are nevertheless exposed to evolutionary forces, because frequently, "following the effects of new circumstances, an inward-looking society makes contact with unknown peoples, customs and needs. Then begins a new cycle of development" (1904a: 311)<sup>(28)</sup>. According to the French geographer, at the "primitive stage" (1913b: 6) of human evolution, human establishment is more "the natural and almost spontaneous expression of the relationship developed with the land" (1903a: 60). In this context, spatial distribution of the *genres de vie* is markedly reflective of the natural divisions that slice up the surface of the Earth. Submitted to the pressures of their environment, and still unable to exploit a wide variety of resources, human groups would then be confined "to the restricted boundaries of a natural region" (*ibid.*)<sup>(29)</sup>.

According to Vidal's system, at a higher stage of civilization, spatial organization of social life would extend beyond the limits of the natural region. Because, in his perspective, "contacts between neighbouring and adjacent regions" (1913b: 6) would encourage the creation of trade networks that are as active as they are different and complementary. In this respect, Vidal, like Karl Ritter, believes that "one cannot consider the different parts of the Earth as lifeless juxtaposition, but as reciprocal centres of acting forces. Indeed, the principle behind the actions of the different parts of the Earth on one another lies within physical nature". This would explain, Vidal notes, "Ritter's patient analyses in which he meticulously observes all the physical features that can induce a certain impulse to Nature's and Man's action. Any difference, any inequality, and hence any contrast is a reason for mutual exchanges and relationships. These activate the forces which, in Nature, tend to re-establish the upset balance, or by which, with regard to human phenomena, desire is aroused, needs are fulfilled, action from the outside is requested" (1896: 138). In other words, relationships between societies are, to a certain point, predetermined by the division of terrestrial land into different natural regions which call for interregional exchange due to the existence of "reciprocal needs" (1902: 17). The increasing circulation would cause, as a result, regional division of labour and make regions dependent on one another<sup>(30)</sup>.

Also, according to Vidal, generalization of exchanges would bring rapid development of cities which, through the centralization of exchange networks, would become, especially in the industrial age, the "vital links"<sup>(31)</sup> of a new spatial organization. From Vidal's perspective, the industrial explosion indeed brings about "a new cycle of geographic phenomena" (1913b: 9). Due to this powerful industrial boom, "most men and things put into action, with all the tools and funds they require, cannot be satisfied within the restrictive limitations of the past [...]. From this would result the increasing role played by the cities, or more accurately, by some large cities. Since there is an advantage to having funds, markets and communication networks near the production centres, [...] the main concentration point remains the city" (*ibid.*). Thus, "major industrial centres create ever extending networks which become ever more tightly enmeshed with neighbouring lands [...]. If industry's trend towards more concentration progresses as it did for the last twenty-five years, Vidal notes, the role played by the cities will only gain in importance. In this case, the city keeps the territory unified. The interests that form around these centres of capital and innovation, exert a seemingly stronger influence on human relationships" (1909: 460). Spatial organization of human

societies is thus more related to areas of market and economic dependence than to natural divisions <sup>(32)</sup>.

Thus, according to Vidal, intensification of exchange deeply transforms the occupational mode of space because in this case: "the principle of unification is no longer based on regional homogeneity, but on regional solidarity" (1913b: 6). This solidarity, which is very important to the French geographer, would constitute the geographical basis of the state's structure. States, he claims, "are not rigid entities" (1898: 108). They are highly civilized and always changing (1914: 559) forms of social and spatial organization resulting from both history and geography. Thus, with respect to the evolutionary process leading to the emergence of states, Vidal suggests that "one cannot imagine the possibility of [their] formation [...] where no important city foundations already exist in order to establish, diversify and develop relationships", because "the city substitutes a principle of stability and continuity to the fluctuation of relations in nature". This is why, he says, "the city is [...] the nucleus of the state" (1898: 107-108). In the same perspective, the state depends, according to Vidal, on the strength of the national feeling which develops when the intensity of exchange can unify, within a single community, inhabitants from different regions. So, Vidal says, for the state, "this diversity of elements", to become a strength, "a powerful national feeling must develop and be maintained in order to assure coherence" (1899: 100).

