

The Referendum Schools Debate

FEBRUARY 2014

NATIONALISM

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MOTION:

**“NATIONALISM IS AN
IDEA THAT HAS NO
PLACE IN THE 21ST
CENTURY”**



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KEY TERMS

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INTRODUCTION

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In the run-up to the independence referendum, a recurring debate has broken out once again – the very nature of nationalism. Does it represent a narrow and parochial outlook, based on ethnicity and history? Or can it be a broader assertion of the commonality of a group of people sharing a particular geographic space, something outward-looking and positive. In August 2013, BBC presenter Andrew Marr, who was born in Scotland, voiced concerns about what he saw as a “toxic” anti-English feeling at large and at some of the language used in the independence debate [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. Scottish writer Alasdair Gray caused controversy when, in a recent essay, he drew a distinction between what he called English “settlers and colonists” who held leading jobs within Scotland, with some claiming this showed an anti-English attitude [Ref: [Express](#)]. On the other hand, many have pointed out clear distinctions between the kind of nationalism associated with the campaign for Scottish independence and the nationalism associated with political parties such as the British National Party – contrasting an inclusive and multicultural “civic nationalism” with a monocultural and racist nationalism [Ref: [Better Nation](#)]. They say that fears over anti-English sentiments are overblown, and that the vast majority of people in Scotland engage with the debate around the independence referendum without engaging in—and free from the fear of—Anglophobia [Ref: [National Collective](#)]. Indeed there are a number of people born in England who live in Scotland who support and actively campaign for Scottish independence [Ref: [Daily Telegraph](#)].

THE NATIONALISM DEBATE IN CONTEXT

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Same old nationalisms

For some, the claim that Scottish nationalism can be truly free from questions of ethnicity is a hollow one – that despite admirable claims to a civic nationalism, there still lies an undercurrent of the idea of a Scottish race or people who are unique amongst others. For example, they point to the SNP government’s Homecoming events, which called for those of Scottish descent living abroad to “come home” [Ref: [Open Unionism](#)]. This, they say, undermines claims that a sense of Scottishness is purely based around those who choose to live and work in Scotland. Others claim that there is a focus on the teaching of Scottish pre-Union history [Ref: [British Future](#)], and there were concerns of “brainwashing” at plans to introduce a Scottish studies course in schools [Ref: [BBC News](#)] (though others saw the proposals as rectifying a lack of teaching about Scottish culture and history [Ref: [Newsnet Scotland](#)]). Others say that the promotion of Gaelic as an “oppressed and suppressed” indigenous language is evidence of an ethnicised view of Scotland’s past, which fails to take into account the diversity of experience in Scotland [Ref: [University of Huddersfield](#)]. These aspects of a view of ethnic Scottishness remain and so tie Scottish nationalism closely with other types of nationalism such as British or English nationalism from which the SNP are keen to distance themselves. There have also been concerns over anti-English bullying, with the former head of the National Theatre of Scotland, Vicky Featherstone, claiming she faced criticism of her programmes due to her being English [Ref: [Scotsman](#)], and claims that there has been an increase in anti-English racism in the run-up to the referendum [Ref: [Telegraph](#)].

Inclusive nationalism

However, others claim that it is a mistake to conflate Scottish

nationalism with British nationalism. Scottish nationalism is a civic nationalism, and has no associations with the racism or jingoism that come with other types of nationalism [Ref: [National Collective](#)]. “Narrow nationalism” doesn’t have to be the case, but rather identities can be more inclusive and fluid – with Scottishness being decided by those who choose to live in Scotland, rather than by birthplace or ethnicity. They rebut claims that the SNP indulge in a narrow nationalism by pointing out that they are much less focused on immigration as a problem for Scotland than the Westminster parties are for the UK and that they have specifically reached out to otherwise ethnically defined communities such as Italians and Pakistanis living in Scotland. As for Scotland as a whole, the failure of the BNP and of UKIP is taken as evidence that, despite claims to the contrary, Scottish nationalism has a distinct nature and embraces the multicultural societies that the nationalisms promoted by those two parties decry [Ref: [Wings Over Scotland](#)]. The first non-white and first Muslim MSP in the Scottish parliament, Bashir Ahmad, represented the SNP [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. He was the founder of the group Scots Asians for Independence, and famously declared at the SNP’s national conference that “It’s not where we came from that’s important, it’s where we’re going together” [Ref: [Scotsman](#)]. Other nationalist parties in the UK struggle under accusations of being extremists [Ref: [Spectator](#)].

