

Re-Locating Identity Politics in the UK in a Post-Brexit Era: The Scottish, Northern Irish, And Welsh National Backlash

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Abstract

In a recent referendum, the British voted to opt out of the European project. Clearly the outcome still remains unclear. Immediately after the referendum, internal debates on how the individual regions that comprise the UK would react have now come to the fore. This study is to examine how the British government will settle its relations with its regions (i.e., Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), and whether the UK will devolve after Brexit. The retrieval of state power will certainly trigger popular movements hence, there is a need to question how identities can be positioned in the UK after Brexit. I argue that the issue of identity will become essential in British politics as it will spell the revival of an internal nationalist political rhetoric. An identity based harsh political discourse is on its play and will remain present for some time in the UK. This is tested by examining the nationalist discourse of the Scottish National Party, Sinn Fein, and Plaid Cymru.

Keywords: Brexit, United Kingdom, Identity, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland

Brexit Sonrası Dönemde Birleşik Krallıkta Kimlikleri Yeniden Tanımlamak: İskoç, Kuzey İrlandalı Ve Galli Milliyetçilikleri

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Öz

İngilizler yakın tarihli bir referandumda Avrupa projesinden uzak durmayı seçmişlerdir. Ortaya çıkan bu sonuç ise belirsizliğini korumaktadır. Ancak, referandumdan hemen sonra, Birleşik Krallık içindeki bölgelerin (İskoçya, Galler, Kuzey İrlanda) referandum neticesine nasıl tepki vereceği hususu önem kazanmış ve iç tartışmalar başlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Londra'nın bölgeleriyle ilişkilerini nasıl çözeceğini ve dahası Brexit sonrası alevlenen milliyetçi söylemin gelişmeleri nasıl şekillendireceğini analiz etmektir. Brexit ile başlayan güç mücadelesi ve gücün Londra merkezli geri alınması, kimlik siyaseti ile beslenen halk hareketlerini tetiklediği görülmektedir. Brexit'in esasen bir yönüyle var olan bir kimlik meselesinin sonucu olduğu da açıktır. Bu süreçte bölgesel kimliklerin nasıl konumlandırılacağını sorgulama ihtiyacını ortaya çıkarmakta ve halihazırda kimlik tabanlı sert bir siyasal söylemim Birleşik Krallık siyasetine egemen olduğu görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, İngiltere'de siyasetin merkezinde yer alan milliyetçi söylemin yeniden canlanmasına neden olan İngiliz siyasetinde kimlik meselesinin önem kazanacağını savunmakta, bu argümanı ise İskoç Ulusal Partisi, Sinn Fein ve Plaid Cymru partilerinin söylemleri üzerinden irdelemeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Brexit, Birleşik Krallık, Kimlik, İskoçya, Galler, Kuzey İrlanda.

Introduction

Bob Geldof (2019) emphasized that Brexit “comes from a dangerous ideology called nationalism,” leading to a clash of identities. Brexit will have far more internal implications for the UK than external, leaving aside its relations with Europe. For years, owing to EU membership, English nationalists have rallied against Europe thanks to political parties such as the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP). With Brexit now in process, English nationalism is once again encountering a rival, albeit this time from inside.

The post-Brexit era has shown that the constituent regions of the UK have entered a harsh bargaining “power grab” (Carrell, 2018) phase. In the cases of Scotland and Wales, both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly are eager to repatriate EU powers into their devolved regions. On the other hand, the border issue of Northern Ireland is causing a deep rift between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and London. This phase will have severe implications for the future of the State, and more importantly, whether it will cause Northern Ireland’s transformation into a federal republic. In the near future, we will find out whether there will be another referendum on independence in Scotland and/or a unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland; however, it is clear that the post-Brexit era has already begun fuelling both Scottish and English nationalism in that direction, not to mention the Irish (both North and South).

To understand this multifaceted outcome, it is better to start with the concept of Brexit¹. Scholars are currently repeating the mistaken use of the concept since most Brexit supporters came predominantly from England and Wales, while the largest populations to vote against Brexit came from Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Gibraltar. According to Winder (2018), it was a kind of an English “No,” not a UK wide “leave” that opened up the issue of

¹ The word is “a blend of British and exit on the pattern of Grexit, which was coined earlier in 2012. It is debated with the notions of Soft and Hard Brexit. The former includes that the UK would be out of the EU, but would retain strong economic ties, make budgetary contributions, and allow the free movement of people, while the latter is about the complete withdrawal of the UK from the EU, the Single Market, and regaining full control of its own law-making and immigration.” See Online Cambridge dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s%C3%B6z%C3%BCk/ingilizce/soft-brexit>

identification within a multi-national state, making London face with its constituent nations, represented, namely, by Cardiff, Edinburgh, and Belfast. The UK is home to six national identities—English, Scottish, Welsh, Ulster, Irish, and British—all having something to say about Brexit, and more generally, on the future of the Union, with a divergence of reasons.