In his *Tableau de la géographie de la France*, Vidal de la Blache uses the same chain of reasoning to explain the political unity of France. The unity of France, he says, does not depend on some natural homogeneity. France, he notes, is rather made of contrasts with regard to geology, climate, biology or race (1903a: 7). In spite of its lack of homogeneity, the French community is nevertheless characterized by "harmony" (*idem*: 4). This harmony would be the result of the solidarity that binds the regions of France, and which is demonstrated through sustained exchanges and multiple relationships <sup>(33)</sup>. Owing to the strong interdependence between the regions, France "brings its power of assimilation against various penetrating and besieging influences" (*idem*: 40). This interregional solidarity, which has been shaping the individual's conscience for centuries, would have lead to the rise of a people and of a country which, in the Middle Ages, have become a political state <sup>(34)</sup>. As a matter of fact, intense and ongoing exchanges would have made the inhabitants of every region more and more familiar with each other. Cultural unity would then have developed, progressively strengthening the feeling of belonging to a single people which possesses, as a result of shared labour in its development, a large territory (*idem*: 51 and *passim*).

In Vidal's perspective, the "geographical individuality" of France thus cannot be deduced from natural conditions: "It is not something that is given in advance by Nature" (1979: 8). In like manner, the unity of France would not be the result of political and historical arbitrariness. It would be based on profound geographical reason, in accordance with the very principles that guide the fundamental relationships between Man and Nature. Vidal uses the same argumentation in his *France de l'Est* (1917) to demonstrate how Alsace and Lorraine, despite their annexation to Germany since the Frankfurt Act in 1871, are geographically part of the French community while both regions fully adhere to French patriotic values <sup>(35)</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Ratzel and Vidal de la Blache thus share a common geographical paradigm. Firstly, both share the same postulate which dictates that land use is conditioned by the fulfillment of needs: Due to his survival requirements, Man would be subjected to Nature. As a component of the natural whole, to which he is linked organically, Man, according to both authors, would nevertheless be a particularly



dynamic and innovative element. Thus, in order to satisfy his needs, Man would display technical means which, through innovation and borrowing, would have been improved throughout history. As a result of progress, Man would improve his ability to take advantage of the numerous opportunities offered by Nature and, consequently, would become less dependent on local natural conditions.

This shared postulate inspired in both geographers a common conception of spatial organization of societies. Indeed, spatial forms of human modes of existence are, for both Vidal and Ratzel, essentially modulated in accordance with the stage of civilization they have reached which conditions Man's more or less developed technical ability to draw useful resources upon Nature and with Earth's own natural divisions. At the early stage of civilization, when technical means are rudimentary, natural divisions set up barriers which divide human establishments into numerous inward-looking regions. At a later stage of development, when skills have been improved and sustained exchanges have taken place between regions, natural divisions no longer act as isolating factors but, to the contrary, as interregional integrating factors. Dynamism induced by natural differences would then cause exchanges to contribute to the creation of a new spatial organization itself supported by the rise of a national feeling which brings structure and solidarity among several regions within a state territorial community.

Although they had distinct disciplinary and philosophical backgrounds, and evolved in different social and political contexts<sup>(36)</sup>, Ratzel and Vidal de la Blache have nonetheless developed geographical concepts which, beyond their specificity, make the regional differentiation issue the centre of their concerns. Their conceptions also merge when it comes to explaining how this differentiation operates. For both authors, Earth's natural heterogeneity is the fundamental factor that triggers the regionalisation of human establishment, while the human factor is closely related to the technical skills of societies, only emphasizes the influence exerted by natural heterogeneity on the regional differentiation process.

Thus, at the early stage of technical skills, regional demarcation is subjected to natural divisions which, due to the lower stage of technical ability of societies, set up barriers against territorial expansion of establishments. At a higher level, the lack of technical skills no longer confines societies within geographical boundaries, because they have developed efficient means of communication that can support exchanges with remote areas. However, systematic exchanges do not reduce in any way the fundamental role played by natural heterogeneity in the regional differentiation process. To the contrary, intensification of trade, which promotes labour distribution, tends to specialize the regions in accordance with their natural features. This explains why natural heterogeneity continues to maintain regional differences, even within an interregional community closely linked by trade.