Patriotism and Nationalism

Questioning the value of patriotism and nationalism (and the differences between the two) is not a new issue, nor one isolated to Scotland. Samuel Johnson declared “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel” in 1774 and George Orwell famously looked at the effects of nationalism post WWII, when he argued that it led to people behaving or thinking dishonestly, and showed concern over the effects

THE NATIONALISM DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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rising nationalism had in Europe [Ref: [Notes on Nationalism](#)]. Education Secretary Michael Gove recently caused controversy by claiming that “Blackadder myths” about WWI “denigrate patriotism” [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)], leading to him being accused of “point scoring” and offering a “simplistic” narrative [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. During WWI itself, poet Wilfred Owen condemned Roman poet Horace’s lines “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” as the “old lie” [Ref: [War Poetry](#)]. The question of patriotism is not isolated to the UK even – for example, countries such as the USA often have internal disputes about the effects of patriotism [Ref: [New York Times](#)].

Can nationalism be more than narrow? Is Scottish nationalism truly a civic nationalism as has been claimed? Are fears of Anglophobia overblown? Does nationalism in Scotland offer an inclusive and progressive outlook? Or does nationalism inevitably lead to a closing off of minds?

Scottish nationalism is not the only nationalism enjoying increasing popularity in Europe today – a recent independence march in Edinburgh was also attended by Catalan nationalists (who are also looking to hold an independence referendum in the near future), and also smaller numbers of Flemish and Venetian nationalists. This need not be viewed as an inward turn, but rather a spirit of integration – for example, wanting to be part of the EU – which, it is hoped, will act as a safeguard against sectarianism [Ref: [OneEurope](#)]. This can be compared to other nationalisms currently undergoing a resurgence, such as the Front National in France and UKIP in the UK. Both have much more traditional, isolationist styles of nationalism. UKIP’s popularity is insignificant in Scotland however. Leader Nigel Farage, on a recent visit to Edinburgh, was hounded by protestors who objected to UKIP’s policies [Ref: [Independent](#)], and the party’s poor performance in the recent Donside by-election was held up as further proof that UKIP style nationalism was not welcome in Scotland [Ref: [Hope Not Hate](#)]. UKIP’s position in Scotland suffered further collapse with the sacking of their Scots leader [Ref: [Herald](#)].

ESSENTIAL READING

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NOTES

Parochialism is the greatest threat to the world in 2012, but if we cheer up, we might avoid it

Daniel Knowles *Telegraph* 3 January 2012

FOR

Alex Salmond is peddling Scottish nationalism. And very little else

Jake Wallis Simons *Telegraph* 17 April 2013

'Time to drop Burns myths that disguise true nature of Scotland'

Magnus Linklater *The Times* 24 January 2013

Scotland should not be wasting time on blaming the English any more

Deborah Orr *Guardian* 21 December 2012

We Scots should be ashamed of anti-English bullying

James MacMillan *Telegraph* 20 December 2012

AGAINST

Pivotal role of culture in talking up independence

Alan Riach *Herald* 20 February 2013

Yes vote vital to realise potential

Murray Pittock *Scotland on Sunday* 10 February 2013

Finally, Britain is beginning to understand civic nationalism

National Collective 5 August 2012

Grown up and independent

Elaine C Smith *Red Pepper* October 2008

ORGANISATIONS

Better Together

Yes Scotland

BACKGROUNDEERS

Michael Gove, using history for politicking is tawdry
Tristram Hunt *Guardian* 4 January 2014

Integration through separation: Catalonia and Scotland
Hallvard Barbogen *One Europe* 21 October 2013

The Eclipse Of Scottish Nationalism
Christopher Silver *National Collective* 24 September 2013

A tale of ideologies: Scottish nationalism and unionism
Gerry Hassan *OpenDemocracy* 12 August 2013