Brexit will have far greater consequences that deepen the politically-divided island. Such divisions began in the pre-referendum era, which currently continues to deepen alongside the post-referendum era. The picture is blurred and the way in which the context (i.e., Brexit) is instrumentalized to gain some political ends is now being investigated. Also, more importantly, one question concerns how identity politics, with its changing, shifting, and contextual character will shape the UK in the years ahead.

The problem, however, is the increased complexity of governance in the context of regional and global integration that is linking Britain into a system of rulemaking that has not been accepted to be compatible with domestic institutions. There is a clear contradiction here in that the shift towards an idea of sovereignty as expressed through interdependence both reinforces and challenges executive power as a pool of sovereignty and the national interest. However, the transformation of state power, shifting authority, and responsibility upwards to the forms of international and transnational governance, and downwards to regional authorities, as well as to the market, has resulted in a clash between popular movements (Welsh, Irish, and Scottish) willing representation and to some extent independence, effecting one another in that direction.

On the other hand, a London-based elite aims to claim power from Brussels, who are still trying to legitimize the multi-national British state through the defense of parliamentary sovereignty, which is believed to be sine-qua-non for the British identity (Wellings, 2007, p.401). As Moffat argued in 2000, “Cultural identity was localizing even though economic structures were globalizing” (Moffat, 2017). The UK has always been defined as a centralized state, but not uniform, or differently (i.e., a Union state). The devolved institutions, for Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland make the UK, as Mitchell (2009) argues, “not a union state but a state of unions” (p.5-6). The leave campaign was about the sovereignty of this state, and for securing the “British interest,” but what should be understood here by the term “British”?

At this point, Bevir and Rhodes (2003) argue that there are two ongoing and competing models that explain the British political sphere. The first is what is known as the Differentiated Polity Model (DPM), which includes the hollowing out of the state power, the transfer of authority, and both upward and downward responsibility. The DPM results in “a move away from static asymmetric and hierarchical power relations towards a more diffuse and plural network in which power is constantly negotiated” (cf. Gifford, 2010, p.326). In opposition to this, as Marsh argues (2008), the British Political Tradition (BPT) tries to maintain a limited liberal notion of representation with a conservative flavor of responsibility and representation in a top-down method of democracy in a “government knows best fashion” (cf. Gifford, 2010, p.326). These explain the center-periphery relations in Britain. And, moreover, gives hints on how the relocation of power would be settled after Brexit, as well as the identification of the regions. This brings the issue towards the clash of identities within the UK. The paper mainly focuses on the rhetoric of the nationalist political parties in the devolved regions: the Scottish National Party, Sinn Fein, and Plaid Cymru, all of whom have shifted towards a hard political discourse built on identity and instrumentalizing nationalism. Clearly, the concepts of ‘state,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘citizenship’ have always been vehemently debated in the UK. Thanks to the EU, certain issues surrounding identity have remained silent for years, though they have recently opened up again with Brexit.

Understanding Nationalism in the UK

David Cameron (2013), in his Europe speech, emphasized Britishness as thus: “We have the character of an island nation—independent, forthright, and passionate in defense of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel.” Here, his intention was to stress a cohesion out of the diversity of competing identities within the UK. However, a few years later, with the Brexit referendum, Scotland’s first Minister Nicola Sturgeon re-declared the current process of Brexit bargaining as “an act of democratic self-determination,” which also calls to mind Scotland’s self-determination right. She remarked that Prime Minister May had empha-

sized the same during the referenda to leave the EU. Currently, what she argues is that the same counts for Scotland's right to negotiate its position during and after Brexit. However, she has also received criticism from London that it is the EU that harms the very democratic institutional set-up of the UK in the first place. To summarize this, for instance: We debate and agonize over our involvement in the European Union precisely because, unlike the Germans or French, we invest our national character in the institutions that govern us. . . . Because Britain's common political institutions are central to the British people's common identity, if you attack these institutions, you are attacking the common identity and the qualities that come with it (Hague, 1999).

As acknowledged in the above citation, British identity is labeled as a sort of state identity—an attachment to the Union, rather than to the people. The Conservatives put forward the issue the European Union's otherness, which has, for a long time, been their motto of nationhood in contemporary British politics. However, the situation in the UK is twofold. Firstly, the debate is not about the supra-national; namely, between London and the EU institutions but also a matter of sub-national, including regional authorities (Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish) that do not share the same interests with that of England. As Paxman argued long ago, "the English put their faith in institutions. It is the present crisis of institutions which is the crisis of Britishness. And the crisis of Britishness is the crisis of Englishness" (Paxman, 1998, p.17). That is why this situation results in inconsistent attitudes towards European integration. The same counts for Brexit.

