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When Parties Make Peoples

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One of the lessons of the 2014 Scottish referendum on independence is that political separatism may be inspired by goals of a Left-Right kind. The surge in support for the Yes campaign corresponded to its emergence as an anti-austerity movement. The paper examines how questions of peoplehood became linked in this case to the adversarial pursuit of political ends. To clarify the dynamics of partisanship at work, I go on to examine a second case of political separatism – Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s – where, major differences notwithstanding, a similar set of currents was present. Rival definitions of peoplehood were here too the symptoms of political contestation at least as much as its inspiration. The paper ends by considering what the partisan contestation of political boundaries reveals about the condition of the democracies in which it occurs.

The inspiration behind contemporary calls for political independence is often assumed to be some mix of the logic of *identity* and *interest*. When Quebecois, Catalan or Flemish voices demand a separate state, it is widely supposed that what motivates them is the desire to give full expression to a sense of cultural selfhood, combined in some measure with an expectation of material benefit.ⁱ In both the logic of identity and interest, the pursuit of political independence is a function of social facts. People are moved to act by ends set for them by their cultural and economic circumstances, not by purposes they have reflexively weighed.

There is a competing inspiration for separatism which tends to get lost in such accounts, yet which recent developments – notably in Scotland – suggest may be crucial to a more complete understanding. This is the drive to uphold or advance a set of *political commitments*.ⁱⁱ Amongst the forms it may take are the aim to protect existing political achievements from subversion – to protect, for example, an institution such as the National Health Service which is said to embody important values – or the desire to establish a new context in which certain values, ideas and practices can better succeed. The clash between such commitments resembles the ideological conflicts of Left-Right politics, but played out here as conflicts over territorial authority. As a motivation for political separatism, the pursuit of political commitments differs from the logic of identity because it need attach no intrinsic importance to the unit for which independence is sought. This unit is treated rather as, in a particular historical context, the venue most conducive to the realisation of chosen ends. The motivation differs also from the logic of interest, as it derives its persuasive force from a sense of rightness concerning the goals pursued. It is overtly normative in character.

In this paper I examine the 2014 referendum campaign in Scotland, as well as events that have followed, to indicate how the pursuit of political commitments has shaped both the movement for independence and the responses met. I show how the main contending political forces, led by the Scottish National Party (SNP), the British Conservative Party, and the British Labour Party, left their imprint on this constitutional process, thereby shaping the contours of peoplehood in both its practical and symbolic aspects. Drawing out the dynamics of *partisanship* in play, I go on to describe how they influenced a quite different case of political separatism – the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Here the context was in some ways quite dissimilar: the terms of political union were regulated by a written constitution formally establishing a federal arrangement,ⁱⁱⁱ and the two territories of the federation were not wholly dissimilar in size. Ethnicity, moreover, has often been regarded as basic to the nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe (Kohn 1944) – in this region more than any, political commitments might seem predictably secondary to the brute attachments of cultural belonging. But like in Britain, if anything more clearly, in Czechoslovakia one saw the emergence of separatist dynamics irreducible to cultural identity or material interest. The country's split was engineered almost wholly by partisan adversaries pursuing contrasting political goals. The case confirms the broader relevance of political commitments to the politics of independence, and allows some more general observations on the relationship between partisanship and peoplehood.

The contestation of political boundaries reveals some important facts about the condition of the democracies in which it occurs. In the paper's final section, I argue that while the processes described are not necessarily intrinsically corrupting, and indeed have some democratic virtues attached, they raise questions about the capacity of institutions to channel political conflicts productively. The challenges are likely to increase in an age of renewed polarisation between the forces of Left and Right.

Scotland 2014: a clash of political commitments

In a referendum on 18th September 2014, 55% of voters in Scotland opted for the country to remain part of the United Kingdom.^{iv} Like all referendums, the vote itself should be seen as part of a longer process of contestation. As one examines this larger context, it becomes clear that the issues at stake in this separatist clash did not boil down to the pull of identity

and interest. A concern to uphold or advance a set of political commitments was evident on many sides of the Scottish debate, both during the referendum campaign and in the subsequent efforts to fix the meaning of its outcome.

