

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Wk 11 Topic 11 Nationalism Lec 4/5 – Conceptual Problems; Brexit; Statehood without
Nationalism - Scotland
38:05

Well, hello again everyone. We're reaching the end of our eleventh topic on this NPTEL ideologies course 2019-20. Our topic is still, we're reaching the end of it today, Nationalism, our eleventh topic. We'll conclude the topic by looking at conceptual problems in Nationalism. We shall look at one or two examples, and we shall then do a worked exercise - which incidentally includes one or two news items from yesterday.

Today's the eleventh of February 2020, and the items, these items have been reported - they're very significant - in the last day or two. Well, when we wound up last time I'd started on, I'd started on conceptual problems on that in nationalism. We'll recapitulate on the introduction to those and then do them in more detail. We'll then look at an example of, a recent example of resurgence of nationalism.

Nationalism, of course, has a number of conceptual problems. And there's a particular historical period which helps us to see these more clearly. The period is the decade or so immediately following the First World War, which ended in 1918. And in that period, a League of Nations was constituted, mainly by the Western powers, in the attempt to prevent a repetition of the conditions which those powers thought had led to the war.

Their approach required the creation of new states in continental Europe on the assumption that nations are made up of populations with common ethnic or linguistic inheritances and the further assumption that such populations had to have their own states. These new nation-states would be defined by territorial boundaries. Notice the specific use of that term 'nation-states' - the state was regarded as being coterminous with the nation, and the nation was defined in terms of ethnicity or, or language.

Now, one major problem was that the war had put an end to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. That had imposed central and often despotic authority and bureaucracy on the many nationalities within its, within its reach, and within its, its territory. Now that authority was gone, and many of the nationalities turned against one another, especially when they were geographical neighbours. The Slovaks were against the Czechs, the Serbs against the Croats,

the Ukrainians against the Poles, and so on. In addition, national majorities often started oppressing national or linguistic minorities. And some of the minorities turned against one another. I draw these details from Hannah Arendt's great work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Now the source of the problem was that the nations which emerged from the collapse of the defeated countries in the First World War had signed individual peace treaties with the League of Nations. And it caused the problem that these treaties recognized nation-states - and had, therefore, themselves created national minorities, which in turn made possible the expulsion of such minorities on the grounds that they did not belong to the particular nation-states where they happened to live.

In some cases, they'd lived there for centuries, as Arendt points out, you will find, if you want to read Arendt's book, the second edition is called *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The first is called *The Burden of Our Time*. Well the, the French Revolution had itself created the idea of the Rights of Man, as they were then called. And the French Revolution had, had combined this idea with the idea of national sovereignty. So at least in theory, all minorities should have been protected, even if they didn't live in their own supposedly own nation-state, but in another nation-state. Indeed, the postwar treaties, the post-First World War treaties, included minority treaties.

But these agreements themselves placed no obligation at all on the new nation-states to protect minorities. Instead the treaties required the League of Nations to safeguard the rights of those in such a situation. That meant legal protections for minorities. But those legal protections would have been provided by an international body or multilateral body, namely the League of Nations. Unsurprisingly, then, minorities themselves did not trust the League to protect them because the League itself was made up of national leaders, that is national majority leaders, in effect. In 1922, the League's Third Ordinary Assembly even adopted resolutions stating the duties of minorities, and it turned out that the minority treaties had been devised with a view to the assimilation of minorities into the new nation-states. That's also in Hannah Arendt, in *The Burden of Our Time*, which is the specific book from which I have drawn the point.

Now, unsurprisingly, it's really no surprise that this infuriated and very probably alarmed the newly created minorities. But it was part of a new and insoluble problem, which was the recognition of the new nation-state's sovereignty over their territories. The existing great powers

could not impose any limits on the new nations' sovereignties without exposing their own hypocrisy in maintaining their own sovereignty at the same time.

