Abstract
There has been a considerable resurgence of interest, in both intellectual and political circles in recent years in the nature of and prospects for English nationalism. One of the most striking features of the debates engendered by this focus has been a division in progressive circles between those envisaging the renewal of an avowed sense of Englishness as the long awaited opening for a radical English patriotism and those resistant to the very idea of a progressive English imaginary. In this paper we explore the genesis of these different positions and argue that, despite their antithetical quality, they both share one common root – the influential and unusual reflections of Scottish and New Left intellectual Tom Nairn.

Thus, much of the centre left’s current anxiety over how to respond to the emergence of contemporary English nationalism can be traced to his early critical theorisation of the pathologies and fantasies expressed via a reactionary Englishness, which he contrasts with a modern, democratic nationalism, in which national history and political development will look ‘something like France’. But this position shifted in his later thinking, influenced by his commitment to Scottish nationalism. This, we suggest, pointed towards a rather different, more optimistic and open-minded conceptualisation of English nationalism, now depicted as an increasingly inevitable and democratically-inclined vector for the dissolution of Britain and its concomitant democratic renewal. This intellectual legacy has left a significant imprint upon how progressive politicians and thinkers have approached questions of nationalism and belonging in England to this day.

---

Introduction
There has been a considerable resurgence of interest, in both intellectual and political circles in the nature of and prospects for nationalism in England. One of the most striking features of the debates engendered by this focus has been a division in progressive circles between those envisaging the renewal of an avowed sense of Englishness as the long awaited opening for a radical English patriotism and those resistant to the very idea of a progressive English imaginary. In this paper we explore the genesis of these different positions and argue that, despite their antithetical quality, they both share one common root – the influential and unusual reflections of Scottish and New Left intellectual Tom Nairn. We argue that much of the centre left’s current anxiety over how to respond to the emergence of contemporary English nationalism can be traced to his critical theorisation of the pathologies and fantasies that are expressed via Englishness, which he contrasts with a modern, democratic and therefore ‘normal’ nationalism. This conceptualisation has left a significant imprint upon how progressive politicians and thinkers have approached this phenomenon.

There are two distinct phases to Nairn’s thought that pertain to England. ‘Nairn Mk I’ - spanning from The Left Against Europe 1972 to The Enchanted Glass 1988 – was the product of a division within British Marxism between the Nairn-Anderson thesis that Britain was an is an ancien régime that needs to reach the full capitalist stage of development in order to reach socialism, on the one hand, and a broadly Anglo-Marxist insistence (most notably in the work of EP Thompson and subsequently Tony Benn) on the intrinsic radicalism of aspects of the English tradition. For Nairn, writing in the 1960s and ‘70s England was pathologically incapable of having ‘normal’ nationalism. Therefore any political expression of this stalled national formation was bound to take the kind of regressive and populist forms that were central to Powellism.

However, ‘Nairn 2.0’ - from Faces of Nationalism 1997 to After Britain 2001, and Pariah 2002 and incorporating his time at the Centre for Globalism Studies at RMIT University in Melbourne and after - offered a subtly different account of English national consciousness. This derived from his close interest in the idea of nationalism as the vehicle for the institutional creation and protection of the ‘Scottish social model’. His developing thinking about Scottish nationalism, we suggest, pointed towards a rather different, more optimistic and open-minded conceptualisation of English nationalism, which was now depicted as an increasingly inevitable and democratically inclined vector for the dissolution of Britain. And this position is broadly congruent with the kind of radical-democratic conception of Englishness associated with constitutional
campaigners such as Anthony Barnett and influential political figures such as Jon Cruddas.

This paper explores the shifts and continuities involved in the movement in his thinking across these phases. Whilst ‘Nairn Mk I’ hinges on the proposition that all nations should be ‘something like France’ Nairn 2.0 posits Scotland as a paradigmatic nationalist model. In positing a ‘normal’ teleology of national development and describing English nationalism in particular as a warped and regressive force, ‘Nairn Mk I’ conditioned much thinking about English nationalism in England today. ‘Nairn 2.0’ adopted nationalism as the means by which the British state would be modernised, and invited the prospect of an English critique of the post-devolved Union which would usher in a more sustained shift towards a nationalist imaginary. This view had limited purchase in England. At the same time, it developed a model that has presented different kinds of challenges for particularistic models of Englishness. Thus, whilst centre left opinion in Scotland was happy to follow a ‘Nairn 2.0’ line, a good deal of the centre left in England has remained bounded by the intellectual framework of ‘Nairn Mk I’, a position it occupies uneasily to this day.