At first glance the movement for independence has the hallmarks of an outburst of regionalist feeling. In charge of the ‘Yes’ campaign was a declaredly nationalist party – the SNP. It had long regarded separation from the UK as an end in itself, and one must assume that a consistent source of its public appeal was the promise of greater local autonomy. Large numbers of Scots apparently wanted decisions taken closer to home, in Edinburgh rather than Westminster. No one can govern Scotland better than the Scottish people themselves – SNP leader Alex Salmond said it himself.^v

Yet the surge in support for the ‘Yes’ campaign in the weeks before the referendum was based on a more defined political message. Led by the SNP but absorbing large numbers of those without membership of the party, the campaign increasingly took on the character of a movement to defend the institutions and values of the welfare state. Exiting the UK became the means to achieve this, as a way to exit a UK-wide policy regime of economic austerity.^{vi} Holding a majority in the Scottish Parliament since 2011, the SNP had for some years pursued policies on health and education generally committed to the principle of public funding through taxation. Such policies were broadly consistent with the party’s self-presentation as social-democratic.^{vii} In the weeks before the referendum, however, the popularity of its campaign for independence dramatically increased when the SNP leadership put renewed emphasis on the vote as an opportunity to defend the welfare state.^{viii} Securing the principle of public healthcare and education, making a stand against ever-increasing social inequality, and diverting public resources from military expenditure to welfare support, as well as excluding once and for all the prospect of being ruled by a Conservative government, became essential goals for those campaigning and voting for independence.^{ix} Leftist arguments, long an inspiration for Scottish nationalism as an intellectual tradition (Jackson 2014a, 2014b), became central to its expression as a political movement.

Whether an SNP-led independent Scotland could have maintained this welfarist commitment is unclear – its claims have been judged with scepticism.^x What seems evident however is that a sizeable portion of those seeking independence were motivated by this political agenda. What moved them, it appears, was not so much belief in the supposedly distinct identity or interests of the Scots and the need to give these constitutional

articulation, but the suspicion that a certain political vision of the good society was no longer attainable across the UK as a whole.^{xi} Scottish independence presented itself as the best option available for notching up a victory against a despised political programme, and for shielding certain institutions and values from extinction.

The animating force of political commitments was just as evident in the ‘No’ campaign, in the final weeks especially. The British Labour Party, like the other Westminster parties, opposed Scottish independence, and for as long as the survival of the Union seemed the referendum’s most likely outcome, the Party’s statements differed little from the ‘pragmatic’ arguments drawn on by other elements in the campaign coalition (principally focused on the economic stability said to be conditional on membership of the United Kingdom). But as opinion polls suggested the prospect of independence was becoming real, an argument similar to the SNP’s was articulated, this time asserting the importance of unity for the achievement of social-democratic goals in the Labour tradition. In former Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s words, ‘we [the nations of the UK] built the health service together, we built the welfare state together, we will build the future together ... A world not of a separate state, but a world of social justice that people can believe in.’^{xii} Not only the party’s rhetoric but also its underlying motivations for defending the Union seemed inseparable from its political commitments: a Labour party shorn of its Scottish MPs, which in previous general elections had consistently far outnumbered those of the other UK parties, would appear to have considerably reduced chances of winning an outright majority at Westminster and thus of being in a position to advance the programme of its choice in government.

Even the unionism of the Conservative Party seemed embedded in an analysis of how a certain set of political commitments might best be achieved. The observation is initially surprising, given the party’s unionism would seem at odds with how it could expect to dominate a parliament of the rump UK. David Cameron acknowledged as much shortly before the referendum by accounting for his unionism on the grounds that ‘I love my country more than I love my party.’^{xiii} But if the party’s political calculus stopped short of endorsing Scottish separatism – a difficult responsibility for a ruling party to embrace – it nonetheless made itself evident in how the aftermath of the campaign was handled. Senior party members sought to establish a link between the prospect of devolving further powers to the Scottish Parliament and a resolution of the ‘West Lothian question’, whereby non-English MPs would no longer be able to vote in the Westminster Parliament on matters that

affect England alone. The Conservative Party's explicit move to link these issues has been widely interpreted as an effort to strengthen its control over Westminster policy-making.^{xiv} Appeals to English sentiment followed: in Cameron's words, 'We have heard the voice of Scotland and now the millions of voices of England must be heard.' A principle of 'English votes for English laws' was presented as the necessary course to follow.^{xv}