Those great powers representatives knew, as Arendt says, I quote, "only too well that minorities within nation-states must sooner or later be assimilated or liquidated." Arendt is making that point in the context of the idea of the nation-state itself, the idea that nations are coterminous with states, that nations, ethnic or linguistic nations have some kind of prior right to the sole occupation of their designated territory.

So the result was that the, the state as a constituted legal body had been transformed from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation. The consequences were deadly. The most obvious manifestation of this was the expulsion of national minorities by nation-states. The human suffering involved might have, might possibly have been mitigated if the minorities had had even some kind of nation-state to go to. But tens of millions had no, of them had no such nation-state. And at one point, the combined numbers of national minorities was greater than the (conf) combined populations of the nation-states themselves. Well the worst result of all was the, the creation of a new category of people, namely those who had no nation-state, and were therefore liable to be rendered stateless at any time. This is only possible, it was only possible, because of the creation of the nation-state.

And between the wars, almost every country in continental Europe passed legislation giving itself the power to expel very large numbers of its own inhabitants at almost any time. Now, no other country was under any obligation to take any responsibility for such expelled people. So their condition was even worse than the condition of criminals - who were at least recognized as human agents by the legal system in which they had committed their crime or crimes; Arendt makes that point very capably, very forcefully.

It hardly needs saying that the system created by the League of Nations after the First World War was what made it possible for fascist governments across Europe to see their Jewish populations as belonging to a Jewish nation with no defined territory - and therefore to send millions of Jews to concentration camps and extermination camps. Yet the victims of these kinds of developments were, at least theoretically, possessors of the supposedly inalienable Rights of Man, the inheritance of the French Revolution. And they were inheritors of these supposedly inalienable, inalienable rights because they were human beings first and foremost -

and because the rights involved are supposedly independent of citizenship or nationality or anything else.

But being made stateless meant that not one public body on the planet had either obligations or powers to protect those rights. Those rights, therefore, became totally meaningless. This is what Arendt says about the stateless, quote, "Their plight is not such that they are equal before the law, but that no law exists for them. Not that they are oppressed, but that nobody wants even to oppress them." That is from Arendt's book, *The Burden of Our Time*, from which I have drawn it, later published as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. So, if we are stateless, we may continue to exist, but we do so as nothing identifiable. We are not even outlaws in a more ancient sense. What we have undergone instead is the loss of a polity, the loss of our membership of a political body.

That is what has expelled us from humanity, and it is the very idea of a nation as a defining political entity that has made this expulsion possible. As a foundation for political association, the idea of the nation may well be completely incoherent. And certainly, its history is one of disaster and tragedy for hundreds of millions all around the world. It is nevertheless the case that few lessons have been learnt as a result, despite the failure of the attempt to create nations in Europe after the First World War.

Despite that failure, the concept of nation-states was used after the even greater destruction caused by the Second World War, when large-scale repatriations were tried in a hopeless attempt to end the truly modern problem of statelessness.

Well, that shows the problems inherent in nationalism; the idea of a nation may well be indefinable in terms which preclude or obviate the problems of national membership. I should just add the, the point here that what may be the truly modern form of political membership is that of the state, where the state confers citizenship and thereby recognition of individuals as political members, and further thereby confers rights within its own political and legal system. Well, let's look at some examples of contemporary nationalism. I have headed this passage in the book (the) 'Contemporary Nationalism: The Implausible Example of Brexit.'

Since that was written, (that) wrote that in I think 2017. Since then, on the thirty-first of January 2020, less than a fortnight ago, the United Kingdom actually left the European Union at 11 PM British Summer Time on that night, I think it was midnight in Brussels, the headquarters of the European Parliament or co-headquarters and headquarters of the European Commission.