Despite their differences, Ratzel and Vidal de la Blache join around a common geographical concept: regional differentiation. Each developed the same theory to explain the genesis and the dynamism of regional entities. This theory, which is coherent and explicit with regard to its postulates, has lead them to a consistent interpretation of the geographical object.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>. This paper has been originally published in French in the *Annales de géographie* (n° 583, 1995, p. 211-235). This English version however has been slightly modified and updated.

<sup>2</sup>. Vidal de la Blache (1898, 1900, 1903b: 223-224, 1904b, 1911-1912: 290, 1921: 5). See also Broc (1977), Sanguin (1985, 1988, 1993: 136), Claval (1976: 23), Berdoulay (1995: 38 and 230).

<sup>3</sup>. Smith (1980), Hunter (1983), Bassin (1984, 1987a, 1987b), Korinman (1983, 1987, 1990), Stehlin (1988) and Mercier (1990, 1992, 1995). The French translation of *Politische Geographie* (1987, 1988) and the English translation of *Städte- und Kulturbilder aus Nordamerika* (1988) also contributed to rectifying several misinterpretations which limited the value of Ratzel's works.

<sup>4</sup>. See Claval (1981: 229), Buttner (1981), Granö (1981), Berdoulay (1995) and Livingston (1992a and b).

<sup>5</sup>. Berdoulay, for example (1978, 1995), who demonstrated how Vidal de la Blache's neokantism is different from Ratzel's positivism.

<sup>6</sup>. See also Ratzel (1898b: 142).

<sup>7</sup>. Ratzel (1902: 63): "In vain have men sought for characteristics in the rocks of the earth and in the composition of the air by which one land might be distinguished from another. The idea of great, lasting, conclusive qualitative variations in different parts of the earth is mythical". See also Ratzel (1896a, b. 1: 10-11 and 106-113), Raveneau (1891: 334), Marinelli (1905: 111), Brunhes (1904: 104), Bassin (1984: 11, 1987a: 124) and Löwie (1971:110).

<sup>8</sup>. Ratzel, 1902 (p. 61): "[Man] is a son of the earth not only because he is born of the earth, and therefore composed of earthy material, nor merely because of the deeper reason that the earth was pregnant with him from the very time she bore the first germ of organic life, so that all that had been previously created only pointed toward mankind: Man appeared upon earth as a child, capable of receiving education and of developing, and to whom education and development were necessities; the earth has brought him up, through a struggle with all her powers and beings, and into his special history is woven the general history of the world".

- <sup>9</sup>. Translating *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* as "natural races" and "cultural races" is not quite accurate, since the term *Volk* means people and not race. This shade of meaning is important since Ratzel insists on the fact that a people does not necessarily have a racial basis. Besides, this is one of the fundamental differences between Ratzel's thought on racial thesis and the German *Geopolitik* of the interwar period. See Ratzel (1900: 13) and Bassin (1984: 19, 1987b: 480). See also Vidal de la Blache's (1900: 258) comment in which he notes the aptness of Ratzel's distinction between race and people.
- <sup>10</sup>. See also Ratzel (1896a, b. 1: 9). It should be noticed that Ratzel's geography, with respect to both his theoretical statements and his regional analyses, is fully impregnated with the concepts of circulation, diffusion, contacts, exchange and trade. On Ratzel's diffusionism, see among others Hückel (1906-1907), Löwie (1971: 113), Malinowski (1944: 17, 32 and 213-215), Bassin (1984), Claval (1984: 34), Raffestin (1988), Sanguin (1990: 592) and Mercier (1990: 603-604).
- <sup>11</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1921: 7, 1914: 558), Berdoulay and Soubeyran (1991) and Buttimer (1971: 49-51).
- <sup>12</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1911-1912: 294).
- <sup>13</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1896: 100, 1904a: 311, 1913b: 5-6, 1898: 99-100).
- <sup>14</sup>. Vidal de la Blache (1921: 199-200 and *passim*) uses the terms "rudimentary civilizations" and "superior civilizations".
- <sup>15</sup>. Thus, for Vidal (1921: 78), Europe's worldwide superiority would be the result, not only of its great innovating capabilities, but mainly of its ongoing contacts with several civilizations.
- <sup>16</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1903a: 386).
- <sup>17</sup>. See also Troll (1949: 114) and Hunter (1983: 48 and *passim*).
- <sup>18</sup>. Ratzel writes (1896b: 352): "People in a low state of civilization are naturally collected in very small political organizations". See also Ratzel (1903: 107, 1898a: 371, 1899: 314).
- <sup>19</sup>. With respect to this, Ratzel writes (1898a: 371): "Phases of development which according to their nature are limited find the most favorable environment in contracted areas. For that primitive stage of political development in which one clan holds itself apart from another and each forms a small community for itself, mountains and forests encourage the inclination toward restriction of territory".
- <sup>20</sup>. See also Ratzel (1896a, b. 1: 131, 1902: 64) and Sauer (1971: 253).
- <sup>21</sup>. See also Ratzel (1902: 83) and Mercier (1990: 606-609).
- <sup>22</sup>. See also Ratzel (1903: 161, 1902: 74) and Bergevin (1989).
- <sup>23</sup>. See Ratzel (1903: 19 and *passim*, 1902: 66), Smith (1980: 54), Sauer (1971: 251), Hunter (1983: 122 and *passim*).
- <sup>24</sup>. See also Buttimer (1971: 52) and Costa Gomez (1993).