The provisional conclusion one may draw is that in the 2014 Scottish independence debate, a distinctive motivation for contesting the contours of peoplehood, irreducible to the logics of territorial identity and interest, was a prominent feature on all sides. I have described it as the concern to uphold or advance a set of political commitments. It involves actors seeking to define the boundaries of a political unit, not based simply on the intrinsic worth they attach to a certain cultural group, nor based on a straightforward calculation of material advantage – though elements of such arguments may be present in addition – but based on an assessment of how the political ends they are dedicated to can best be practically realised. Calls for regional autonomy are voiced most loudly when there is opposition to the policies being imposed from the centre: the importance of political commitments to the actors involved explains this. The effect is a conflict in keeping with the ideological conflicts of Left-Right politics conventionally understood, but played out here as a conflict over territorial authority.^{xvi}

One might summarise this process as one shaped by a logic of *partisanship*. One tends to think of partisanship in terms of the behaviour of an organisation – the party – and clearly such actors are central to the processes in view. But the relevant practices extend beyond those holding party membership to include a broader community of the politically engaged – here most obviously in the case of the Yes campaign for Scottish independence. Partisanship in this larger sense can be understood as the sense of belonging to a community of shared commitments and in the projects undertaken to advance these in coordination with others (White, 2014; White & Ypi, 2011). In the course of partisan clashes on the Scottish question, ideas of 'Scottishness', 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' were regularly invoked and given significance in different ways. There are good grounds, I suggest, to see these competing efforts to define the meaning and boundaries of peoplehood as guided for many by a prior concern with securing the conditions for the achievement of political goals. Ideas and practices of peoplehood appear as the *symptoms* of political contestation at least as much as its inspiration.

The Scope of Conflict: the Velvet Divorce and beyond

What was true in Scotland is arguably part of a wider truth about how the contours of peoplehood are shaped. The partisan contribution is a recurrent one: what looks at first sight like an initiative grounded in the spontaneous appeal of cultural identity or material interest will often be marked by considerations rooted in political commitments. Some further confirmation may be found by examining a quite different case of people-making, one that lacks the popular involvement evident in Scotland yet where political goals were just as keenly pursued. Coupled with the Scottish case, it provides the basis for some more general observations about the partisan contestation of political boundaries, before the analysis turns in the following section to an evaluation of the significance of these patterns for contemporary democracy.

Czechoslovakia in the years following the fall of communism in 1989 makes an interesting case for studying the relationship between peoplehood and partisanship. The country's process of demise, culminating in the 'Velvet Divorce' of 1993, looks at first glance like a classic instance of a scenario widely assumed to typify post-communist Central and Eastern Europe: the re-emergence of an historically-rooted ethnic nationalism following the loosening of the strictures of totalitarian rule. While there were indeed certain organised political groupings determined to advance a culturalist definition of the people,^{xvii} such a picture is generally misleading. First, the majority of citizens in both the Czech and Slovak lands were, at least until the relatively late stage of summer 1992, against the split: there was no groundswell of nationalist feeling (Wolchik, 1995). Indeed, a popular referendum was for a long time the last hope of those who wanted to avoid the break-up of the state by demonstrating popular support for the federation. Nor did the country's largest political parties concertededly pursue an agenda of this kind until after the general elections of June 1992 (Innes, 2001). To understand the course of events, one must drop the assumption that separatism in this period was a function of nationalist sentiment: on the contrary, nationalist discourse was, in general, adopted only insofar as it suited the commitments of the leading partisans on the Czechoslovak political scene, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), led by Vladimír Mečiar, and – in particular – the Czech Civic Democratic Party

(ODS), led by Václav Klaus. These partisans advanced quite different conceptions of peoplehood in opposition to one another, with high levels of variation displayed over time.