Nairn Mk I: ‘Something Like France’

In this phase of his thinking, Nairn contrasted what he implicitly theorised as “normal” historical development with the United Kingdom’s “abnormal” arrested development. For Nairn, Britishness was a form Gramscian of hegemony that produced an ‘occluded multi-nationalism’ (Nairn, 1997: 212)2 throughout the United Kingdom, or what – borrowing from Robert Musil’s satire of the Habsburg Empire in its autumnal years – Nairn called “Ukania”. The monarchy in particular provided a form Ukanian nationalism or ‘folklore from above’ (Nairn, 1988: 174), inhibiting the development of “normal” nationality politics that was linked to the emergence of a form of democracy underpinned by the republican tradition.3 By positing this teleology of national development and theorizing nationalism and nationhood in this way, Nairn’s model of historical development was ‘something like France’ (Nairn, 1998: 133).4 Britain was still waiting for its own ‘1789’ when a republican nationalism would replace Ukania’s ancien regime.

The starting point for Nairn’s thinking about nationhood in the United Kingdom was the recognition that nationalism rather than class was the real motor of history. For Nairn nationalism, in both theory and practice, represented ‘Marxism’s great historical failure’ (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 317).5 Other

---

philosophies and ideologies had similarly failed to grapple with nationalism, but in the case of Marxism the failure was particularly catastrophic. This conclusion was reinforced by the events of 1989 and after. For Nairn, nationalism was no mere epiphenomenon. As Jonathan Hearn argues, Nairn saw nations ‘not as side effects of modernization, but momentous new forms of historical agency that once formed make history’ (Hearn, 2006: 99).

Understanding the place of nations and nationalism as historical agents, explains Nairn’s persistence in supporting small nations and secessionism in general and Scottish nationalism and secession in particular. This theoretical support for secession led Arthur Aughey to label Nairn as ‘the bard of disintegration’ (Aughey, 2010: xx). This theoretically derived position emerged out of a debate within the New Left and British Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically it drew upon what emerged as the ‘Nairn-Anderson’ thesis about the British state that suggested that the United Kingdom represented an ossification of state structures and their attendant ideologies that had been swept away in Europe at the end of the First World War [ref.]. Nairn’s thinking was what Paul James referred to as a ‘partial break with orthodoxy’ (James, 1996: xx). His thinking represented only a ‘partial break’ since in the mid-1970s it was still grounded in historical materialism, but with nationalism providing the motive force for development rather than class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Where this thinking did break with orthodoxy was in its iconoclastic descriptions of the left and in overturning shibboleths of left wing ideology. (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 318). In what would be come a typically contrary position, Nairn urged the left to support accession to the European Communities as a means to hasten the collapse of the ancient regime British state. This position was outlined in The Left Against Europe published in 1972 and set him against received wisdom amongst British Marxists and the Bennite left of the Labour Party. The latter resisted Britain’s involvement in the process of European integration on the grounds that the EEC’s capitalist policies would undermine the possibility of socialism in Britain brought about through Parliamentary means (Wellings, 2012: xx). But for Nairn, Parliament was part of the problem rather than the solution because like the Monarchy, it too had prevented Britain from becoming something like France. ‘The absolutism of

---

8 James, Paul. Nation Formation. Towards a Theory of Abstract Community.
10 Wellings, Ben. Euroscepticism and English Nationalism: losing the peace, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), xx.
Parliament has become as much a Leviathan as the absolute right of kings, because it has prevented the emergence in Britain of the doctrine of popular sovereignty as the true source of power (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 290). This conclusion implied another impossibility: those who wished to reform the British state within the confines of what political scientists referred to as the British Political Tradition were doomed to failure. Not only did this mean that the Labour Party could never be a true force for change, it also meant the necessity of embracing nationalism within the United Kingdom as a means of bringing about democratic renewal. But there were differences between Benn and Nairn that went further than an attitude towards European integration despite a common left-populism (Vines, 2014: xxx). In an early indication of an ambivalent attitude towards nationalism, Nairn argued that the European communities operated as the best container of the destructive tendencies inherent within nationalism [ref.].