In policy terms, the Conservatives have positioned themselves against further integration (though there is a Euro-enthusiast Tory wing within the party) and, in some areas, such as social policy, employment, and immigration, they are committed to taking back powers from Europe. However, for Gifford, the "Conservatives' general approach to constitutional matters, is the extent to which the European issue is increasingly viewed more as a matter of popular rather than parliamentary sovereignty" (Gifford, 2010, p.331). However, there is a divergence of views when European issues are debated at the national level. For instance, even Wales, which is truly committed to the Union, reflects sympathy to the EU. As Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones argues:

Wales would sit more easily in a Europe which had a different structure, which is more federal, but the EU needs to be more transparent, it's absolutely crucial that [EU] citizens feel they have an influence on what the Commission, for example, does. And that isn't the case at the moment in many ways (Carywn, 2012).

Clearly, the principle of opt-outs and 'red lines' in European negotiations have preserved the British way of dealing with the EU, thereby allowing continued conditional engagement on the basis that it is in line with domestic policy agendas. The issue is, therefore, not whether sovereignty is compromised by the increasing level of interdependence but how it will be secured (the ongoing debate on the future trajectory of the EU). Crucially, it is linked to the expression and value of executive power, ensuring that European decisions are in line with the government's (Labor, Liberal, or Conservative) domestically-mandated policy agenda, which implies that British parliamentary sovereignty remains integral. However, at this point, the role of the devolved regions comes into play, and consequently, their reaction to Westminster's rule.

In this context, it seems that the British Conservatives may wish to adopt a more pragmatic approach to Europe by reconstructing a different kind of engagement with Europe. However, the position of the Conservatives does not fit alongside the views from the devolved regions. The current situation is defined as a "power grab" phase in the UK, where each side is trying to justify its position via a great use of identity politics; namely, nationalism. For scholars, there are two distinctions made in identity research: the cultural or political conceptions of national identity. For Breuilly (1994), national identity is mostly about the political attachment the individual perceives towards his/her state. In the case of the UK, the source of this political attachment is, firstly, the respect for political institutions, and secondly, the responsibility of good citizenship. However, the Brexit process will have a much greater political significance than ever before as it will transform the people's sense of political belonging and cause the issue of Britishness to arise once again.

Long before, John Breuilly, in his famous book entitled "Nationalism and the State," emphasized the power-hungry behavior of the state elite,

especially in instrumentalizing nationalism for other ends. For Breuilly, nationalism “is best understood as an especially appropriate form of political behavior in the context of the modern state...” (Breuilly, 1993, p.1). Breuilly evaluates nationalism as a form of politics, and, “nationalism is, above, and beyond all else, about politics, and that politics is about power. Power, in the modern world, is principally about control of the state” (ibid, p.1).

Breuilly emphasizes the shift from what he calls ‘corporate’ to a ‘functional’ division of labor. He defines this by describing past conditions where people were administrated under only a single corporate organization, while, with the establishment of the modern state, the needs of the society have been met by separate function-specific organizations, which have all been covered under a bureaucratic state (ibid, p.163). For Breuilly, the modern state developed in a liberal way, which included public powers being exercised by state institutions and the private powers being transferred to non-political institutions. Hence, the system underwent a rapid transformation in which the monarchy, the church, and even the lordships were thrown away (ibid, p.164). This process leads to the establishment of new institutions representing the modern nation-state. Today’s problems do not only concern the UK but also many nation-states around the world that are forced to confront this new modern institutional setup, or, in Breuilly’s words, “power sharing” (ibid, p.164). As in the case of the UK, there is also a clash between Scottish, Northern Irish, and Welsh popular sovereignty which confronts British parliamentary sovereignty.

Certainly, the transformation of the state introduced “the state as public and the civil society as private with the modern idea of sovereignty,” which required states to be secured with a strong political shield; namely, nationalism. That is why, as Breuilly believes, in securing the needs and controlling the direction for protecting the state, “nationalism is used to refer to political units seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments” (ibid, p.1). The establishment of the institutions and the public-private distinction requires the participation of the citizens. Through this participation, the goal is to bind the individual to the state, which is to make the state-society connection. Breuilly speaks of “harmony between the public interests of citizens and the private interests of selfish

individuals;" (ibid, p.165) namely, the elites. For this aim, it was first necessary to construct the tie between the state and society, and afterward, secure it in the name of framing the individuals.