<sup>25</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1921: 21-24 and *passim*) and Berdoulay (1995: 208)

<sup>26</sup>. On the importance of the concept of adaptation in the works of Vidal de la Blache, see Berdoulay and Soubeyran (1991).

<sup>27</sup>. Vidal imputes the responsibility of the mode of existence relative stability to the force of habit (1902: 22): "How is it possible [...] that life conditions contracted in certain environments can reach an adequate level of coherence and stability in order to become types of civilization, real entities [...]?" It should be remembered that the force of habit plays a major role in Man's social nature. If he is essentially progressive in his desire for improvement, his progress follows above all a previously cleared path, that is in accordance with the technical and special skills he developed by force of habit and cemented by his heritage. Any wild tribe instrument reflects a certain level of ingenuity which, when applied to other objects, would have been the principle of a superior civilization. This progress did not happen. Indeed, Man does not easily turn his back to his traditional way of life [...]. He eventually locks himself into a self-made prison. His customs become rituals supported by beliefs and superstitions he creates as needed". This is why, "it is frequent that, among the geographical potentialities of a given land, some which seemed obvious have remained sterile, or only produced late effects". See also Vidal de la Blache (1911-1912: 303-304, 1904a: 132).

<sup>28</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1921: 204 and *passim*, 1904a: 310) and Archer (1993).

<sup>29</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1911-1912: 303-304, 1909: 457-459).

<sup>30</sup>. A good demonstration of this interregional dependence is included in Vidal's *Tableau de la géographie de la France* (1903a: 15 and following).

<sup>31</sup>. Using the word of the English geographer Halford Mackinder, Vidal also talks about the "nodality" of the cities in territorial organization in the industrial age. See Vidal de la Blache (1910: 832, 1913b: 11).

<sup>32</sup>. See also Vidal de la Blache (1913b: 11). Moreover, this is why Vidal de la Blache (1910 and 1913b) stands for a new division of the French territory. He claims that the *départements* have become too small to fit with the country's new geographical reality, that they should be brought together into larger regional entities which would be better related to the newly acquired importance of industrial towns and communication networks. See also Le Couédic (1992), Ozouf-Marignier and Robic (1995) and Mercier (1998a).

<sup>33</sup>. This aspect of Vidal's thinking has been quite clearly demonstrated by Canu (1931), Guiomar (1986) and Berdoulay (1995).

<sup>34</sup>. Vidal de la Blache makes his Michelet's argumentation. On the relation between Vidal's *Tableau* and that of Michelet (1987), see Canu (1931).

<sup>35</sup>. On this subject, see also Nicolas-Obadia *et al.* (1988), Nicolas (1988) and Gallois (1918).

<sup>36</sup>. For a better understanding of these contextual differences, see, among many others, Wanklyn (1961), Hunter (1983), Sanguin (1990, 1993), Berdoulay (1981), Berdoulay and Soubeyran (1991), Nicolas-Obadia *et al.* (1988), Hussy (1993) and Claval (1998).