It was this characterisation of nationalism as the bearer of modernity and democracy, yet at the same time a phenomenon of huge destructive potential, that led Nairn towards his most famous characterization of nationalism as ‘the modern Janus’ (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 317). A selection of writings first published collectively in 1977, with second and third editions released in 1981 and 2003, The Break-up of Britain remains the most influential of all Nairn’s considerations on nationalism and the United Kingdom. According to Nairn, nationalism was both progressive and regressive at the same time: seeking a clear distinction between the two faces of nationalism – progressive and reactionary; destructive and creative – was impossible. Reflecting the concerns of the left of the time Nairn argued that ‘there are two kinds of nationalism. The main, essentially health sort we applaud in Indo-China and Mozambique; and the derivative, degenerate sort we oppose in, for example, the American working class, Gaullism, the Chilean Junta and so on’ (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 335). But on a theoretical rather than a normative level he added a cautionary note:

The distinctions do not imply two brands of nationalism, one healthy and one morbid. The point is that, as the most elementary comparative analysis will show, all nationalism is both healthy and morbid. Both progress and regress are inscribed in its genetic code from the start (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 335).

---

This specific conclusion rested on a general understanding of the origins of nationalism. For all the intellectual debt to Marxist and post-structuralist thought the intellectual progenitor that Nairn wore on his sleeve most openly was the anthropologist and polymath, Ernest Gellner, with whom he worked in Prague in the mid-1990s. For Nairn, already dissatisfied with Marxist theorizing of nationalism, Gellner’s single chapter on nationalism in Thought and Change (1964) was ‘the “Eureka!” cry which founded the social-scientific theory of nationalism’ (Nairn, 1998: 1). Gellner’s theory – grounded in the modernisation theory of the 1960s and developed a greater length in Nations and Nationalism (1983) – was that nationalism was not some atavistic manifestation of humanity’s worst nature, but was instead the product of impersonal forces unleashed by the uneven development of industrialisation throughout the globe. Gellner argued that ‘The great but valid paradox is this: nations can only be defined in terms of the age of nationalism, rather than, as you might expect, the other way round’. He continued:

It is not the case that ‘the age of nationalism’ is a mere summation of the awakening and political self-assertion of this, that or the other nation. Rather, when general social conditions make for standardised, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well defined, educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men [sic] willingly and often ardently identify. These cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy (Gellner, 1983: 55).15

The reason that this was Nairn’s ‘Eureka!’ moment was that despite the epiphenomenal nature of nationalism in Gellner’s account, nations were seen as historical agents, unwittingly pushing human societies forward to certain forms of political and economic development. By putting nationalism before the development of nations and nationhood, Gellner’s formulation allowed Nairn to advance a theory of political development linked to nationalism, which he understood as a psychological response to the demands of modernisation (Miriam Dixson, 1999). In particular, it was the response of peripheral elites (i.e. those not directly in charge of the process of development but who could see its potential benefits) to the rigours of development that generated a historical alliance between masses and bourgeoisie. This was the moment in which the masses were invited into history and that invitation had to be written in language that they understood [find quote from The Break-up of Britain].

Nairn’s addition to Gellner’s understanding was that of ‘the modern Janus’: societies tried to propel themselves forward by what he called ‘a certain sort of regression’, drawing on past victories and defeats as a means of surviving the

millrace of development (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 336). This need to generate a community bound by common myths and memories led to the ‘necessary report to populism’ resulting in a cross class alliance between proletariat, peasantry and the peripheral bourgeoisie that came to be known as ‘the nation’ (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 327). Whilst this process played out throughout the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, the United Kingdom remained immune from these trends: partly due to its precocious development as set out in the Nairn-Anderson thesis; and partly due to the British state’s victories in the twentieth century’s great conflicts.