What Breuilly argues is that coordination is required for the elites to meet on common grounds to develop the idea of common interests; on the other hand, mobilization is for gaining support, namely from the grassroots, to bring their attention towards the cause. Finally, legitimacy is required to justify the national ideas developed (ibid, p.166-167). This was all about establishing the state-society connection, which has come to be a polity of citizens. However, in the case of UK, the polity of citizens is constantly diverging with different interests and deeper contradictions about the future of the UK, which have all been triggered with Brexit.

For Breuilly, "it is the political rights, not the cultural identities of those who are citizens" that make up today's nations. On the contrary, a limit was put forth to "the body of citizens" as "the notion of freedom as privacy beyond the state by defining freedom solely as participation in the implementation of the general will" (ibid, p.165). The post-Brexit era has become a scene for these national movements led by the political parties by confronting and recriminating one another under the debate of Brexit. As Gallagher (2018) puts it, "Brexit is where Scottish and English nationalism have met." The underlying reason for this clash in nationalism appears to be a result of market relationships. Since 1973, the UK has participated in the European Single Market and, if an exit occurs, it will regain direct control of the market within its national borders, thereby transforming its participation in the single market into a national market once again. The question appears on how to re-define the 'national market.'

For Breuilly, the changes and transformations brought along with modernity are mostly in the economic realm. Regarding market relationships, it is a way to break down local isolation and the ones which are controlling it. Through this direction, it will provide entry for outside political groups, as well as locals who aim to turn their attention outwards (Breuilly, 1993, p.20).

Nationalism will, therefore, be understood neither as an expression of some enduring reality such as the nation, and nor as an arbitrary ideological

construction, but rather as one response to certain crucial aspects of modernity (ibid, p.140). In this context, it is about the economic aspects dominating the society in voting on recent referenda (e.g., the Scottish independence referendum, Brexit referendum). In the case of Brexit, it comes either in the form of the border issue between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, or the economic success of Scotland participating within the Single Market. To convince the public, in their assertion of the abovementioned reasons, the regional elites react to the London based elites by centering and projecting their interests with the nationalist shield.

Brexit for Whom? Understanding Identity Politics in the UK

British identity has always been evaluated as a supplement, rather than a replacement, much like the European identity. However, Thatcher's 1988 Bruges speech is important as she once demonstrated that, "we would all become identikit Europeans in a supranational way" (Taylor, 2008, p.52). At this point, Taylor argues, "what about the failure of the British turning identikit English in a supranational UK as the Scots still remain Scottish, the Welsh still Welsh..." (ibid, p.52). As a result, under so many years of British rule, none of these identities have disappeared as Britishness remains a regional and political identity, rather than a cultural one. The questioning of Britishness, alongside Brexit, currently confronts a deepening of other dimensions. Thanks to Brexit, there is an increasing amount of blame-shift and accusations covered with an identity rhetoric. Whether this be "remainers," "leavers," "perpetrators," "unionists," "closet unionists," "Little Englanders," "racists," etc. A kind of blame-shifting rhetoric has occupied the political arena in the UK which has shifted the identification crisis toward a more general polarization within the society.

For the EU, a political integration is not seeking to remove national identities (and certainly its fragments) and is trying to grasp all these diversifications in what is called a post-national environment where each of them has something to argue in the name of Europe. However, this brings along more important developments in the UK, rather than with its relations with the EU, and certainly jeopardizes the minimum reconciliation that the Unionism requires. And, more importantly, if the general picture of British politics (allocation between Conservatives, Labor, and Liberal Democrats) is to

be considered, the attitude of British voter's signals to a more liberal open economy, which, in essence, requires support for integration, namely, economic integration, while at the same time reflecting Euroskepticism towards a more political union. The political side of integration opens up a suspicious debate in the UK on whether this will harm the democratic values of the nation, limit sovereignty, and how to settle relations with devolved regions.

The issue of democracy has become fragile at the national level in the UK, especially in its different forms of loyalty and of self-determination; for instance, how regions can legitimately adopt policies aimed at strengthening a sense of "we" amongst its members. Such identity-building (or protecting) projects can sometimes be contradictory; for example, in being a part of the EU, or how British politicians may promote a common British identity in a way that minimizes the significance of regional identities. On the other hand, Scottish (or Welsh, Irish, etc.) politicians may promote a sense of their nationhood that views national authorities as surrendering or as an artificial or ersatz (known as ersatz nationalism) which finally grasps the EU level. As Kymlicka (2011) argues, "EU politicians may imply that both national and local (regional) identities are anachronisms in an increasingly post-national European demos" (p.288). That is why there those who are favoring to federalize the Union, and those who are favoring to protect the status quo in an intergovernmental structure. Bartolini (2005) argues that European integration is very different from the turbulent nation formation processes of center formation when he states that, "this process of cultural homogenization and nation-building was never peaceful, completed, comprehensive, or uniform" (p.86). As mentioned earlier, whether this is a national or a European issue, it cannot be addressed to the whole nation (in which most niche parties fall into such a mistake). Therefore, it is necessary to draw a distinction between the nation and the state; otherwise, there is a clash of interests, as well as identities, in issues arising from the European integration between local, regional, and national levels. It is clear that "...re-legitimizing the state by shifting power from national to local level may end up deepening the legitimization crisis of the nation-state, and the tribalization of society in communities built around primary identities" (Castells, 197, p.275). With the experience of multi-level governance, thanks

to the EU, the territorial distribution of power within the UK is forcing the devolved regions to gain more power in their reluctance to give away power to London.