Well, what about Brexit? I'm no longer a citizen of the European Union. I remain, as my passport says, a citizen of the United Kingdom. Constitutionally, I'm actually a subject of the British monarch, I'm a subject of the Crown. As British subjects and holders of British passports, the other 65 million Britons and myself do have the rights that, that formal constitutions would provide us, but we have no constitution, and Parliament is our supreme ruling authority. And therefore, such rights of citizenship as might be guaranteed to us in a formally constituted system are the result of tradition, practice, custom, and Acts of Parliament, and are in no way sacrosanct or in no way, in fact, protected ultimately from parliamentary legislative action. This is a fact about being a British subject.

Well, what about Brexit? In a referendum held on the twenty-third of June 2016, 2016, the British electorate voted by 51.9 percent to 48.1 percent to leave the European Union. The turnout was 72.2 percent of an electorate which at that time numbered just over 46.5 million. The referendum, in which of course I voted, was - like almost all referenda held in the United Kingdom - advisory and not of itself binding. On the twenty-fourth of January 2017, about nine months later, seven months later I beg your pardon, the United Kingdom Supreme Court, which is not a Constitutional Court in the conventional sense of the term, but is the highest court in the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom Supreme Court ruled that parliament and not the government had the sole power to invoke Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon. On the twenty-ninth of March 2017, the British Parliament voted to invoke or trigger Article 50. Article 50 initiates the process of departure from the European Union.

The referendum itself had concluded an extremely ugly campaign. And the result brought about the resignation of then Prime Minister David Cameron, who had called the referendum and had campaigned for the country to remain in the EU. If the campaign was ugly, the, the aftermath was even uglier. The police recorded sharp rises in racist and xenophobic attacks. For example, the BBC journalist Sima Kotecha, interviewing people in her home town of Basingstoke in Hampshire, was racially abused, live on air, by an interviewee. People of Polish origin were often attacked; one was murdered by a gang who set upon him. Some white British people were attacked, sometimes very seriously, by strangers who thought they were Polish, and in 2017 a visiting Swedish minister publicly expressed shock at the xenophobia Swedes living in Britain had been experiencing.

In addition, other aspects of the political atmosphere after the referendum are at best puzzling. The leading pro-Brexit party - that was at that time the United Kingdom Independence Party - all

but collapsed, even though it had got the result it said it wanted. The leader, Nigel Farage, resigned on the fourth of July 2016, saying he wanted to, I quote, “get his life back”, and the party descended into bitter public infighting. The next leader, Dianne James, herself resigned after 18 days, and her successor Paul Nuttall faced continuing public dissent from some of the members. He resigned on June 19, 2017, the, that is the day (aft), a year after the general election.

Now among, among other leading Brexit campaigners, the former central government Justice Minister Michael Gove seemed to have left politics - he hasn't actually - seemed to have left after saying his greatest campaign ally Boris Johnson was not fit to be prime minister. Johnson himself accepted the post of foreign minister in the new Prime Minister Theresa May's cabinet. This looked more like the conduct of people who had lost instead of winning and was public talk of their not having to, having wanted to win at all - because none of them seem to have any plan for what they would do or wanted to see done by the UK government in the event of their winning the referendum.

What about the referendum itself? The great bulk of, of it has been and continues to be about what the result means or expresses. In some senses that question is, well, has changed its shape and significance because we have already left, we, we left on the thirty-first of January 2020, but the, the issue isn't going to go away that, isn't that easily dismissed, and it's made much harder by the regional and other variations in the vote itself. Among the devolved regions, which unlike England have their own elected assemblies, among the devolved regions, Scottish (voted) voters voted 62 percent to 38 to stay in the EU; Northern Irish voters took the same position, 55.8 to 44.2 percent to remain. In Wales the vote to leave was 52.5 percent, and therefore 47.5 percent wanted to remain. I've drawn those from the BBC website, and from the Electoral Commission, the British Electoral Commission website. The English vote was 53.4 percent to leave, a margin of nearly 7 percent over the 46.6 who voted to stay.