Therefore part of the reason for Nairn’s view of Anglo-British/English nationalism derived from what he conceptualised as its thwarted historical course rather than its endurance in Ernest Barker’s view (Barker, 1944: xx). The English, being at the centre of the world-changing developments connected with the transition to modernity, were not forced to think about who they were in the same way that peripheral elites and masses were forced to by the operations of the global political economy. Specifically ‘identity’ never became a political issue in a way that was essential to ‘normal’ nationalism. In this way, Nairn concurred with Hans Kohn and Liah Greenfeld that there was something distinct about the historical course of English nationalism, although, given his feelings about Ulster Protestantism, he did not share their views about the foundational importance of Protestant democracy. Moreover, the radical democratic forces in existence between 1789 and 1848 had been contained, neutralised and some of their ideas absorbed into the body politic by the agents of the British state, replacing “proper” nationalism with ‘folklore from above’.

[Comparison between English Puritans and French Jacobins in The Enchanted Glass]

The survival of the British state in 1940 and the perpetuation of Crown-in-Parliament sovereignty from 1688 to the ‘crisis’ of the 1970s had implications for Nairn’s view of the largest of the United Kingdom’s constituent nations. By the publication of the first two editions of Break-up of Britain in 1977 and 1981, the potential for nationalism (or more specifically neo-nationalism) to create democratic renewal via a type of (left) populism had already appeared in Nairn’s thinking (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 168). But this potential seemed severely limited – if not entirely impossible – in the case of England (and Ulster Loyalism). Given that nationalism was driven by peripheral elites, it was not clear how England – at the centre of the type of historical development central to Nairn’s understanding of nationalism – could benefit from the alliance between the

---


bourgeoisie and masses that nationalism “normally” entailed. It was this impossibility of “normal nationalism’ that led to what he described as ‘the English enigma’ whereby the English were presented with the historical Hobson’s choice between ‘Windsor Socialism’ and a ‘vestigial imperial patriotism close to expiry’ rather than a new image of England (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 287).

In fact by the time of The Break-up of Britain’s first appearance a ‘regressive’ English nationalism had manifested itself for the best part of a decade in the shape of Powellism. Finding its tribunes on the right of the Conservative Party particularly amongst the Monday Club – driven by issues such as income tax reform, Rhodesia’s unilateral declaration of independence, a defence of Ulster Protestantism, resistance to European integration and above all an opposition to New Commonwealth immigration buttressed by a policy of repatriation – what came to be known as ‘Powellism’ clearly displayed ‘a certain sort of regression’ in its infatuation with “olde England” but was entirely reactionary rather than progressive in its political programme. Powell’s reactionary politics were aligned with his political image as the tweed wearing, fox hunting defender of Ulster Protestantism, parliamentary sovereignty and (white) local communities. Thus Nairn could not endorse Powellite English nationalism normatively or theoretically since, not only was it crypto-fascist, but it was not fulfilling its theoretical and world historical role in bringing about the collapse of the British state. Indeed the veneration of Crown-in-Parliament sovereignty lay at the heart of Powellism and in this way it became a buttress of the old regime (Wellings, 2013: 52). This English defence of British sovereignty not only helped shore up the British ship of state – which in Nairn’s view was already taking in water by the bows – but it had a negative effect on expressions of Englishness. Nairn concluded in the late 1970s that ‘the English need to rediscover who and what they are, to reinvent an identity of some sort better than the battered cliché-ridden hulk which the retreating tide of imperialism has left them’ (Nairn, 2003 [1977]: 248).

By the early 1980s the ‘crisis’ that drove the publication of Break-up of Britain was entering a new (or another) period of intensity. But if Powellism was entirely reactionary, Thatcherism at least promised some sort of “creative destruction”. By taking on the “Wets” in her party and undermining the ‘glamour’ of all the old institutions and traditions associated with the British state Thatcher played a historical role that was more congenial to Nairn’s understanding of politics and historical development than Powell ever could. In

---


fact, the clash between the Thatcherite politics and Scottish autonomy in the 1980s advanced the cause of Scottish nationalism and helped revive the fortunes of Scottish secessionism that had seemed so bleak after 1979.