At either the regional or at national level, the views and interests in British politics related to the EU remain mostly about representation and sovereignty, which gives birth to “remainers” regarding the largest population aspiring more representation (supported by the EU level) and those who aspire to secure their representation; namely, the Brexiteers. In a process of antagonism, both at supra-national and sub-national levels, an important question is: who is to be empowered in a post-Brexit era? A politics of skepticism, distrust, and disbelief is haunting the UK, whereby a troublesome stranger Union rhetoric is occupying the political arena, and moreover, the “post-devolution institutionalization” (Livingstone et.al, 2009, p.238) is forcing the devolved regions to seek more power with a nationalist rhetoric.

Northern Ireland

The divided Irish identity is no new issue. For decades, the island has faced much violence and fear due to the clash of identities between the nationalists vs. unionists, even on sectarian bases between the Protestants and Catholics. In 1998, with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the horrors and atrocities of the past gave way to peace in the island. In Northern Ireland, however, political hostility remains always high on the agenda. Bolstered by the Brexit referendum, the issue of national identity has been triggered once again. This remains a twofold situation. Firstly, it covers the hostility between Northern Irish politicians with that of London-based elites; and secondly, the divided community in Northern Ireland has become more polarized between the remainers and leavers.

As Ulster Unionist Party leader Robin Swann emphasized, “Westminster has turned its back on Northern Ireland, the Union is challenged at the minute by Brexit” (The Irish News, October 18, 2018). Or, as Mary Lou McDonald, leader of Sinn Fein, argues, “Brexit is fundamentally wrong and undemocratic” (The Irish News, November 26, 2018). She continues to argue that “an executive in the north should be in place to deliver for all in the community, growing the economy, standing up to destructive Tory poli-

cies, and representing the majority view on Brexit” (ibid). Certainly, the issue facing Northern Ireland rests on the Good Friday Agreement, which recognizes that, if approved by the people, there may be a transfer of power from London to Belfast.

The Irish identity has become a very important matter for Northern Irish politicians and people alike. Whether there will be a plan to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland, the future of the border issue with the Republic of Ireland, and questioning the level of belonging, etc., the Brexit referendum has forced the people to make a choice on the old debate on nationalism vs. unionism. For McDonald, “Irish nationalism is born out of resistance to a colonial power. It is traditionally progressive. My politics has always been about two things: about Irish unity, ending partition, national freedom, and also about equality” (Politico, April 25, 2019).

Thanks to Brexit, an over-stressing and re-remembering of Irish identity is currently high on the agenda. According to the Good Friday Agreement, the Northern Irish people, by birthright, are allowed to choose their nationality as Irish, British, or both. Recently, with Brexit, they have to make a choice. For instance, N. Ireland-born British citizens have to apply for Irish passports for the sake of freedom of movement in the EU; likewise, N. Ireland-born Irish citizens have to formally renounce British citizenship to continue enjoying EU rights. Dual nationals face a slightly different dilemma: they will either face restrictions to their EU rights, or the other way round, would they be EU citizens or not? As Mary Lou McDonald has emphasized, “...in the event of a crash, in the event of a Tory crash, that she [Theresa May] must as a democrat return to the Good Friday Agreement, and she must begin preparation for a referendum on Irish unity” (Reuters, February 20, 2019). Michelle Gildernew supports this argument in making reference to the post-conflict era settled with the Good Friday Agreement: “It is the alternative to conflict. It is a democratic and legitimate way to achieve Irish unity ... It is an accommodation between those with Irish identity and those with British identity” (Anadolu Agency, February 13, 2019). When compared to England, both N. Ireland and Scotland remain attached to the European project. Doyle summarizes this comparison as;

Irish unity was historically portrayed, by some unionists, as a move from a large, cosmopolitan and internationally focused state to a smaller and

more inward-looking Irish state. This has now reversed, and it is Ireland which is linked to Europe and cosmopolitanism, and the UK seems inward-looking and parochial. If Scotland votes for independence in the near future, that clash of images will be all the stranger (Doyle and Connolly, 2017).