The period is best seen as an on-going partisan clash concerning the implementation of a radical set of economic policies. While there is considerable diversity in the scholarship on the break-up of Czechoslovakia, a point of convergence is the significance of the ODS's determination to impose monetarist neoliberal reforms, including 'voucher privatisation', on as much of the country as possible (Innes, 2001; Wolchik, 1995; Kraus & Stranger, 2000). The success of this programme, economic in form but bound up in a comprehensive vision of liberal democracy, seems to have been the principal concern of the ODS (Innes, 2001, p. 45). In the first instance, this meant efforts to introduce a uniform economic regime on Czechoslovakia as a whole, justified in the name of the Czechoslovak public good. However, these reforms were considerably less popular in the Slovak than the Czech lands (Wolchik, 1995, p. 236-237), with the implication that they would have to be introduced either by strong centralised government – a 'unitary federation', as Klaus termed it (Innes, 2001, p. 173) – or not at all. The ODS quickly ran up against the opposition of the HZDS and of other broadly leftist Slovak parties, which called for high levels of autonomy – still within the framework of a common state – for the Slovaks to manage their economy differently. As the HZDS increased its demands following a strong showing in the elections of June 1992, partisans around the ODS seem to have concluded that Klaus's reforms faced little prospect of success at the level of Czechoslovakia as a whole, and that they were best pursued therefore in the Czech lands solely, albeit at the cost of dissolving the state (Innes, 2001, p.178).

The ODS' strategy shifted accordingly, such that the HZDS's provocations were willingly received, and such that it was the *Czech* interest that the party sought to articulate in public statements: it was the health of the *Czech* finances which Klaus now pronounced on (Innes, 2001, p.209), and 'the future of the Czech state and the Czech nation' which formed his guiding concern. The HZDS, seeing that the choice was between full Slovak capitulation on the economic question or the break-up of Czechoslovakia, acquiesced in the latter and redoubled its defence of 'Slovak' interests, even if a desire for full secession had never genuinely been its motivating idea (whatever the rhetoric, Czechoslovakia as a whole had consistently been the framework of its ambitions). Public opinion too had slowly shifted by the end of 1992, such that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia came increasingly to

be seen as either desirable or inevitable (Wolchik, 1995, p. 240). The result was the Velvet Divorce of 1st January 1993.

In sum, what we have here is an illuminating case of the boundaries of peoplehood being contested in partisan exchange. The culmination was a constitutional moment, but crucial to understanding it is the adversarial process which preceded this. The ODS, a party seeking radical change to the status quo, sought an expansive terrain on which to pursue its goals, before retreating to a more modest one when this seemed the best guarantee of their realisation. The HZDS, seeking to stave off these initiatives, sought a more local terrain, seeking support amongst Slovaks by opposing the implementation of a uniform liberal model, though calling for an outright split only late in the day.^{xviii} To some observers the process may have looked like the inevitable return of hostilities born of age-old national identities – and certainly frictions over the idea of ‘Czechoslovakia’ went back to its founding in 1918 – but it looked this way in significant part because one of the ODS’ partisan strategies was to make the Slovaks appear nationalists hell-bent on secession (Innes, 2001, p. 188, p. 209). In reality, ideas of nationhood were – amongst the key protagonists – secondary to partisan agendas that were political rather than ethnic in inspiration.^{xix} As a consequence of different and shifting partisan views on the best way to realise their political commitments, a variety of conceptions of peoplehood – Czechoslovak, Czech and Slovak – were advanced in public debate, and with a discernible impact on popular self-understanding. While the boundaries of Czech and Slovak have historically been faintly drawn – differences of language, religion and culture are relatively slight, though differences of political history rather stronger – they increased in salience following their politicisation in the early 1990s.

That contesting political boundaries should be an abiding partisan concern finds backing in the wider theorisation of partisanship. An aspect of adversarial encounter critical to determining its development and outcome has been described as the *scope of conflict* (Schattschneider, 1975). Behind the militaristic imagery is a simple and compelling thought: that political causes may, in a given historical context, be more or less likely to succeed depending on whether opponents are engaged in a local setting or on a wider stage. Different institutional structures, as well as varying degrees of popular support, hostility or indifference, mean selecting the right theatre of engagement is crucial. And from the choice of battleground flows the need to convince others of its appropriateness. A natural way to pursue this is to claim that the setting corresponds to the contours of a *people*, whose good is

best served by promoting the political cause on this scale. All democratic partisans are in this way likely to make reference to the concept of ‘the people’, the nation, or equivalent social categories, defined differently according to the differing nature of their political commitments (Laclau, 2005).^{xx} The contestation of political boundaries in this way corresponds to contesting the boundaries and composition of peoplehood. It has been polemically suggested that in every conflictual encounter, the crowd decides the outcome of the fight (Schattschneider, 1975, p. 3-4; Coser, 1995).^{xxi} Later, one might add, the outcome of the fight in turn serves to reconfigure the crowd.