During this period Nairn deepened his argument about the corrupting effect of the British state on the emergence of “normal” nationalist development in the United Kingdom. Although written from a more self-consciously Scottish secessionist point of view, the logic of his argument had implications for his understanding of nationalism in England. *The Enchanted Glass* (first published in 1988 and reprinted in 1993) dealt at length with the Monarchy and the Crown-in-Parliament. It did so in the unfolding context of a crisis within the royal family that spilled out into public life from the *annus horribilis* of 1992 to death of Diana in 1997 and the concomitant crisis of the Conservative Party during the years of the Major government from 1990 to 1997. *The Enchanted Glass* provided a Gramscian account of the Monarchy in which the term 'Ukania' was deployed by way of a disparaging an delegitimising comparison with the late Habsburg Empire and suggesting the prospect of a similar political fate to that multinational polity. The modernisation theory of *The Break-up of Britain* was combined with the Gramscian-inspired analysis of hegemony in *The Enchanted Glass* to argue that nationalism in 'Ukania' was hidden – Nairn increasingly used the term ‘occluded’ – by the existence of the British state and its chief object of ‘glamour’ (in the Scottish sense of the word), the Monarchy.

Considerations of English nationalism in this account tended to dwell upon its function as providing majority support for the British state. Although there were intimations that England could achieve ‘normality’ in terms of its national-political development, the dominant image of English nationalism was negative. At best the English habit of deference towards the British state was a form of false (national) consciousness; at worst it was a vector for atavistic and crypto-fascist ideologies. The lasting outcome of this analysis for English progressives was, as Michael Kenny has argued, a diversion away from the potentialities of English nationalism in all its plurality (Kenny, 2014: 241). As Kenny noted, Nairn Mk I ‘rekindled a rich seam of progressive fears about Englishness [and] an archaic Englishry frozen in aspic’ (Kenny, 2014: 58-9). Such anxieties were not without irony given that Nairn himself shifted his position on the potentialities of English nationalism too so that what was once a regressive brake on nationalist development in the United Kingdom became a essential liberating, civic element if the British state were to (finally) collapse.

---


Nairn 2.0: Something like Scotland

Nairn is best known for his shift from a position of orthodox British Marxism in the 1960s to an endorsement of nationalism (at least for peripheral nations) in the 1970s. However, we argue that another, more subtle shift took place in the late 1990s in the context of his analysis of nationalism within Britain towards an endorsement of ‘civic’ nationalism for all nations in the United Kingdom, including – especially – England. Although both faces of English nationalism were discernible in Nairn Mk I, this aspect of his normative theorising only came to the fore after devolution in 1997-98. Whilst English progressives had taken up the Nairn Mk I analysis, there were fewer champions for Nairn 2.0 south of the border even as Englishness became politicised in the 2000s.

Until the late 1990s, Nairn focused most of his attention on Scotland and on the British state. But this theorising left the largest nation in the United Kingdom in an awkward theoretical position. The idea of ‘occluded multi-nationalism’ was initially used to explain Scotland’s situation vis-à-vis the British state at this time, rather than England’s, but the analysis had implications that would become clearer as the decade wore on. The period around the fall of the Conservative Party in 1997 permitted a normative shift in Nairn’s thinking about nationalism, but one that did not fully translate or resonate in England.

The emphasis in Nairn 2.0 is on the ‘civic’ face of nationalism with contemporary Scotland now as the model rather than republican France alone. By the late 1990s global and domestic politics (as well as opinion about nationalism within the academy) were such that Nairn felt able to promote and endorsement of nationalism as a vector of democratic development. (Liah Greenfeld) In doing so he had to overcome the opprobrium that adhered to “ethnic” nationalism witnessed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the first half of the decade. In doing so, Nairn’s reply was always that small nations were far less deadly than superpowers (Faces of Nationalism), thereby reinforcing his normative commitment to secession.

Thus the keys to understanding Nairn’s shift are the notions of ‘greatness’ and ‘normality’, two concepts that shaped the nationalisms of contemporary England and Scotland in different ways. ‘Greatness’ was the foundation for post-imperial nostalgia amongst the English; ‘Normality’ was an aspiration for small nations like the Scots who increasingly sought ‘development on their own terms’ [ref] driven towards this inevitable political outcome because nationality was ‘simply the fate of modernity’ (Nairn, 2001: 199).23 But cognizant of the ‘Janus-faced’ nature of nationalism, Nairn argued for the right sort of nationalism: the civic variety. Reflecting on the murder of Stephen Lawrence in London in 1993 and

fears that the murder of Mark Ayton in Edinburgh in 1998 might have suggested similar motivating hatreds, Nairn argued ‘the English (like the Scots) have to get rid of their own venomous dregs – largely the deposit of a joint British imperialism which has been formally would up yet still festers in the unconsciousness of both countries (Nairn, 2001: 216).24 Only by letting go of the identity of ‘Greatness’ associated with imperialism and becoming a ‘normal’ nation, could England be saved from itself.