So the evidence is complex to say the least. It undermines claims that the result expressed the will of the British people; that claim has often been made. It also undermines the complexity of the evidence, also undermines or renders much more problematic the claim that, that the urban or metropolitan elite, who were largely remainers, were remote from the much larger numbers living in former industrial heartland or in rural areas. There are elites in Scotland just as there are in Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the UK, and they don't seem to have seen the referendum as any kind of issue to do with national identity, even though the campaign was

notably devoid of any serious analysis of what EU membership means or of any articulated alternative. I've drawn that from Boyle 2017.

In addition, in addition, the English vote, in particular, is very revealing. There is no English regional assembly, and English identity, whatever that might mean the following the impact of the Norman Conquest in 1066 and the enormous transformations which that brought upon the then English society and English language - now, whatever English and English identity might mean is, is hardly clear, but this seems to have been subsumed under a British identity by the 1707 Treaty of Union between England and Scotland, and by the Acts of Union with Ireland in 1800, and by the fact of the British Empire.

I draw from Boyle's paper again. The fact of EU membership has brought to the surface what may well be an English and not a Scottish or Irish issue, over having to be something of an equal in partnership with others. I draw that from Boyle and from Kenny and Pearce, both published in in 2017, all three of them; Kenny and Pearce wrote a joint paper.

The irony, or absurdity or worse, of the situation, as it stands, is that the partnership in question, that is the European Union is the world's outstanding example of cooperation between sovereign states. It is a truly mighty achievement in the light of the terrible violence and destruction of the Second World War - which started in the heart of Europe, and which caused much of its worst destruction in - across - Europe, including the United Kingdom.

So, if what the Brexit referendum means or meant is therefore anything but clear, the direction events will take is, or was at the time I wrote this, is or was completely unpredictable. The, as the implications of even a hypothetical Brexit emerged, you know, for example, what will happen to the estimated 1.2 million Britons currently living in the other 27 EU states - if they become non-EU aliens, what'll happen to them?

That's just one example of the kind of, the kind of issue that has already arisen has now arisen. Some poll evidence suggests that at the time of writing, that was 2017, it may (pose) also point in this direction generally across the United Kingdom even right now, 2020; some poll evidence suggests that a second referendum would produce a remain result - not by a large majority, but 52 to 48, perhaps 53 to 47. Check the polls please for yourself if you like.

Secondly, all the major parties except the Scottish National Party, and possibly the Liberal Democrats, are divided, and indeed often bitterly divided, over EU membership. Therefore, with

all that seems to obtain, seemed to obtain, obtain at the time I wrote that and I'll say is still the case, all that seems to obtain is chaos and confusion. Whatever else, this is not the resurgence of serious nationalism, but more like something out of Monty Python's Flying Circus - sadly, without the hilarious entertainment and with far worse consequences for tens of millions of people. Monty Python at least entertained people and made them laugh so much that those of us who saw it at the time are still laughing fifty years later.

Well, in view of the pervasiveness, the global pervasiveness of the idea of a nation, it may seem as if no claim to political independence or self-determination can be made without some sort of foundational claim to national identity - even if that kind of foundation crumbles when it's examined, as we've seen, and even if it results in the creation of brutally exclusive systems based on ideas of racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic homogeneity, or uniformity. All of those, as we've seen, are incoherent.

But what about the idea of statehood without nationalism? Is that tenable? Well, in theory, and practice, and in practice, significant attempts have been made, and continue to be made to assert claims to statehood, without any claim to the usual nationalist foundations. Among the theoretical or analytical attempts, for example, is an argument for Kurdish or Kurdish (straight) statehood, without any assertion of national or religious exclusivity. I draw that from Nawzat Besifki's PhD thesis at the University of Southampton, 1996. The work sadly remains unpublished, but the point was extremely well made in that work.

Let's look at an example of this, a claim to statehood without nationalism. A striking and illuminating example is provided by Scotland, the United Kingdom devolved region of Scotland. At the time of writing, 2017, and just as much so today, perhaps even more so, Scotland seems virtually, virtually certain to achieve not only independence from the United Kingdom but also full membership of the EU and the UN.