In the 20th century it seemed natural to see this as an expansive logic, such that the agonistic context in which partisans operate would encourage them to seek to mobilise ever more citizens, producing an ‘expanding universe of politics’ (Schattschneider, 1975, p. 16). Expansive definitions of peoplehood would be contagious, leading to a shift from localised forms of conflict (e.g. intra-urban) to political conflict on a national scale, of the kind we associate with modern party systems.^{xxii} It may be that some forms of transnational partisanship continue this pattern today.^{xxiii} Yet as political separatism indicates, a counter-tendency exists, one that leads to a *contraction* of the scope of conflict and with it of political boundaries.^{xxiv} Where partisans are doubtful of their ability to garner mass support across a large area, or are dissuaded from trying by the further institutional hurdles they would need to clear, retrenchment to a smaller territorial space will predictably follow.

The Politicisation of Peoplehood: an Aspect of Democratic Crisis?

What then should we make of the partisan influence on peoplehood, and what can we infer about the health of the democracies in which it occurs? While it is not possible here to give a thorough examination of the many normative questions involved, a few of the key issues can be outlined. To this end it may be useful to sketch two sharply diverging evaluations of the politicisation of peoplehood, each with some plausibility, each highlighting a different side of the matter, before offering some connecting remarks.

A) The politicisation of peoplehood as a pathology of democracy

It is not difficult to read the practices described as an indication of malaise. A basic liberal intuition is that the framework within which politics takes place should be

impartial as regards political ends. Certain aspects of the life in common, notably procedures and boundaries, apparently need to be depoliticised so that they may draw the consent of the large majority of citizens, whatever their political orientations. In this view, foundational questions of peoplehood need to be protected from partisan influence, and it is a major problem if they end up reflecting the political agendas of partisans. One of the roles of a constitution is exactly to limit the capacity of any one such grouping to succeed at the expense of others, so as to preserve the balance of the polity as a whole. The politicisation of peoplehood is the sign of a constitutionally weak political environment. That different partisans are liable to champion different conceptions of peoplehood promises perpetual instability in the structures and boundaries of the polity. Such concerns have been articulated in the post-referendum discussions about a new constitutional settlement for Scotland and the United Kingdom,^{xxv} and are likely to be all the more pronounced when, as in the Czechoslovak case, the politicisation of peoplehood results in the break-up of a state.

B) The politicisation of peoplehood as the essence of democracy

The partisan contestation of political boundaries can equally be seen though in a much more favourable light. In this view, it is through such practices that the principle of popular sovereignty comes to be approximated in political life, and at the same time its exclusivist tendencies challenged.^{xxvi} By cultivating categories of collective subjecthood (Scottishness, Britishness, Czechness, Slovakness and so on) and connecting them to political causes, partisans give meaning to the concept of ‘the people’ that underpins a democratic regime. They give such categories an explicitly political focus, countering their usage merely as quasi-sociological categories of cultural and ethnic description. Insofar as they successfully mobilise large numbers of supporters – witness the dramatic increase in political activism in Scotland^{xxvii} – they give practical expression to the idea of collective self-rule.

Moreover, by contesting the accounts of their opponents, they go some way to preventing the naturalisation of any one such category of subjecthood and the unthinking exclusions that would accompany this. The more partisans contest the boundaries of peoplehood, the less these boundaries are taken for granted, and the more they are seen to be properly the subject of scrutiny, critique and justification. Even where the break-up of a state is the outcome, so long as the separation is non-violent it may act as a

useful spur to political realignment. From this perspective, what was problematic in the Czechoslovak case was the sudden and elitist character of these constitutional changes, which for that reason were limited in their democratic contribution.

Underlying the negative appraisal (A), one may detect a more general suspicion of partisans and their political commitments. The axiom that constitutional matters should be insulated from partisan considerations may be said to reflect the view that partisanship involves – perhaps by definition – the pursuit of a sectoral good over a general one. By seeking to impose one set of political commitments at the expense of others, partisans may seem to be showing a form of bias, compromising the whole for the sake of the part.^{xxviii}