So by the turn of the millennium Nairn’s answer to such “ethnic” animosities, was more nationalism, not less. A renewed (i.e. “civic”) English nationalism became central to his vision of nationalism in the United Kingdom. An early critic of Blairism that he dismissed as ‘Hormone Replacement Therapy, not revolution’, Nairn argued that only an English majority could, reconciled with European integration and preferably a republic, could forge a new identity that could contain regressive face of the nationalism in England that anxieties about devolution had revealed (Nairn, 2002: 169-70).25 This course of action implied a particular burden on the left in England with the risk being that in-action would have consequences worse than the adoption of nationalism as a progressive force. ‘It wouldn't be the first time', wrote Nairn, ‘that the Left had dismissed nationality-politics, only to see it fall straight into the paws of a resurgent Right, slavering about come backs, former glories and family values’ (Nairn, 2002: 167).26 Nairn remained optimistic that a new English nationalism was not fated to take such a path (Nairn, 2002: 167), but in England itself opinion was divided on the merits of such a course, not least within the Labour Party.

Nairn 2.1 – Down Under?

- Paul James and the Globalism Institute
- Miriam Dixson and the Imaginary Australian
- Open Democracy

After Nairn: English Progressives in the Shadow of Scotland

So when by the late 1990s the ‘tectonic shift' in Britain's ‘occluded multi-nationalism’ (‘Sovereigntyscapes', 1997) revealed the political re-emergence of Britain's peripheral nations, England fell between two stools. From a Nairnite point of view it was still burdened with a residual British identity and although public opinion appeared deeply ambivalent about the monarchy, it had not yet developed a “proper” nationalism of its own. This too was the period of England’s perceived “absence” when the anticipated “backlash” that did not manifest itself in the form of English secessionism immediately following

devolution to other parts of the United Kingdom including London (Condor, 2010: xx).\textsuperscript{28}

This new view of English nationalism as a progressive force built on the radical tradition within British socialism and the New Left, had some supporters in England. Foremost amongst them was Anthony Barnett, a long time companion of Nairn’s, who used the \textit{Open Democracy} website that he founded \cite{Barnett2014} – and in particular the \textit{Our Kingdom} site – to promote a “Nairn 2.0” vision of English nationalism. Barnett, too, followed Nairn’s description of England as an atypical example of nationhood. The drama of the Scottish referendum in 2014 increased the comparisons with England’s northern neighbour, playing out its quest for normality. As a result of Britain’s imperial experience, Englishness, according to Barnett, was a ‘singular form of nationalism’ and in its defence of Britishness it was ‘not a logical nationalism’. But it was only illogical when compared to Scotland whose nationalism represented a ‘revolution of the normal’.\textsuperscript{29} Such normality was not beyond the reach of the English, however. On the eve of the Scottish referendum vote Barnett sought to soothe English anxieties. He argued that as a nation England was:

\begin{quote}
more than capable of working through its imperial legacy for it is intrinsically anti-fascist and consciously fair-minded. Indeed it turned its imperial roots into a commitment to global consciousness and an ease with the larger world that draws on the inheritance of being ‘first born’. This internationalism is symbolised by ‘Britishness’, the world-facing aspect of being English. It is fear of losing this exceptionally generous and tolerant legacy that induces intense anxiety about a Scottish Yes.’\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Perhaps the highest profile adherent to this view was the singer-songwriter Billy Bragg. As someone closely associated with the radical left in the 1980s, his publication of \textit{The Progressive Patriot}, in 2006 surprised some, but built on the tradition of radical Englishness. In academia, Richard Weight built on the tradition of radical Orwellianism and saw national identity’ as a progressive force in politics. Crossing the boundaries from politics to academia, John Denham became an ‘optimistic patriot’, whilst Jon Cruddas, as policy advisor to Ed Miliband, advanced the cause of ‘Blue Labour’ whose platform included a commitment to engaging with the political dimensions of English nationality; a tacit admission that these had not been addressed before. In the wake of the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Condor2010} Condor, Susan. \textit{Nations and Nationalism}, 16, 3: 2010:
\end{thebibliography}
Labour Party’s election defeat in 2015 a new policy group called Red Shift similarly urged the party to consider the English as a political community more seriously.