As seen from the above quote, the issue regarding identity is about routes, and, consequently, it is about the future; in this case, the identity issue specifically concerns the future of N. Ireland, rather than the roots or sources of Irish identity. Leaving behind an era of destabilization and damage, the region requires working for a peaceful future. It is clear that, in the UK, there are multiple identities; for example, a person may feel both British and Irish, or just as Irish, or even British. However, the Brexit issue has now cut across these belongings, which thus leads to a polarization of society. Austen Ivereigh has summarized this situation as “rather than build a new consensus for a reinvigorated vision of our European membership, the referendum split society in two and led eventually to our self-expulsion” (June 28, 2016). Identities have become politically – Brexit – relevant. People have come to identify themselves as Unionists, for example, in the case of the Democratic Unionist Party leader Arlene Foster, who emphasizes that the “Union is our guiding star” (BBC, June 9, 2017). The DUP, who are also known as Unionists, support Brexit but reject a soft border between N. Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. According to Foster, “The fact that it [soft border] separates N. Ireland out from the rest of the UK, puts an internal border within the UK, and makes us subject to rules and regulations which the rest of the UK will not be subject to” (AOL, May 20, 2019).

On the other hand, parties like Sinn Fein and Alliance party back up a no border deal between the N. Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and more importantly, want a referendum on Irish unity. As the leader of Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald (2018) states, “Brexit will hamper the economy, agreements, and restrict the rights of citizens.” The importance of the border is directly linked to the identity debate as both the Republic of Ireland and the UK joined the EU (then known as the EEC) at the same time. Thanks to the European Single Market, the borders between the states were eliminated; as a result, there was no questioning as to whether N. Ireland represented either the northern part of the island or a region in the UK. Although the European project helped enormously to settle peace on the Island, the

UK's exit from the EU has caused a serious crisis for the island by creating another problematic border issue.

Scotland

On the other hand, Scotland's case differs. Here, Brexit becomes directly related with independence as this issue dates as far back as the 1988 "independence in Europe" policy. However, the 2014 referenda for the independence of Scotland resulted with a 55% majority to remain in the UK. Concerning the Brexit outcome, the issue of independence has been highly debated. Nicole Sturgeon argued that "any special post-Brexit status for Northern Ireland should also apply to Scotland" (The Guardian, October 9, 2018). She also criticized that "Brexit is about turning inwards, pulling up the drawbridge, retreating from the world. Independence is about being open, outward-looking, aspiring to play our full part in the world around us" (November 26, 2018). In her speech, she actually defines the characteristics of what a "remain" vote signifies for Scotland in being a part of Europe, and that to be open is to have multiple identities within a European project, not to pick up one over the other. Scotland is a devolved region within the UK, but just like N. Ireland, Scotland also feels like a European region in its participation in EU developments and policies, its taking advantage of the programmes of the EU, its enjoyment of extra rights granted by the EU, etc. For the Scots, there is a clear ambition towards pluralism, both in terms of institutions and identity. One of the voters named Douglas Baird summarizes Brexit as "the most ridiculous thing that has happened to the UK in my lifetime" (cf. Booth, The Washington Post, February 11, 2019). Regarding the current situation in Scotland, he continues to confess that, "I may sound like a Scottish nationalist to you, but I voted 'remain' in the Scottish independence referendum as I wanted Scotland to remain in Europe" (ibid). This encapsulates the issue of how Scottish people are willing to stay in the EU, no matter if they have independence or not. The traditional narrative for collective solidarity does not bother the majority of Scottish nationals. The solidarity of this multinational state, which is based on economic prosperity, welfare, glory as an international actor, security, etc., are serving well in advantage of the devolved regions. For Scotland, the issue of Brexit is mostly

about the advantages and disadvantages of Scotland's future within the British Union, with the highest goal being democratic equalization and the pooling of sovereignty with London, just as it was under the European contract (Wallace, 1999, p.503).

Scottish nationalism is a civic type of nationalism pursued in a non-ethnic and non-cultural way by the Scottish National Party. The SNP's policy is based on a greater self-governance for Scotland, as well as the accommodation of diversity, civic institutional practices, etc. For instance, in an interview in 2018, Nicola Sturgeon clarified the SNP as being a civic nationalist party. She also explained that the aim of the party is to gain control of Scotland's destiny. In her words, she demonstrated that "being proud to be Scottish is not what really drives my support for Scottish independence. There is a distinction between what I call utilitarian nationalism and existential nationalism. I want Scotland to be independent because the powers of decision-making will help us to build a better country. I'm very much a utilitarian nationalist" (November 26, 2018). She continued to explain that her nationalism is not exclusionary and anything like the nationalisms in Europe. For her, the SNP is a pro-immigration party. Talking on nationalism, she argues that,

It's not what drives my politics. It's not really about my identity. It's about what gives the country I live in the best opportunity to build the best economy, have the fairest society, have the decisions taken that determine the prosperity of our country. I happen to think that governing ourselves is the best way to do that (November 26, 2018).

