

The big difference between patriotism and nationalism

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LAST Sunday, along with most of the country, I spent time observing the centenary of the armistice and remembering the millions of people across the world who lost their lives or their loved ones in conflicts then and since. I also watched news reports of the commemoration at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and was struck by a phrase that the French president Emmanuel Macron used in his speech: "Patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism. Nationalism is a betrayal of patriotism".

These two words are often thought of as synonymous yet there is an increasingly important difference between them. Nationalism promotes the interests of one particular nation as being better than all others. It holds to the idea of self-determination, unencumbered by outside influence and, crucially, ignoring the effects of policies on other, supposedly lesser, nations or peoples. As a system it often includes the maintenance of a national identity based on such characteristics as culture, language, religion or a belief in a common ancestral heritage.

Patriotism is not dissimilar in that it too expresses a strong love and support for one's country but it does not carry the same connotations of superiority. Many members of our armed forces serve through a sense of patriotism, a love of their country.

Nationalism is not necessarily bad, it has been a driving force behind many independence movements and helped to bring an end to colonialism. Some argue nationalist ideas lay behind the Arab Spring but nationalism also fuelled the holocaust in Europe and the invasion of China by Japan, events eventually leading to the second World War. Nationalism has led to ethnic cleansing including the horrors of Serbia, Bosnia and Rwanda. Nationalism focuses on the state while patriotism focuses on the people.

One of the points of Macron's speech at the weekend, that also echoed themes from his address to the Houses of Congress in his visit to Washington in April, is that nationalism promotes one nation at the expense of others. The French president

appealed "let us unite our hopes instead of playing out our fears against each other." Nationalist leaders distance themselves from international organisations or agreements as they believe themselves, and their nation, to be superior to others.

A patriot will say 'I love my country' and will work to make it a better place and will defend it if necessary. On the other hand, a nationalist will say 'My country is the best, the greatest,' they will not believe any criticism of it and are prepared to go to war to prove its superiority. To paraphrase George Orwell, 'while nationalism can unite people, it unites them against other people.'

Macron's most telling argument against the rise of nationalism and nationalistic leaders was that "in saying 'Our interests first, whatever happens to the others,' you erase the most precious thing a nation can have, that which makes it live, that which causes it to be great and that which is most important: its moral values."

In April, in the US Congress, he declared: "We must not let the rampaging work of extreme nationalism shake a world full of hopes for greater prosperity."

You would think there should be less space for nationalism, after the lessons learnt from the world wars and the global rise of democratic governments assisted by the greater inter-connectedness of the modern world, yet it appears to be more and more prevalent.

All of us must challenge the rise of any extremist agenda, and it is incumbent on those of us in schools that we ensure that we promote our country (patriotism) while also guaranteeing that the values of the free world, openness, tolerance, democracy, the rule of law and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with differences are maintained. The Great War might not have been the war to end all wars but there are important lessons to be learnt from its legacy, not least that it is incumbent upon us all to challenge misguided nationalism masquerading as patriotism. Let us mark the centenary of the Armistice by working towards this.

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