

Deleuze, Guattari and the Scottish independence referendum

I have been asked recently by students in Dundee and while travelling to conferences abroad how support for Scottish independence can be politically progressive, in the sense of a search for a better society for all on an egalitarian basis. The background to the query stems from my claim that Deleuze and Guattari are modernist progressives rather than postmodernist conservatives, reactionaries or nihilists. In response, I will argue here that independence can be a positive political choice, when understood according to recent philosophical ideas about territory and progressive values.

In some ways the question is counter-intuitive. Scotland is arguably more progressive than England, given the current dominance of neo-conservative ideology and populism in the latter and the greater collectivism and commitment to enlightenment values of the former. However, the idea that independence might be anti-progressive makes some sense when viewed more broadly as the formation of a nation state at a time when such entities are becoming obsolete in view of global capitalism, global communication networks, international population movements and global rather than national crises. Isn't it reactionary to seek to form a new nation based on old borders when any truly progressive movement should be international and 'for all' in a cosmopolitan sense?

Counter to this suspicion of a return to nations, I want to argue that it is possible to argue for an independent nation and yet also claim this will be a progressive decision. The creation of a new Scottish nation does not have to be a return to an outdated yet still dangerous nationalism. In this case, it can be an opportunity for progressive democratic movements. I will seek to suggest why this is true on the basis of recent work in political and social philosophy set out by Deleuze and Guattari (D&G) in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Anti-Oedipus, 1972 and A Thousand Plateaus, 1980)*.

The concepts from the works that I find most helpful for making the argument are the twinned processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. These are without doubt strange terms, so I will begin by explaining why D&G had to use them and what they mean.

We usually think of a territory as defined by its borders. So for instance Scotland is defined by a line roughly from Berwick to Gretna. D&G's insight is that a territory only makes sense as something made by processes crossing its borders. The border is a connection defined by what goes on either side of it and at the border itself. There is a very simple way of making this point: a border between two states that are exactly the same does not work as a border. You might well draw it on a map, but it has no deep meaning and can be moved one way or another with no significant wider implications. A border has to do something and what it does is supported by links between different processes to either side of it.

If territories are made by processes what are they and how do they work? For D&G, philosophy is about the creation of concepts. They answer the question by creating the widest and most powerful explanatory concepts for territory formation. This theoretical commitment is sensible from their point of

view because they believe any descriptive frame will involve theoretical presuppositions and investments, for instance, in the choice of exactly what is to be described and which values drive the description.

The concepts they use to provide the explanatory model are deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation because they think that any animal or human territory is constantly undone and constructed in relation to others. Deterritorialisation is a process that makes a territory porous, that makes it leak, change shape and assume new lines, for example, when a subset of a population takes flight. Thus emigration changed parts of Europe after the Second World War. It altered the places left, for instance, through the effects of depopulation, and the places moved to, with the addition of new cultures and labour.

Reterritorialisation counters these 'lines of flight' or escape routes through processes that make a new territory emerge, for instance, when new cultural practices or legal policies allow a territory to be demarcated due to differences in culture or laws. A territory is therefore defined by processes that are undoing it and forming it, rather than by identified borders and settled states. D&G's philosophy is above all a philosophy of becoming. Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are more precise theoretical terms for an undoing and forming anew that defines territories.

We can see an example of these processes, of interest to D&G, in the question posed at the outset. Contemporary nations are being deterritorialised by global capitalism, population movements and ideologies. We witness this in the powerlessness of nation states in relation to global companies and capital flows. As a reaction, existing nations are being weakly reterritorialised by appeals to shallow or faded national values (What it is to be X and why it is better to be), to racist reactions (the venal exploitation of fear of difference à la Farage) and bureaucratic pettiness (the manufacture of barriers supporting claims to national contrasts, such as differences in laws, practices and customs).

These philosophical definitions of territory appear to support the original scepticism about Scottish independence. Isn't it the case that to argue for Scottish independence is to fall back on reactionary reterritorialisations such as Scottish historical identity, new Scottish bureaucracies, and power bases that will have to demonstrate their Scottish perspectives (for instance, in arts councils, universities, national services, and even in armies)? It would seem that deterritorialisation is the progressive process. If that's the case, we should be getting rid of borders and embracing the ways in which they are overcome.

This view is a misunderstanding of D&G's point. Once we realise why it is a mistake we can also see why and how Scottish independence can be an opportunity for a progressive movement. There are four important points to note about the theory:

1. It is always deterritorialisation *and* reterritorialisation
2. Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are between two things

3. Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are positively and negatively destructive, where negative destruction is a direct curtailing of creative potential, and positive destruction is the result of but not the aim of creation
4. While the greatest value and progressiveness is in the positive destruction and creativity of deterritorialisation, in any given situation it is always a question of which processes of territorialisation and reterritorialisation allow for the maximum creativity and minimal negative destruction.