Constitutionally, Scotland today remains a devolved region of the UK under the Scotland Act 1988 **[correction - 1998]**. That Act created the Scottish Parliament and specified the extensive range of powers which would thenceforth lie with the Scottish Parliament. The Act, the Scotland Act 1998, also specifies those powers which are not devolved to Scotland and are retained by the UK Parliament at Westminster.

Those reserved powers include, for example, Foreign Affairs and Defence. It hardly needs saying that Scotland is very recognizably a first-world country, without, or without yet being a

state in its own right. The historical background to this is unusual in a history of nationalist ideas and movements. In 1603, the Scottish King James the Sixth succeeded quite legitimately to the throne of England and Ireland, but in 1706 and 1707, the English and Scottish Parliaments respectively legislated to abolish themselves and to create a single Parliament at Westminster.

This Parliament, under the 1688 constitutional settlement, that was between Parliament and the Monarch, this parliament is still the sovereign body of the United Kingdom. Therefore, the (16) 1707 Treaty of Union meant that Scotland had given up statehood, but had retained so much of the institutional and cultural ethos associated with statehood that it had become, I quote, “a decapitated state but without an associated or assimilated nationality.”

This amounts to what has been called, I quote again, “a quasi-national legacy.” I’ve taken those quotations and those points from Tom Nairn’s book written in 1981, some of which is, well, almost prophetic.

Now one major result of the Union of Parliaments following the Union of Crowns is that, was that Scotland’s emerging bourgeois or merchant, mercantile classes played little or no part in the formation of Scottish institutions and processes of state. In this, they were noticeably different from similar classes in other Northern European countries, particularly England. Because in England, the bourgeois class broke into the ruling landed and aristocratic castes so successfully that the latter the aristocratic, landed and aristocratic class, made very sure they coopted the new class into their ranks, and thereby also crushed an earlier English revolutionary tradition. I draw that from Tom Nairn as well.

But in Scotland, the expansion in philosophic and scientific ideas which accompanied the eighteenth-century economic and mercantile transformations in England gave rise to what has been called a Scottish, a Scottish intelligentsia. The figures involved were among the greatest intellects of their time, and in some cases of all time. They include the philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith, the poet Robert Burns, the engineer-inventor James Watt, the architect Robert Adam, and many others, I draw these from Tom Nairn, but if, as I have, you’ve spent many decades in the humanities you’ll be aware of them in any way, you may well, have almost certainly heard of, it’s very likely you have heard of these figures anyway.

Well, why am I spending time on Scotland? It, it is very likely to leave the United Kingdom. And that’s why I am looking at the grounds on which it is likely to do so and the kind of thing it is likely to become after leaving. Scotland did certainly have its own bourgeois class. But this

class in effect inherited a position which was so favourable that it was neither threatened by industrial modernity nor excluded from it. This new bourgeoisie also benefited greatly from the expansion of British imperial power and imperial wealth through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But the position of this class was not unchallenged; the inequalities between the coastal southern areas, the Lowlands, and the rural areas - mainly in the north and the Highlands of Scotland - grew. And a serious insurrection in 1745 almost succeeded. Scotland, as Tom Nairn says, was unusually well equipped for recognizable nationalist struggles, but these never took place. Now the recent and rapid rise of what amounts to an independence movement in Scotland without the usual nationalist burdens and trappings therefore needs another form of explanation. The main factors seem to lie in very modern or contemporary economic and political (fact) reasons.

One factor is the discovery and exploitation of oil fields under the bed of the North Sea from the early 1970s onwards. Another has to do with the political or constitutional position of Scotland in relation to the UK Parliament at Westminster. By the mid-1970s, the Scottish National Party, the SNP, was starting to win significant elections to Westminster seats, including some in Scottish Labour strongholds.

