

AUTONOMY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN STATELESS NATIONS: SCOTLAND, CATALONIA AND QUEBEC

INTRODUCTION: MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

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As the twentieth century draws to a close, so the issue of national identities becomes more salient. In the modern world, we have become used to conflicts over forms of political identity. We can find examples of disputed identities in many western countries. The peoples of Quebec, Catalonia and Euskadi (the Basque Country), Scotland and Wales are among the most obvious groupings which, to a greater or lesser extent, dispute the political identities conferred on them by the states to which they belong. In many respects this is a remarkable feature, because, for most of the century, indeed for most of the period we now call 'modern', it seemed as if the problem of national identity had been solved once and for all.

The modern state requires the commitment of its citizens in exchange for the provision of services which could only be delivered at the national level. The state, in other words, demanded that the citizen be loyal to it, obey its rules, and, when required, fight on its behalf. National identity became a necessary device for exacting the obedience of the citizen to the state. This was, by and large, not an oppressive feature, because people wanted to belong to the

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'national community' from which they derived psychological, cultural and social benefits.

There seemed to be no question about who they were. Their 'national' identity was bestowed by the state, and citizens appeared happy to accept it. What we might call 'identity-politics' - disputes about who people give their loyalty to - had little or no place on the political agenda. Politics was deemed to be about material matters; issues of social class and the distribution of resources were the substance of politics. Identity-politics were confined, it was thought, to the periphery of the modern political process, to the less developed world, and to those parts of Europe like Northern Ireland, and the Balkans, which somehow had been left out of the processes of 'real' politics, and which had succumbed to ancient, ethnic rivalries. Modern societies worthy of the name were deemed to have 'civic' not 'ethnic' politics.

THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Life in the late 20th century has not turned out to be so simple. Challenges to existing states have grown more, not less, common. Alternative political identities have been emerging, different from those laid down by existing state structures. Late 20th century challenges to the social, economic and cultural jurisdiction of the modern state - what we might call processes of state reformation - have begun to have implications for national identity. Suddenly identity issues are back on the political agenda. In Mercer's words: 'Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty' (Mercer 1990, p.43).

The result of reproblematising identity has been a greater awareness that it is less a categorical self-concept, and more of a process. In Stuart Hall's words:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being; not 'who we are' or 'where have we come from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside, representation.
(Hall 1996, p.4)

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As the century closes, there is general awareness that no 'master-identity' is possible, and that a 'politics of difference' has emerged defined by new social movements such as feminism, black struggles, nationalist and ecological movements. Further, identity is no longer seen as a given, but as something struggled over, as chosen, as problematic. To put it another way, identity, as Bauman points out, should be treated as a verb not a noun, 'albeit a strange one to be sure: it appears only in the future tense'. (1996, p.19) Identity, he says, is a name given to the escape from uncertainty. In other words, identities should be seen as a concern with 'routes' rather than 'roots', with optional ways forward rather than pre-determined paths to the present.

The discussion about national identity, then, properly belongs to a much broader debate about identity generally. Rapidly changing social and political structures are having an effect on all forms of identity, including the ones which interest us here - national, political identity. By the 1990s, the old agenda had changed. New political structures, and the concomitant decline of older ones, seem to have forefronted the issue of identity. National identities become more problematic as conventional state-identities are corroded by forces of globalisation which shift the classical sociological focus away from the assumption that 'societies' are well-bounded social, economic and cultural systems. What replaces conventional state-identities is not 'cultural homogenisation' in which everyone shares in the same global 'post-modern' identity because they consume the same material and cultural products. Rather, in Hall's words, 'we are confronted by a range of different identities, each appealing to us, or rather to different parts of ourselves, from which it seems possible to choose' (Hall 1992, p.303).

We have grown used to the common-sense notion that identity differences which people express are 'real' in an ontological sense. They are, of course, real insofar as people treat them as such, but ethnic identities have to be treated as social and cultural accounts which participants use to make sense of their actions. In essence, ethnicity is a reflection of a relationship, not the property of the group as such. It is sustained in the course of the interaction, and does not exist in isolation. Hence: to be Bosnian is not to be Serb; to be Scottish is not to be English; to be English is not to be French; and so on.

While it is true that identities are constructed by participants in the course of social and political action, they are not entirely of their own making. We work within cultural representations, as Stuart Hall points out:

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we only know what it is to be 'English' because of the way 'Englishness' has come to be represented, as a set of meanings, by English national culture. It follows that a nation is not only a political entity but something which produces meanings - a system of cultural representation. (Hall 1992, p.292)

Hall argues that national culture is a discourse, a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises our actions and our conceptions of ourselves. The idea of the nation is a 'narrative' (Bhabha 1990) whose origin is obscure, but whose symbolic power to mobilise the sense of identity and allegiance is strong. By looking at national identity in this way, as multifaceted and plural, we begin to see that it cannot be taken for granted, that it will reflect social power, and that competing identities will emerge and challenge each other. In Peter Worsley's words,

cultural traits are not absolutes or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide identities which legitimise claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce resources. (Worsley 1984, p.249).

Nor are national cultures and identities fixed and immutable. They are subject to processes of translation and change. Hall's term 'cultures of hybridity' refers to the ways in which identities are subject to the play of history, political representation and difference, and are very unlikely to be pure or unitary. He cites the writer Salman Rushdie's description of his controversial book **The Satanic Verses**, as 'a love-story to our mongrel selves' (Hall 1992, p.311).