These points are deliberately abstract in order to increase their explanatory reach. They have to give detail to a theory with the widest possible applicability. Here are more concrete versions of them in terms of the example of borders:

1. A border is always a point where a nation begins to be undone and where it emerges. For instance, the current trend towards fortress Europe in relation to immigration is dissolving an ideal of openness and universality for European nations. It is made by a deterritorialisation of Europe as defined by its Kantian cosmopolitan heritage. It is also made by a reterritorialisation around a new image of siege and of ideas about what it means to be indigenous Europeans. The 'and' is important here because it means that any emerging territory must be considered in terms of its multiple deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations rather than according to one side or the other, or according to a restricted selection of some processes.
2. When a border begins to dissolve, two things either side of it are put in contact with one another and change in that contact. This is what begins to dissolve the border and deterritorialise the areas it limits. For example, when a cultural product or technology crosses a border into a different realm it can begin to destabilise the new realm (with the effect of uncensored news or of clandestine modes of communication, for instance), but the product or technology and the place where they originated are also transformed as they cross the boundary (for instance when music and language are taken up differently, or when different possibilities for technology are revealed). This means that in assessing the consequences and value of deterritorialisation we also need to reflect on which things are put in contact and how.
3. This connection between two things also applies to reterritorialisation. The term can seem to only apply to what stands inside the territory, for example, to a population defined by a common language or dialect. However, D&G note in specific cases and insist more generally that the making of a territory in this way determines two or more things rather than one. We can see this in the terrible consequences of shibboleths, a form of pronunciation or wider symbol that works as a test of belonging, for example, around the correct way to pronounce the 'ch' in 'loch'. The test does not only define those who belong and who pass, but also those who do not. The Hebraic roots of the test record that death followed for outsiders incapable of pronouncing the 'sh'.
4. Shibboleths allow us to understand the reference to positive and negative creation in D&G's account of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Each process will involve a positive creation yet with destructive consequences. The process will also involve a direct negative destructiveness curtailing creative potential. For instance, great poetry can invent new idioms

around shibboleths and distinctive types of pronunciation. In turn this releases new potential for further artistic and cultural creativity, for example, in national cultural movements and styles. This is not without cost, though, and there will always be kinds of consequent destruction, for instance, when other styles find it harder to attain prominence. There are also, though, direct forms of violence; for example, in the murder of outsiders or expulsion of foreigners in direct acts of negative self-definition. These are detrimental even for those seeking to define themselves through them. The idea of fortress Europe is one such direct, non-creative, form of territorialisation where horrifying deaths at our frontiers and violent expulsions and incarcerations are the means for the definition of a territory around negative passions of fear and greed.

5. *Each of the preceding points leads to the most important conclusion about reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation: they are always a matter of pragmatic decisions about types and degrees of change where there are no absolutes or unchanging values.* We cannot say nationalism good and internationalism bad, or the opposite. We can only ask which processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are at work here? What things are being transformed through contact with one another? What creative potential is increased and how? With which negative consequences? What directly negative results and actions are at work? D&G's philosophy of becoming leads to a case-by-case pragmatism rather than to unchanging values or statutes. This pragmatism still has an orientation, since it will be a matter of seeking to increase deterritorialisation and progressive potential, but with an awareness of the necessary reterritorialisations accompanying them.

We can now return to the opening question about progressiveness and Scottish independence. No argument resting on a pre-set view of the values of nationhood or internationalisation, of cosmopolitan values or of local ones can settle this question. Instead, we need to study the processes at work in the making of Scotland and the UK now. Importantly, if we follow D&G we cannot abstract from ongoing changes and appeal to continuing states and values, for these are just as subject to change as anything else. This is a significant general point against both sides of the debate where they appeal either to enduring Scottish values and practices or to those of the UK. Neither claims based on Scottish nostalgia nor on essential qualities, nor appeals on behalf of British establishment values and systems have much weight when we take account of ongoing transformations of Scotland and Britain.

The key question is not 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' if by this we understand Scotland and the UK to be in current fixed states that allow us to judge which outcome is best for Scotland and for the UK. The right question is 'Given the processes transforming Scotland and the UK today, will it be more progressive for Scotland to be an independent country?'

I do not intend to give a definitive answer to this last question, but I want to suggest some justifications for independence with some possible counters. I will divide the argument according to a set of areas which D&G considered to be of importance when considering contemporary political action:

1. The current effects of capitalism as leading to political and social inequality, and to widespread disempowerment
2. The need to re-invent democracy in relation to capital and to established powers
3. The possibility of releasing creativity against repressive and established systems which seek to control it
4. The need to find ways of resisting societies of control, whereby what we can do is governed by technological and political structures serving capitalism and established powers
5. The possibility of inventing a new people worthy of a world where capital can be resisted, where we can invent new democracies and maximise creativity
6. The need for this new people to be 'of and for all', where all is not restricted to humans but extends to animals and to environments

Much of the current debate around independence is based around different claims to a financially richer or poorer Scotland after independence. Some of these arguments are about oil, others about debt and banking, still more about the advantages and disadvantages of currencies and of larger economic unions. All these debates have already conceded too much ground to the blackmail of capitalism and of its current main proponents in banking and large international businesses, since they agree that growth depends on the better or worse running of capital and that growth in GDP is the first priority of any nation.