It may be that this suspicion is overdrawn however, or at least too lightly differentiated. If one accepts that there are some political commitments worth endorsing over others, and especially if one doubts that the boundaries of peoplehood can ever be a wholly neutral matter (cf. Muirhead 2014, pp.76ff.), it may be necessary to judge instances of the partisan shaping of peoplehood case-by-case, according at least partly to whether one endorses the commitments that motivate them. ‘Pick your partisans,’ one might say: some causes are less disreputable than others. Views on the Scottish independence movement are surely legitimately derived from how far one sympathises with the anti-austerity message that informed it, even if clearly these views must be shaped also by a judgement on the likely efficacy of separatism as a means to advance this end. Likewise a position on ‘English votes for English laws’ may be legitimately shaped by one’s willingness to see the policies of the Conservative Party prosper, or one’s take on the Czechoslovak split governed by one’s attitude to the market liberalism of the ODS. The politicisation of peoplehood is arguably as desirable as the ideas it is mixed with. It is not obviously inappropriate to approach constitutional questions from a partisan perspective.^{xxix}

Still, even if one rejects the impartial view and projects oneself into the partisan contest, there are limits to how warmly these practices can be welcomed. Contra a benign reading along the lines of (B), it remains the case that political separatism, even when inspired by the pursuit of desirable political commitments, nonetheless serves to denominate political conflict in the categories of territorial identity and interest. It encourages the localisation of ideas which potentially are of much wider appeal. Due to its regional organisation and regional symbolism, a movement of opposition to austerity in Scotland easily comes to sound like the airing of ‘Scottish grievances’ rather than the principled

commitment to welfare provision it might otherwise be recognised as. Movements that become closely associated with territory would seem inevitably to compromise some of their claim to universality.

The problem is exacerbated by the separatist tendency to promote a unit of peoplehood smaller in scale than existing institutional structures. Whereas in principle the contestation of peoplehood may be internationalist and expansive in focus (White 2014), in its separatist form it points to ever more localised political entities. Moreover, as independence is successfully secured for one such entity, new territorial claims may be triggered by those dissatisfied with the arrangement of political forces in the newly created unit, as well as by those in neighbouring states for whom the change acts as a precedent. The prospect of a domino process of fragmentation, led by partisans of varied political complexions, challenges the feasibility of assessing separatist movements on a case-by-case basis.

It is hard not to see separatist partisanship as indicative of institutional failings. Dissent is particularly prone to take separatist form when partisans suspect that their political commitments have no realistic chance for the foreseeable future of shaping the public policy of the state they are part of. Permanent minorities, or those who feel themselves to be such, will naturally be inclined to seek out an alternative political unit that affords them better prospects of success. These expectations may overstate the predictability of the distribution of political opinion – it is not clear that an independent Scotland would consistently be inclined towards left-wing politics, nor that an England of ‘English votes for English laws’ would consistently favour a Conservative agenda.^{xxx} The outcome of constitutional reconfiguration may well be the realignment of political forces, as new concerns rise to prominence and new parties emerge to address them. But it seems clear that a political system which does not promise the possibility of success to a range of political orientations will be especially susceptible to separatist impulses.

In the British case, the sense of permanent minority status felt by those of an anti-austerity persuasion in Scotland may be attributed in significant part to the weakness in preceding years of left-wing partisanship in Westminster. The legacy of the New-Labour era continues to be a widespread concern that the party offers little meaningful alternative to the economic commitments of the Conservatives and their coalition partners. Gordon Brown’s rallying-call on the eve of the referendum to a Labour-led project of social justice was likely to ring hollow for many. And when the parties of Westminster are widely

thought to be alike, dissent takes the form of opposing Westminster itself. So it is that while separatist feeling may be significantly inspired by partisan concerns, at the same time it bears witness to the weakness of many mainstream parties in the present period, and offers a reminder of the crucial place of large parties in holding a polity together.

To the extent that separatisms and the movements that oppose them are inspired by political commitments, it seems mistaken to suppose that the dissolution or restructuring of states will lead to a more stable order.^{xxxii} Since the territorial aspect of their claims has an essentially strategic component, derived from an assessment of the context in which certain ends are most likely to be achieved rather than an intrinsic concern with territory itself, and since there is no placement of political boundaries that will suit all partisans equally, reallocating territorial powers is unlikely to be enough to placate them. It is misguided, in other words, to see these as problems that a more perfect constitutional settlement could adequately and enduringly solve. An arguably more pertinent goal would be the achievement of a level of political pluralism in existing institutions consistent with the pluralism of the societies they govern. Sharpening political contestation in the established arenas of decision-making seems the most likely route to tempering the appeal of territorial exit.