Edward Said has also made this point central to his writings, in **Orientalism**, and **Culture and Imperialism**. He points out that imperialism and resistance to it are inextricably linked, defining and competing with each other. There is no meaningful 'us' and 'them'. 'Gone', he says, 'are the binary opposites dear to the nationalist and the imperialist enterprise' (1993, p.xxviii), although each have a vested interest in their defining separateness. He elaborates as follows:

If you know in advance that the African or Iranian or Chinese or Jewish or German experience is fundamentally integral, coherent, separate, and therefore comprehensible only to Africans, Iranians, Chinese, Jews or Germans, you first of all posit as essential something which ... is both

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historically created and the result of interpretation, namely the existence of Africanness, Jewishness or Germanness or for that matter Orientalism and Occidentalism. (1993, pp.35-6).

The point is that the codification of difference is a vital part of the strategy of identity-politics, and ought not be taken for granted by the social scientist and historian. In practical terms, as Said says, today no-one is merely one thing. Such stereotypes are part of the polemic batteries of discourse, especially in a rapidly changing world in which state formations are coming under attack from below and above. Here, then, are some of the analytical tools we can use in understanding autonomy and national identity in the modern world, and especially in those territories in which nations and states do not map onto each other.

STATELESS NATIONS: SCOTLAND, CATALUNYA, AND QUEBEC

In selecting these three examples of 'stateless nations', we are able to examine the ways in which 'national identity' is created, maintained and transformed. In so doing, we do not imply either that these are the only such nations, or that that they are identical. There are obvious points of similarity and difference, most clearly in the following ways.

Scotland and Catalunya have related geo-political relations with the European Union, reflected in the fact that their 'state' governments - the UK and Spain - have to negotiate with both the EU and the autonomous territories. NAFTA, the North Atlantic Free Trade Area, is as yet much more of an economic than a political project. *Europe des Patries* is a shared political project of Scottish and Catalan nationalists alike.

Catalunya and Quebec appear to have strong 'cultural' politics - especially over the language issue (and with shared religious bases, at least historically), whereas Scotland has been characterised as 'culturally light' in these respects. Both Catalunya and Quebec also have autonomous assemblies in which a measure of political control is institutionalised.

Scotland and Quebec are less frequently compared, but they share the British imperial legacy, and the general context of progressive economic development since the 18th century. They have, of course, different relationships to that development - as coloniser and colonised.

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On the other hand, Scotland, Catalunya and Quebec have key features in common.

- They are coherent civil societies which are not independent states, with ostensible but varying degrees of political autonomy.
- In each there is a complex relationship between cultural nationalism and political nationalism over time to the extent that these have converged in recent years.
- They have evolved political movements/parties, carriers of this nationalism, which are of relatively recent origin, that is, mainly in the second half of the 20th century. The Scottish National Party, Convergència i Unió, and Parti Québécois are in essence modern creations.
- There is ambiguity about their aims. Are they seeking independence or autonomy, and in what senses? Do they seek outright separation, or something less than that? This is reflected in the ambivalent terms of the political debate - 'Home Rule', 'Autonomisme', Souveraineté-Association/Consociation. Is autonomy a stepping-stone to full independence, or a constitutional cul-de-sac? The ambivalence is reflected in terms used by analysts to describe the movements: 'regionalism', or 'regional nationalism' or 'neo-nationalism'.
- The relevant political debates take place within three-dimensions not simply two-dimensions of power: the nation/state/ and supra-state - the EU and NAFTA. In other words, the nation develops a debate with both dimensions, usually using the supra-state level to its rhetorical advantage.
- The constituent elements of the message is ambiguous and complex: different ideological elements are mixed and mobilised: right/left; ethnic/civic; past/future; local/global; corporatist/neo-liberal; separatist/autonomist. This allows the movement to play fast-and-loose, as their opponents see it, with the ideological message.
- In a related way, progressive aspects - in political and economic terms - outweigh reactionary ones. Movements appear as social-democratic or as neo-liberal, reflecting the kind of 'niche nationalism' being developed. Attempts are even made to align the leftist and rightist elements in these respects (learning to love - or live with - the global market in a social-democratic way).

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- We can relate these shifts in ideological messages to adjustments in changing and diverse social constituencies. Unlike 'bourgeois' nationalist movements of the 19th century, the social base is more free-floating and unpredictable. The SNP for example has restructured itself as a 'working class' party in the 1990s unlike its 'tartan tory' image and (to some extent) appeal of the 1970s.
- Finally the 'movement' (for self-government) is not usually aligned with support for the party. At least, the voters seem to be adept at giving only contingent support at certain elections, and voting in ostensibly 'unionist' ways in others.

In this special feature in Scottish Affairs, we examine the relationship between autonomy - civil and political - and national identity in these three 'stateless' nations. Gaëtan Tremblay and Jean LaCroix focus on Quebec at a crucial juncture in its history - the aftermath of the 1995 Referendum which appeared to split public opinion down the middle over the demand for greater autonomy. Luis Moreno and Ana Arriba examine the relationship between national, regional and state identity in modern democratic Spain, and Manuel Parés discusses the key aspects of cultural identity with regard to the role of mass communications. Lindsay Paterson rounds off the discussion by outlining the ways in which 'negotiated autonomy' has become the condition of nations at the end of the twentieth century.

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