From a progressive stance, the question is not will we grow faster with independence, but rather how might independence put us in a stronger position to combat the terrible inequalities and injustices driven by the capitalist system? This does not mean that we have to be anti-capitalist or anti-growth, in the sense of suggesting that an independent Scotland could somehow adopt another economic system. It means that we must consider whether opportunities to mitigate and resist the worst effects of capitalism, to create alternative and better ways of working with and outside capital, will be greater with independence or not.

This first point leads to the next. There can be no optimism whatsoever for genuine change and resistance on the basis of current UK or EU democratic political action, because of the entrenched nature of Westminster and Brussels politics and the closeness of politicians of all stripes to the corruption of capital. Even politicians on the so-called left have been supine or fellow-travellers with big business, banking and the pro-capitalist press. Democracy will need to change scale, type and location in order to break with the stagnation and failure of contemporary UK and EU politics.

The emergence of new nations - not only Scotland - provides an opportunity, since it forces peoples and politicians to think in different ways as a response to new hopes and aspirations. I believe this has already been shown to be the case in the stark contrast in progressive legislation in health, education, democratic representation and social inclusiveness between Holyrood and Westminster. The terms of the debate change when the question is not how do we make things better in this old and continuing state, but rather how can a new Scotland be a better place for all?

Two familiar objections can be made against these hopes and aspirations. Aren't they an abandonment of wider political groups outside a given nation? Aren't they a retrenchment from greater sites of power? Both points depend on the view that something can be done on the UK and EU stage without first gathering strength and ideas in an independent Scotland. Again, one of the things that have been made most clear over the last few years is that doing the same thing in the same political and economic arenas will do nothing for resistance and progressiveness. Independence does not have to be a severing from wider communities. It can be an opportunity to concentrate and renew progressive movements around newly politicised ones.

Part of this renewal and the main reason for deep scepticism about the status quo is the current state of UK and EU democracy, caught in a negative spiral of disenchantment and incapacity. If even the shock of the latest economic crisis and recession can do nothing for UK and EU politics, what is going to reconnect people to forms of democratic engagement and hope? Many contemporary philosophers speak of a new democracy or a democracy to come, D&G among them. This can be found not only in the institutions and spaces of newly independent nations, but in the way in which political activity and representation have to be reinvented in them. Where better than through a reinvention of the deep enlightenment and progressive traditions in Scotland?

At first glance, then, nationalist reterritorialisation can seem to be regressive, but this is to forget that any reterritorialisation is also necessarily a deterritorialisation of Scotland, the UK and the EU, in ways that will necessarily begin new debates about democracy, capital, progressive policies and the nature not only of the Scottish polity but also of all those related to and affected by the emergence of a new Scottish nation.

This is not to deny the regressive power of nationalism, but it is to counterbalance it with the more dangerous work of capital in its alliance with current political systems and orders, and the failure of democracy in them. Of course, this also means that in order to be genuinely progressive a new Scotland will have to struggle hard against powerful pressures to bend to those same forces. As we have seen in current debates and in the established political and financial interest groups lining up with the 'no' camp, this battle is already underway.

In the effort to renew democracy and progressive politics in Scotland, one of the most important lessons from the failure of the UK and the EU in relation to economic and political interests lies with societies of control. We can see this in recent evidence of political and economic management of citizens through the press, media, spying, workplace organisation, policing and legal systems. All of which present us with immense barriers to genuine freedom and therefore democratic engagement.

It is a matter for further debate, but a smaller new nation is likely to be of a scale and of a heightened state of awareness among citizens such that control via media, policing and political corruption will be easier to scrutinise and call into question. Those involved will be our neighbours, rather than operators in London, a city so far removed now from ordinary Britons as to constitute a different realm of wealth and power, yet still supposedly working as the seat of our political representation.

The counter-argument to the advantages of local involvement and scrutiny is detachment from wider communities and action. Isn't a turn to local concerns a contradiction of an engagement 'for all' and of the creation of a 'new people'? However, it does not follow that an independence movement is a betrayal of larger national and international movements. For D&G, since every deterritorialisation is also a reterritorialisation, the pragmatic question is whether reterritorialisation around independence and deterritorialisation of the former nation lead to different international movements and of what kind?

Once again, the debate becomes a strategic one about how best to ensure progressive international movements given the state of UK and EU, and wider, economic and political organisation. The most important considerations here are therefore whether there are current powerful international movements that will be harmed by Scottish independence. I see none threatened that are not already bankrupt, exhausted or corrupted. The fact that new political organisation must emerge in an independent Scotland does not preclude those movements making international alliances and setting internationalist examples. This is of course already the case in the differences between Scotland and the UK that put pressure on UK policy, drawing further opposition to independence from the UK establishment.

There are no guarantees in D&G's pragmatic theory of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. It is a matter of what a people and a series of bodies can do within a set of processes of change shaping action but not fully determining it. Independence is therefore never necessarily anti-progressive. It is a matter of the forces at work in the deterritorialised and reterritorialised nations. Those forces are powerfully regressive in the UK. In an independent Scotland they will meet a new progressive challenge.

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