Conclusion

As this analysis has sought to show, the formation, reshaping and dissolution of political boundaries and the peoples they enfold may be shaped by influences inadequately grasped by the categories of identity and interest. Contemporary British history provides us with a popularly-based movement, regional in form but irreducible to regionalist feeling. Many of its proponents sought political independence for Scotland as a means to resist the austerity policies of the UK government. They encountered a ‘No’ campaign led by the British Labour and Conservative parties, coordinated in their unionism but increasingly distinct in their plans for UK constitutional reform, and guided in their agendas by a distinct set of political commitments. A glance at the history of another major case of political separatism quite different in context – the break-up of Czechoslovakia – shows these motivations to be far from peculiar to the Scottish case. The Velvet Divorce was shaped by an analogous set

of partisan dynamics, and was little obstructed by the apparent clarity of the union's constitutional basis.

There are no doubt further cases in the contemporary world where these tendencies are manifest or likely to become so. Catalonia is an obvious example. And if there are some signs of increasing polarisation in contemporary western politics more generally, with the rise of populist parties of both Left and Right (White, 2013), this may accelerate these tendencies, as a wider array of actors have recourse to the politics of peoplehood as a way to advance their claims. The European Union is another political entity whose future may be shaped by the extent to which such actors are able to mobilise.

The partisan contestation of political boundaries looks instinctively like a corruption of democratic politics – not just because it can lead to the break-up of a polity, but because it implies the politicisation of something which for many ought to be kept neutral. There are in fact some grounds on which to welcome the politicisation of peoplehood, notably how it may foster citizen engagement and how it makes visible the political stakes already bound up in these boundary questions. But it remains an indicator of institutional rigidity, of political ambitions thwarted. The challenge for democratic design, and for partisan practice itself, is to channel these currents so they augment rather than detract from the political process. If there is a general rule to be followed, it is that one should maximise the opportunities for political contestation in existing institutions so that dissenting views are not pushed to seek new outlets of territorial expression.

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ⁱ For a critical analysis of the logics of separatism, see Spencer 1998. On the tendency of observers to 'depoliticise' contemporary nationalisms, and to ascribe motivations of political principle only to nationalisms long past, see Smith 1995, pp.11ff.

ⁱⁱ I use this term to avoid the negative and possibly overly-systematic connotations of political *ideology*, a term which in other respects would adequately describe the motivation in question.

ⁱⁱⁱ I.e. the 1968 Constitutional Act on the Czechoslovak Federation.

^{iv} Cf. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2014/sep/18/-sp-scottish-independence-referendum-results-in-full>.

^v See the first debate between SNP leader Alex Salmond and the leader of the 'No' campaign Alistair Darling, 5th August 2014, Glasgow: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/08/alex-salmond-vs-alistair-darling-live-blog>

^{vi} Cf. John Nichols, 'Scotland's referendum on austerity', *The Nation*, 17th September 2014 <http://www.thenation.com/blog/181654/scotlands-referendum-austerity>. Efforts to entwine the case for independence with an anti-austerity message preceded its full embrace by the SNP: see e.g. Foley and Ramand 2014. On the broader context of relations between left-wing thought and Scottish nationalism, see Jackson 2014a, 2014b.

^{vii} <http://www.snp.org/about-us>.

^{viii} See in particular the second Salmond / Darling debate, 25th August 2014, Glasgow:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04g1w4s/scotland-decides-salmond-versus-darling>.

^{ix} Cf. Denis Campbell, 'Scottish NHS becomes key issue in independence as doctors debate future', *The Guardian*, 15th September 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/15/scottish-nhs-independence-doctors-warn>).

^x E.g. Seamus Milne, 'Salmond's Scotland won't be an escape from Tory Britain', *The Guardian*, 11th Sept. 2014 (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/11/salmond-scotland-no-escape-tory-britain>). Cf. Jackson 2014a.

^{xi} The same message was also central to another of the independence parties, the Scottish Greens. See for instance Green MSP Patrick Harvie's post-referendum blog entry: 'In the Green Yes campaign we sought to give a distinctive vision of Scotland as a beacon of social, economic and environmental progress. I argued that Scottish independence was far more likely to deliver that vision than the backward-looking and increasingly broken British state centred on Westminster' (<http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/category/blog/>).