According to Sturgeon, for Scotland, the issue is about self-governance, and to decide what remains good and bad for the Scottish people. However, in maintaining this policy, the SNP does not reflect an anti-English sentiment, but it does make clear that the Scots do have a distinct identity, resting not only on survival but also popular sovereignty. Also, the SNP's goal is to make Westminster interfere as little as possible in Scotland's future. As such, decisions need to be taken as much as at regional level, as it is in most political areas, such as education, culture, Presbyterian Kirk, law and civil service, etc, and with regards to these areas, a territorial distribution of power has already been settled. However, with Brexit in process, it can be said that the Scottish people feel their future is uncertain. This triggers the nationalist rhetoric used by the SNP to strengthen its cause on the issues

arising from Brexit. Recently one of the issues, is about a differentiated strategy plan negotiated by London for the devolved regions. According to SNP each devolved region must be subjected to the same conditions. However, the 'backstop proposal' for Northern Ireland would lead to more damage to the Union. If applied, this will lead to a serious disadvantage of the Scottish business, where Northern Ireland will have much easier access to the Single Market and to the Customs Union. And, if such an arrangement can be made to Northern Ireland, why can't for Scotland? As a result such inequality between regions is not accepted by Scotland.

One of these concerns remains the territory in which Scotland, as a region within the British Union, will be separated with the EU. It is clear that most of the Scots favor the EU, are fond of taking part in its variety of policies, and have even localized Europe into their regional administration and management. It is this sharing of authority between Brussels, London, and Edinburgh that makes the Scottish embrace the European integration and causes them to consider it as an important marker, and even supporter, for Scottish autonomy. Further, Europe helps to shelter a vision for Scotland as a regional autonomous government by expressing its rights to self-rule, as well as making London understand what shared authority means. The British system is based on the fundamental principles of absolutism, and that is the British parliament; hence, it is this parliamentary sovereignty that is deeply instituted in the British system and is well beyond the roots of national identity; namely Englishness. This is why and how many Scots remain skeptical about the results of Brexit. According to the SNP, the European identity is functional, which means giving opportunities to solve issues arising from national identity conflicts in Europe. Therefore, the European identity can be considered a form of both accommodation and identification for those who are unsure of their national identity. Being a part of the EU, as well as participating within the European identity context, have become important for regional or sub-national groups to express themselves more freely in a wider geography of belonging and attachment.

Wales

The case of Wales is quite different as compared to its counterparts; namely, Scotland and N. Ireland. In the referendum, Wales voted out of the EU in

favor of the other Union. Since the main theme of the leave campaign was to ‘take back control,’ it is clear that both the issue of identity and devolution have always been on the Welsh agenda. According to the “One Wales Strategy,” to become a strong and confident nation, Wales requires more devolution. In the strategy paper, it emphasizes that “without a strong government with a sense of purpose and direction, we cannot deliver the real and lasting changes to transform people’s lives all over Wales” (BBC, One Wales Strategy Paper, 2007, p.6). With the Brexit outcome, the party has hardened its discourse on the future of Wales. In the 2017 election manifesto, party former leader Leanne Wood has emphasized “we face grave risks ahead of this election – our farming, our communities, even our very identity as a nation ... All of that is under threat from a Tory party that can only be described as cruel and reckless” (Plaid Cymru Party Action Plan, 2017).

Thanks to Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales), which is the equivalent of SNP in Scotland and Sinn Fein in N. Ireland, besides devolution, the national identity debate has gathered pace in the Brexit era. The party supports the national distinctiveness of Wales and posits that it is neglected by the central government in the UK. Also, Plaid Cymru strictly criticizes the over-centralization of the UK Government in Westminster. For instance, MP leader of Plaid Cymru Westminster group Liz Saville Roberts announced that “Westminster has always seen fit to benefit most that which is closest to its heart, and its heart is in southeast England. As for the rest of us? We are as we always have been—peripheral, expendable, beyond the pale” (January 29, 2019). With such negligence, Plaid Cymru considers that it has been deceived by London. Hence, the party pushes for more decentralization and devolution and evaluates this as an instrument for regeneration. To invest in this regeneration Adam Price, leader of Plaid Cymru, has demonstrated the need to stop Brexit, as he defines it as “a cliff-edge, cataclysmic hard Brexit would be incredibly destructive to the people of Wales. It’s being promoted by people who do not care what happens to our communities.” (The Guardian, October 5, 2018). A constant reminding of Wales as a nation, having the right to decide on its future, is rehearsed by the party members. The national discourse of the party, just like in the case of Sinn Fein and SNP, does not include a destructive and exclusive tongue.