One reason was increasing resentment over the fact that revenues from North Sea oil were not under the control of Scottish local authorities, or indeed any Scottish elected bodies, but instead oil revenues went straight to the UK Treasury; they still do. And they were mainly used to reduce the budget deficit, rather than being invested in physical (struct) infrastructure, or in health and education, or in the creation of a UK sovereign wealth, wealth fund on the lines of Norwegian oil money.

Secondly, as the 1980s progressed, the conservative central government in London imposed a new and highly unpopular form of local taxation, a per capita local tax called the Community Charge, in Scotland a year before it did so in England. The tax - which the public, the media, and even conservative politicians immediately renamed the Poll Tax, after a hated tax in the fourteenth century - provoked widespread civil disobedience and nonpayment when it was introduced in England, and it was soon abandoned. But a large proportion of the Scottish electorate never forgot the way they had been treated over it.

Well, a third factor almost certainly had to do with internal turmoil and even sclerosis dare I say it. I'm not the first one to say it by the way, publicly. A third factor had almost certainly to do with the internal turmoil and even sclerosis within the British Labour Party. According to Nairn, Tom Nairn, this had grown as addicted, his own word, addicted to the existing British state as the Conservatives. The Scottish electorate had elected 56 Labour MPs out of 72 seats in the 1997 general election - but in 2015, it sent 54 Scottish National Party MPs to Westminster, out of 59 Scottish seats; 54 out of 59 parliamentary seats were held by the SNP in 2015. In the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in, at Holyrood in Edinburgh, the SNP holds 63 out of 128 seats - that was at the time of writing.

And this parliament, by the way, is elected by the additional member system. So, the SNP holds, it's just a couple of inches, this was in, when I wrote this in 2017 it was only a couple of inches short of an absolute majority in the Scottish Parliament. Now Scotland is, we must remember, complex in its linguistic, cultural and religious composition. Gaelic has not been the first language of a majority of Scots for 500 years. Today, fewer than 60,000 Scots out of about I think 7 to 8 million in a total, in total speak it. The country's other main languages are Lallans, a word coined by the poet Robert Burns for a form of the language which is closely related to English and is spoken in the southernmost counties, and of course English. I take those points from Anthony Appiah's Reith lectures of 2016.

Similarly, the largest denomination in the country is the Church of Scotland or the Kirk, which is Protestant. But in Glasgow, Scotland's (lar) Scotland's largest city, Catholics outnumber Protestants. Scotland has for a long time also had a Jewish minority and a Muslim one. At least one member, at least one member in the current Scottish Government, if I'm not mistaken, is a Muslim, at least one. But the key point here is that the Scottish National Party makes no claim to any of the backward-looking, atavistic, and ultimately incoherent elements of nationalism, such as ethnic, linguistic, racial or religious exclusivity, or priority of occupation or unity of membership. I draw that from the Scottish National Party's own website.

Neither do more radical movements for Scottish independence, such as Common Weal or the Radical Independence Collective, make such claims. What all of them do is make a claim to statehood. The contrast with nationalism, the contrast with nationalism in any of its forms, could not be more obvious. We shall look at this in the worked example which follows this lecture. I shall save that for the next lecture, because it will take us some time to get through the worked example - I can say here that the worked example involves extremely contemporary issues.

I shall be using, and will of course send you, the links, they'll come up, they'll go up on the site with the lecture. I shall draw from a recent - September - 2019 long article in *Der Spiegel International*, the German news magazine, on the position of the far-right, the AfD or AfD, the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany.

There have been very recent developments as of yesterday and the day before, that is the ninth, tenth and eleventh of February 2020, and I shall be drawing on newspapers for news of that. I've been talking with German colleagues about this here on the IIT Madras campus. And I shall draw on recent discussions in, on United States National Public Radio with various Scots to, to back up and illuminate the points that I've made throughout this topic of nationalism. So we shall stop there, and we'll do the worked example in the next lecture.