^{xii} See the speech by Gordon Brown at the 'Better Together' rally, Maryhill Community Central Hall, 17th September 2014: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/09/silent-no-more-watch-gordon-browns-patriotic-and-passionate-scotland-speech>

^{xiii} As reported at: http://www.politicshome.com/uk/story/44230/salmond_no_camp_is_panicking.html

^{xiv} See Patrick Wintour, 'David Cameron raises West Lothian question after Scotland vote', *The Guardian*, 19th September 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/sep/19/david-cameron-devolution-revolution-uk-scotland-vote>.

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} Whether all separatist movements can be thought of in Left-Right terms need not detain us here; on this see Noël and Thérien, 2008.

^{xvii} The Slovak National Party, or the (Slovak) Christian Democratic Movement, conform to that model.

^{xviii} In the upside-down world of post-Communist Europe, those seeking radical change have more often, as in this case, been associated with the right than the left of the political spectrum.

^{xix} As Innes summarises her argument (2001, p.x), ‘The explanation developed here is that the separation was neither an expression of deep nationalist enmities between Czechs and Slovaks – their often fractious history notwithstanding – nor was it merely a symptom of the transition, of the multiple stresses afflicting the state. Rather it was a process manufactured by a ruthlessly pragmatic Czech right, abetted, when push finally came to shove, by a populist and opportunist Slovak leadership.’

^{xx} Note therefore the concept is by no means the preserve of a particular species, the ‘populist’ party. What distinguishes the latter is a range of secondary characteristics to do with how ‘the people’ are positioned in relation to political elites, how the characteristics of a leader figure are presented, how ideas of ‘commonsense’ are celebrated, and so on. On the nature of populist claims, see Laclau 2005.

^{xxi} See Schattschneider 1975, p.3: ‘If a fight starts, watch the crowd, because the crowd plays the decisive role’; also p.4: ‘conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be.’ Cf. Coser 1956.

^{xxii} For an account of the formation of European party systems in not dissimilar terms, see Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

^{xxiii} On transnational partisanship, see White 2014.

^{xxiv} Though the point cannot be developed here, this applies also to the density of political mobilisation within settled territorial boundaries. If many contemporary political systems resemble cartels (see Katz and Mair 2009), one aspect of their parties’ collusion may exactly be the renunciation of efforts to mobilise large segments of the population so as to retain greater autonomy of action.

^{xxv} E.g. Nick Pearce and Guy Lodge, ‘After No, What Next?’, *IPPR blog*, 19th September 2014

(<http://www.ippr.org/nicks-blog/after-no-what-next>).

^{xxvi} The necessary contestation of peoplehood is a theme of agonist writings on democracy: see e.g. Honig 2009; also Fraser 2009.

^{xxvii} The SNP added 37,000 new members to its existing 25,000 in the first five days after the referendum; the Scottish Greens saw their membership increase from 2000 to 6000 over the same period

(<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/25/scotland-politics-left-purpose-snp-green-working-class-women>.)

Some participants in the Yes campaign consciously modelled their activities on the drives to socialise conflict found in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century workers’ movements or civil rights movements in the 1960: see Neil Davidson, *LSE British Politics and Policy blog*, 17th September 2014:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/neil-davidson-on-the-radical-independence-campaign/>

^{xxviii} On scepticism towards partisanship, see Rosenblum 2008; Muirhead 2014.

^{xxix} It may be said that political boundaries need to be *seen* to be independent of partisan politics, even where they are not, if citizens are to accept their polity as legitimate. But again, it may not be possible to defend the de-politicisation of peoplehood based on a general claim of this kind, independent of the desirability of the polity whose legitimacy is preserved in this way.

^{xxx} Labour’s calculation that it will generally be the beneficiary of Scottish votes also looks optimistic at the time of writing. Note though that its unionism need not depend on this assumption: as an historically expansive and internationalist movement, there are plenty of arguments within the Labour tradition, beyond the merely electoral, for why its political commitments are best pursued at the level of Great Britain as a whole.

^{xxxi} This though is the scenario unfolding in Britain, as the balance of powers between Westminster and Edinburgh are renegotiated. Laying out its recommendations as requested by the UK government, see the ‘Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament’, 27th November 2014 (https://www.smith-commission.scot/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/The_Smith_Commission_Report-1.pdf).