The party aims to secure more devolution which will lead to a quasi-federal model for the British Union. For instance, Leanne Wood, former

leader of Plaid Cymru, argued that "...the UK government recognizes in any negotiations that the UK is a multi-national state, not a single nation." (Welsh Government, 2018, p.5). At this point, it is the role of the EU which serves as Wales' greatest asset in enabling the region to actively take part in re-conceptualizing policy spaces beyond the British Union. However, now that Britain is on its way leaving the EU, Plaid Cymru considers this to have a negative impact as Wales would start losing the transnational linkage benefiting the Welsh identity to explain itself outside the British Union. To promote the European identity of Wales, the party has launched an "I am European" campaign with the motto of "will you join us in telling Westminster that we are Europeans?" As the former party leader Leanne Wood expressed, "I am a European. I call myself a Welsh European. That's not just a title. That's something that I feel and that is something that deserves to be protected and recognized" (Wales Online, March 7, 2019). It is clear that the nationalism of Plaid Cymru is much like the Scottish and Irish cases. A civic, inclusive, as well as pragmatic nationalism explains the party's stance on national identity. The party is confident about its plural and multi-layered identities. Leanne Wood continues to argue that "my Welshness and my Europeaness are interlinked—the one complements the other..." Clearly not a replacement, or to choose one identity over another, but to secure a vision that best serves the interests of the people. Adam Price questions where Wales stands within the Brexit equation. He states that "these are the dying days of the British State" and "there needs to be a vision, a strong massive change for Wales" (The Guardian, October 5, 2018). In making reference to the SNP, he argues that an inspiring vision must be drawn for Wales. In his words "One of the reasons for the SNP's success was that they decided to go positive ... They set out an inspiring, imaginative vision of a different Scotland. That fired up the imagination. That got people thinking and talking again" (ibid).

For Plaid Cymru, the ultimate aim is for the UK to stay in the Single Market and to defend the Welsh interest in blocking some politicians to regain power in Westminster. Liz Saville Roberts emphasizes that the "withdrawal agreement will be equally catastrophic. Plaid Cymru will never support a withdrawal agreement that takes Wales out of the Single Market and Customs Union..." (Public Speech, March 12, 2019). Adam Price, leader of Plaid

Cymru, carried his argument further by stating that, in the future, Wales might have an independence referendum like Scotland did. Back in 2018, Price stated that, “We’re about stopping it, but if it happens, it will be a crisis on a huge level. We will have to think about how to best defend ourselves in those circumstances and believe that may accelerate the path towards independence” (The Guardian, September 28, 2018). He has rehearsed this statement as a “chaotic constitutional change which, without consulting the public, would justify holding a referendum on Wales’ future as an independent nation” (ibid). He also emphasized that “Wales will soon face a choice between a bright future as an independent country in the EU or a ‘forgotten’ region in a ‘dying’ British state” (Public Speech, April 26, 2019). Neither Wales in general, nor Plaid Cymru, had such assertions of independence. However, Brexit did trigger and differentiate the politics of Plaid Cymru to embrace a more hard stance towards London, as Ellie Mae O’Hagan carefully evaluated that “Welsh nationalism risks being elided by a ‘Little England’ narrative” (The Guardian, April 15, 2015). Entering the Brexit era and struggling with English dominance has forced Plaid Cymru to take a tougher stand on its policies to secure the interests of Wales in an era of uncertainty.

Conclusion

Nationalism is clearly one of the most important ideologies for mass mobilization and can be a useful means in times of crisis. The Brexit crisis, as well as the uncertainty it brings along, have pushed nearly all political parties in the UK to play the nationalist card in politics. In fact, Brexit is a result of nationalism itself. A clash of interests between two Unions, both the British Union and European Union struggled for reconciliation, however, the result is still uncertain. The identity issue became so prominent during the pre and post-Brexit era that it pushed the Brexit into a deadlock, not only between the UK and the European Union but also within the UK.

Although the devolved regions of Scotland, N. Ireland and Wales have a divergence of tendencies towards London, thanks to Brexit, policies of a nationalist tendency have started displaying convergence. The nationalist parties—Sinn Fein, the Scottish National Party, and Plaid Cymru—representing these regions within the UK are using the national rhetoric in order

to gain more power for their devolved regions. The first common point is that the regions' nationalism is not romanticized but instrumentalized with pragmatic motivations in a process of a power grabbing. The second point of convergence lies in the aim of fulfilling a new constitutional or political contract to settle down or reshape the UK after Brexit. This has pushed these parties to overstress their national identities to reorganize the center-periphery relations in the British Union, thereby constantly reminding the importance of the European Union. Thirdly, the quest for independence put forth by these regions, at this point, is to gain political leverage rather than a direct call on independence from the UK, which does need further exploration and investigation.

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