Scotland doesn't want UKIP
Simon Cressy *Hope Not Hate* 22 July 2013

Yes, Scottish Nationalism DOES have an ugly face
Gerald Warner *Daily Mail* 17 May 2013

Festival chief faces some home truths
Alan Taylor *Herald* 24 April 2013

Parochialism warning over demise of language studies
Andrew Denholm *Herald* 16 April 2013

Enough with the paranoia. It is time to be grown-ups
Magnus Linklater *The Times* 17 December 2012

'British nationalism will not help Scotland' Hyslop tells SNP
STV 21 October 2012

The Cause: A History of Scottish Nationalism
BBC Radio Scotland October 2012

Ruth Wishart: 'Why I'm coming out for Scottish independence'
Stewart Kirkpatrick *Yes Scotland* 22 September 2012

Scottish Nationalists recoil from militant Quebec parallel
Tom Gallagher *thecommentator.com* 7 September 2012

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NOTES

New generation of Scots keeps parochialism off the podium
Gillian Bowditch *Sunday Times* 12 August 2012

Is Our Patriotism Moral?
Garry Gutting *New York Times* 3 July 2012

'Nationalism has produced the most brutal and cruel wars in history'

Mario Vargas Llosa *Herald* 9 June 2012

Why nationalists aren't racists
Wings Over Scotland 31 May 2012

How civic is the 'new Scottishness'?
British Future 27 April 2012

Alex Salmond? Progressive?
Willie Bain *Guardian* 24 January 2012

Salmond's civic nationalism a problem for the Westminster elite
Phil Mac Giolla Bhain *Sluggor O'Toole* 11 January 2012

Scottish Civic Nationalism: The Bhangra & Bagpipes Solution
Humza Yousaf *Better Nation* 4 December 2010

Obituary: Bashir Ahmad
Scotsman 9 February 2009

Notes on Nationalism
George Orwell *Polemic* October 1945

IN THE NEWS

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NOTES

Are Scots more tolerant of immigrant workers?

Scotland Tonight 8 January 2014

Michael Gove blasts 'Blackadder myths' about the First World War spread by television sit-coms

Daily Mail 3 January 2014

Ukip 'wiped out' north of the Border after its Scots leader is sacked

Herald 1 December 2013

Scottish Secretary Moore talks of 'parallels' between SNP and Ukip campaign

Herald 17 September 2013

'Scottish nationalists are fascist scum'

Daily Mail 17 May 2013

Farage Blasted By SNP Over 'Racism' Claim

Sky News 17 May 2013

Ukip leader Nigel Farage hits back at 'fascist' hecklers in Edinburgh pub

Independent 17 May 2013

Exiting theatre boss Vicky Featherstone 'suffered at hands of anti-English bullies'

Scotsman 18 December 2012

Record number of 'racist' attacks on English in Scotland

Herald 11 December 2012

Scotland's first Muslim MSP dies

BBC News 6 February 2009

ABOUT THE STV/DEBATING MATTERS REFERENDUM SCHOOLS DEBATE

Debating Matters has teamed up with STV to give secondary school pupils across Scotland the opportunity to debate the big issues in the run up to the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. The Scotland wide competition will give school pupils, many of who will be eligible to vote in the referendum on independence, the chance to research and discuss issues which will affect the future of Scotland. STV will provide a platform for debates and cover the competition on air and online. Debating Matters has produced these special editions of our acclaimed Topic Guides on the motions for debate.

STV.TV/DEBATE



FIND OUT MORE

Debating Matters engages a wide range of individuals, from the students who take part in the debates, the diverse group of professionals who judge for us, the teachers who train and support their debaters, and the young people who go on to become Debating Matters Alumni after school and help us to continue to expand and develop the competition. If you enjoyed using this Topic Guide, and are interested in finding out more about Debating Matters and how you can be involved, please complete this form and return it to us at the address below.

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Academy of Ideas Ltd
Signet House
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- I am a teacher and would like further details about events in my area and how to enter a team
- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

First name

Surname

School/company/
organisation

Professional role
(if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
ARCHITECTURE
IS CREATED BY
ENGAGING WITH
IDEAS”**

TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER

