



GLOBALISATION OUTLOOK

by Joe Zammit-Lucia

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While the left and centre-left have been the standard bearers of identity politics, the politics of national identity has been ceded to the right

My identity politics is good, yours is bad



GLOBALISATION AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN DEFENCE OF THE NATION STATE

Following the tragedy in Christchurch, in this issue of our Globalisation Outlook we are moving away from our usual newsletter format to present an essay on nationalism vs globalism

IDENTITY POLITICS – DIVISIVE OR UNITING?

“The term identity politics in common usage refers to a tendency of people sharing a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity to form exclusive political alliances, instead of engaging in traditional broad-based party politics.”¹

The left and centre-left have traditionally been the standard bearers of identity politics. They have championed rights associated with gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, social class, and others.

One area of identity politics that has been ceded largely to the right and centre-right has been that associated with national identity.

Today, those who have been the greatest champions of identity politics – and have presented them as a force for unity – tend to be the same political groups who claim that the politics of national identity is divisive rather than uniting. This can be caricatured as a belief that my sort of identity politics is good, yours is bad.

Many have criticized all forms of identity politics on the basis that it is a politics of victimology that tends to emphasise difference, and the

¹ Oxford Living Dictionary

consequences of that difference, rather than aiming to develop collective narratives that bring people together. In other words the borders are very narrow between a feminist politics and one that is anti-men; or an ethnic equality politics and one that is anti-white, anti-black, anti-Muslim, etc..

Arthur M Schlesinger Jr goes as far as to suggest that basing politics on group marginalization is itself what fractures the civil polity, and that identity politics therefore works against creating real opportunities for ending marginalization.

GLOBALISATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Identity politics is the consequence of groups feeling marginalized or excluded. Parts of their identity are suppressed, given lesser rights, or ignored by social norms.

We may believe that, until relatively recently, none of this applied to national identity. That is not the case.

Globalism has reached the point where many feel that their national identity is under threat

- and the phenomenon is not new

As far back as 1907, Friedrich Meinecke explored the writings of German intellectuals from the Enlightenment until the late 19th century. He showed how the rise of German nationalism was intimately intertwined with a form of cosmopolitanism.²

But we seemed to have learned nothing from it. We have kept pushing an ethic of globalism to the point where many feel that their national identity is under threat.

Increased cross-border people flows and the easy acceptance, until recently, of the concept of the multicultural society have played a large role in the rise of the politics of national identity. The 'white male', previously dominant in Western society, has now started to feel marginalized and is starting to adopt the same victimological politics of previously marginalized groups.

Globalisation has fractured the concept of a political economy. It is not clear that democracies can survive such a fracture.

Though undoubtedly a significant driving factor, it would be simplistic to put it down exclusively to multiculturalism. The reality is that many other aspects of globalisation – from the rise of multi-national corporations, to large scale tax arbitrage, to the globalisation of financial markets, to social media that knows no borders, have all undermined the power of the nation state.

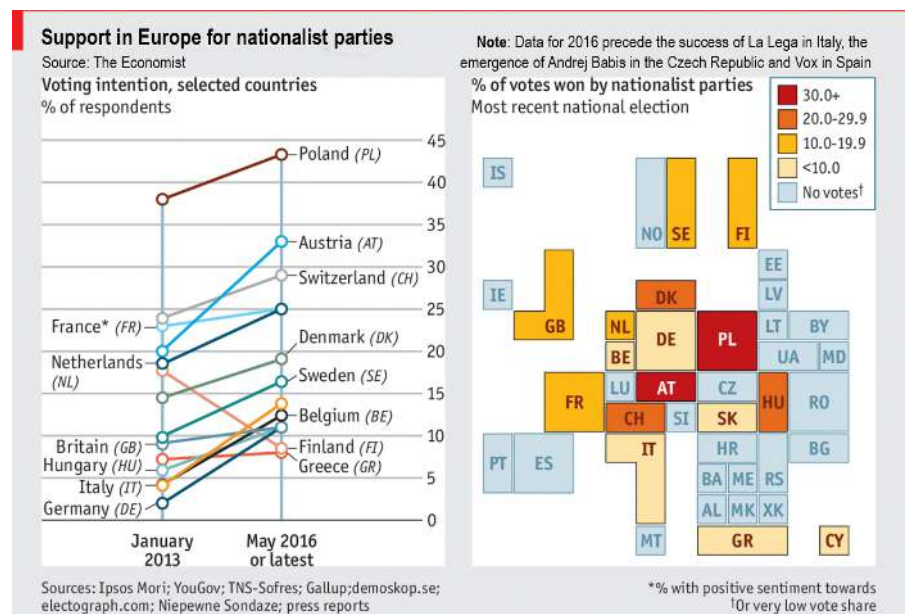
As we have pointed out before, the net result is a fracturing of the concept of a 'political economy'. We are now at a stage where political legitimacy

² Cosmopolitanism and the National State. Friedrich Meinecke. 1907

still rests primarily with the nation state or sub-national political institutions, while living in an economy that is largely trans-national.

The essential bond between politics and economics has been largely broken. As we shall see later, it is not at all clear that democracy can function in such a situation.

All of this has led to the rise of nationalist political forces (figure). It is easy, unjustifiably condescending, and intellectually lazy simply to dismiss such forces as 'populist'. They are a response to real political, cultural, economic and social changes – many of them a direct result of increasing globalism.



A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY?

Those who dismiss these issues, see them as somehow inevitable and irreversible, or reflexively condemn them as parochial, nationalistic concerns, should be wary. They have the potential to threaten the very basis of our liberal democracies.

As Schlesinger argued, liberal democracy requires some common basis, a shared narrative if you like, for culture and society to function.³

With the waning of religion, ethnicity, geography and common cultural norms, what is it that will hold us together?

Or, to put it another way, with the waning of religion, ethnicity, geography, and common cultural norms as uniting forces in society, what is there that will hold us together if not the cohesion of the nation state? And on what basis will such cohesion be built?

³ The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society. Arthur M Schlesinger. 1991

Is multiculturalism undermining the cohesive solidarity on which any welfare state depends?

Otto von Bismarck established the welfare state as the basis for a national polity to unite Germany. Much of Europe followed. Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal went in the same direction to bring the nation together after the Great Depression and to lift people out of poverty. Yet, the effects of globalisation are now undermining the welfare state as they are undermining the nation state.

Tax arbitrage continues to put national coffers under strain leading to seemingly ever-present austerity. Mass immigration is further stretching the functioning of a welfare state. While the difficult to manage issues associated with multiculturalism are now threatening to undermine the cohesive solidarity upon which any welfare state depends.

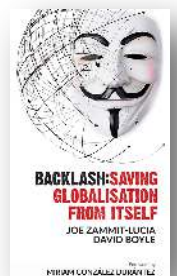
The effects of this fracturing should not be underestimated. [We have argued](#) that the rise in street crime we are seeing in the UK and elsewhere may be better read as a symptom of fracturing societies than as inadequate policing.

There is the world of difference between freedom to choose to look beyond one's own culture and having different cultural norms imposed upon you

GLOBALISATION VS CULTURAL EXCHANGE

In her foreword to our recent [book](#), Miriam González Durántez describes the cultural aspects of globalisation as:

'the inner wish of most individuals to expand beyond their immediate neighbourhood, to emulate what others in other parts of the world do, to rise above their cultural horizons and live in a world without constraints.'



There is much truth to this statement. It almost certainly applies to most readers of this Outlook. Whether it is true of 'most individuals' I would not venture to say without taking the risk of projecting my own perspective on most of the world's population.

But this statement fails to draw a distinction between individuals seeking 'to rise above their cultural horizons' as a matter of personal choice, and societies that feel that cultural change, and the effects of cultural and social norms that they do not consider their own, is being imposed upon them – whether they like it or not. To some it must feel like being robbed of their emotional home.

Globalism risks leaving people feeling deprived of their emotional home

There is a difference between freedom of choice and perceived coercion. As our friend Renaud Girard [puts it](#):

‘The European peoples...have never been democratically consulted on immigration, which is the most important social phenomenon they have known since the Second World War...

...in a functioning democracy, the minimum is for the population to be consulted about the extent of multiculturalism that they will have to manage in the long term.’

Globalism is just as much a form of identity politics as is nationalism

Just like there is a difference between a degree of freedom to travel, experience other cultures, and work in different countries, as opposed to feeling compelled to leave one’s own family and community behind as the only way to go somewhere where one can earn a decent living.

Some argue that it is ‘wrong’ to privilege one culture over another. That may well be so. But that is not what we are talking about here.

Just think of how we feel about families. *‘It’s not that my family matters more than yours; it’s that it matters more to me.’*⁴ Most of us would buy into such a sentiment. And people feel the exact same way about their national culture.

And, let us be clear. Globalism is just as much a form of identity politics as is nationalism. And just as divisive when those who care about national culture are labelled xenophobic racists. It just that globalism is a form of identity politics that appeals to a different tribe of people.

GERMANY ACTS

Germany plans to cut ties between Muslims in Germany and the Turkish government

‘There is a growing schism between German youth and the immigrant youth of Muslim origin.’

So claims Renaud Girard in an [article](#) describing the tensions between Turkish-German Muslims and the rest of the population. A cultural tension that was not helped when Angela Merkel threw open Germany’s border indiscriminately to one million migrants.

⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah. ‘The Importance of Elsewhere: In defence of cosmopolitanism.’ Foreign Affairs, March/April 2019.

But now Germany is acting. It is planning to cut ties between Muslims in Germany and the Turkish government.

“What we need now is an Islam for German Muslims that belongs to Germany”

(note: ‘belongs to Germany’, not ‘Europe’)

Top civil servant Markus Kerber
as reported in the [Financial Times](#)

Multi-religious societies are not the same thing as multicultural ones

Cynically, one could characterize this as an electoral reaction to the rise of the AfD. But, AfD or no AfD, it is an initial attempt to preserve some kind of cohesive German culture while accepting a multi-religious society – something that, while often conflated, is not the same thing as a multicultural society.

IN DEFENCE OF THE NATION STATE

Soundbite politics about being ‘patriotic’ but not ‘nationalist’ are largely meaningless

Those who consider themselves ‘progressive’, or ‘liberal’, or ‘cosmopolitan’, or any other moniker they wear with pride, have taken to condemning nationalism and a focus on the nation state. Some have recently taken to soundbite politics – claiming to be ‘patriotic’ but not ‘nationalist’ – without any kind of clarity as to where, in practical terms, one ends and the other starts.

In a world where communities risk being progressively riven apart at the altar of globalisation and multiculturalism. Where fracturing cultural and social cohesion risks undermining the very basis on which liberal democracy rests.

It is banal to define nationalism exclusively or largely in terms of economics and international trade

To define nationalism in exclusively in terms of economics and international trade is banal. An excessive focus on economics at the expense of culture risks transforming communities and societies into an incoherent gaggle of self-centred individuals only out for themselves. We suggest that the nation state remains the main defensive structure against such societal breakdown. Against a Hobbesian war of all against all.

We therefore argue that we should be looking for ways to strengthen the cultural and economic power of nation states while, simultaneously, strengthening the bonds of co-operation, cultural exchange and mutual understanding between nation states.

We do not believe, as many seem to, that international cooperation and mutual understanding can only be achieved by weakening the nation state and treating the concept with disdain. In fact, such an attitude betrays the

The nation state remains the main bulwark against a societal war of all against all

fact that the identity politics of globalism falls into the same trap as any other form of identity politics – it soon morphs from being *for* something to being against its opposite.

What need to return to the concept of internationalism (or internationalism) – the nurturing of willingly given cooperation between culturally and socially cohesive nation states – rather than the more recent concept of globalism against which we see a widespread backlash

For this to be effective, a nation cannot simply be defined as a set of borders. If democratic states are to survive, they must have a degree of cultural cohesion, a shared narrative as to who they are and why they belong together in mutual solidarity.

It can also be reasonably argued that a common language (or a set of established common languages in those few selected cases with a long history of knowing how to manage it *eg.* Switzerland, Canada), is an essential component of a cohesive state.

'Global governance' structures need to return to their role of being in the service of nation states

Conversely, the structures of so-called 'global governance' – the IMF, World Bank, United Nations, WTO, and the like – need to return to their role of being in the service of nation states rather than unelected administrators of those states.

If anything, what we are seeing today is a move towards sub-national local politics rather than global governance.

ARE ALL NATIONALISMS EQUAL?

Are British, French or German nationalisms any better or worse than Catalan or Scottish nationalisms?

A further question that some have difficulty addressing is whether all nationalisms are equally desirable/undesirable.

If French, British or German nationalism are 'bad', what of Catalan and Scottish nationalism – both of which seem to be granted the moniker of 'self-determination' rather than nationalism – especially by the political left? How do we evaluate the reunification of Germany, and the splitting of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (and the bloody wars that the latter unleashed) in nationalist terms?

EUROPE

Germany is right to resist Macron's man-in-a-hurry attempts at further integration at the expense of the political legitimacy of the nation state

These principles probably apply in Europe as much as they apply elsewhere.

It is debatable whether the European union can survive if 'ever closer union' can only be achieved at the expense of the cohesion and sense of identity provided by nation states.

President Macron has proposed doing a Bismarck at European scale – setting up what is essentially a welfare state at European level. His German counterparts are wise to resist such moves, at least for now.

Moving too fast in that direction will emasculate the cultural and social cohesion provided by nation states well before European culture and solidarity are strong enough to have any hope of filling that void.

The result is likely to be further social breakdown and further strengthening of nationalist political forces. Moving forward in these integrationist directions should be evaluated in generational timeframes not electoral cycle ones.

About Radix

Radix is a cross-party think tank for the radical centre of contemporary politics. Its aim is to re-imagine the way government, institutions and societies function based on open-source, participative citizenship. To kick-start the thinking that is needed for politics to embrace technology, innovation, social and cultural change.

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