

Theories and Practices of Nationalism - HW01

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Is membership of a nation voluntary or non-voluntary? Does an individual decide his/her membership of a nation, or does the national community decide whether an individual is a member of the community or not?

Note: This answer pre-supposes that nationalism as an ideology is prevalent and not the matter of question, as initial subscription to that is involuntary due to the system-justifying nature of an ideology meaning that it is enforced if the system is in place, and any non-subscription to it is voluntary.

Ans: The matter is complicated by the fact that Nationality \neq Citizenship. For instance, Citizens of Wales, England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are all “British Nationals”¹, whereas despite popular usage “Indian Nationality Law” is a redirect from “Indian Citizenship”² on Wikipedia which lends itself to a strict definition Indian media deifying “nationals” seem to not adhere to.

It is possible to make a strong claim that the initial membership to a nation is *non-voluntary*. National status is conferred to a child on birth, when they do not have any say in the matter.

Based on the various independence movements and the Right to Secede, we might argue that at least those at the forefront of said independence movements *chose* to identify with a particular nation, while being born under a different flag. This does not include those who were born in times with awareness of a national identity (like in 1900s India) as they grow up in an environment of some “National awareness”, but those who initiate the awareness in the first place.

However, their nationality is arguably more community-defined than individual. From Seton-Watson’s “scientific definition”, he states that

“a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation”

And in popular parlance, it does seem as if the nationality of an individual is also whatever a sizeable community ascribes to them, regardless of their citizenship or self-identification: consider any “person of Indian origin” reported in

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Countries_of_the_United_Kingdom

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_nationality_law

the newspapers. Likewise, historical figures who may have acted in no way to warrant that they were members of a unified Indian nation (for example) are often considered “Indian” by those of us in the present, due to nothing more than their geographic location.

It’s complicated. An individual’s voluntary declaration of nationality is not legal status, and thus it is what any community views them as: and in that light, it is involuntary.