However, there was a serious counter-current to this view. Unlike Scotland where nationalism was viewed as a progressive force for political modernisation and renewal (Nairn 2.0), in England it was still commonly seen in much more regressive terms (Nairn Mk I). These views were held on the left and right of politics and amongst non-aligned commentators. Fears that such a backlash would appear were held in high places. In 1997 John Major sought to warn Scottish voters that demands for greater autonomy would have political consequences that might be beyond the control of the governing class.

- Major: ‘...as night follows day...’
- Examples of English fears of English nationalism during the latter stages of the Scottish referendum campaign:

Anxieties about the potential of neo-Englishness increased when England fans rioted in France during the World Cup in 1998 and Scottish fans didn’t. This pattern was repeated during the Euro2000 championships in the Low Countries, leading Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, to ask himself why hostility to foreigners seemed to be stronger in England than elsewhere in Britain. Straw stated that ‘I think that it’s very important we redefine not only what it means to be British, but also what it means to be English’ blaming the xenophobia of England’s football fans on what he called ‘the global baggage of empire’ (Australian, 18 July 2000).31

For some English progressives, the reinvention of Britishness from Powellite racial exclusivity to multicultural inclusivity was the corollary of the right’s imperial nostalgia and was therefore to be defended against what was perceived as “English exclusivity” (firmly in Nairn Mk I territory). Writing about Scotland, Nairn argued that ‘the land of supposed “ninety minute patriots” had carried the game outside the stadium, ignored the final whistle and intended playing on a real conclusion’ (Nairn, 2001: 220). England, suggested Nairn, should do the same. But this prospect was not welcomed in some quarters. In a revealing exchange between Nairn and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown on the prospects for a ‘New Britishness’ originally intended for the pages of The Sunday Herald but published as an appendix to pariah in 2002, Alibhai-Brown made the progressive case for Britishness. ‘It is extraordinary how differently we see Britishness’ she wrote to Nairn:

You see it as the Old Devil. I see it as subversive of all nationalisms and

fundamentalisms ... What has been unleashed cannot be contained again, but it can be circumscribed and made less appealing by the invention of a better, broader identity, that of New Britishness (cited in Nairn, 2002: 168-69).

One of the things that this exchange revealed was not only the different views held about Britishness by a Scottish nationalist and a spokeswoman for multicultural Britain, but just how different the meanings ascribed to Britishness now were in Scotland and England. In Scotland, nationalist politics was focused on constitutional matters (the Union) whereas in England it was driven by questions of immigration and Euroscepticism. It was this that gave Scottish and English nationalisms their respective “civic” and ‘ethnic’ characters more than the intrinsic characters of each nationalism alone.

What was usually offered in place of Englishness between 1997 and 2014 was Britishness, the apogee of which was the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympics in 2012. Central to this a resistance within New Labour to engage with – let alone endorse – the politics of English nationality, turning it into what Michael Kenny has characterised as a ‘forbidden national identity’ (Kenny, 2014: 237). Gordon Brown’s espousal of a renewed Britishness in defence of the Union absorbed political space that might have allowed for an articulation of Englishness.

Admittedly, until 19 September 2014, none of the other major parties – not even UKIP – were consciously interested in cultivating Englishness as a political force. Nevertheless it was New Labour that struggled with the issue in opposition too. In 20102, Labour appeared to embrace the radical English tradition, but to do so it had to allay progressive fears about awakening an English nationalism that accorded to the Nairn Mk I model. Millband argued that

We have been too nervous to talk of English pride and English character. For some it was connected to the kind of nationalism that left us ill at ease. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Union flag was reclaimed from the National Front. Since Euro 96, English football fans have helped to reclaim the flag of St George from the BNP. Now more than ever, as we make the case for the United Kingdom throughout the United Kingdom, we must talk about England (Millband, 2012).

---

Although Ed Milliband hoped to ‘embrace a positive, outward looking version of English identity’ (Milliband, 2012)35 this effort was undercut in two ways aside from the unpopularity of the Labour Party from 2010-2015. The first was by Labour’s unconvincing adoption if the radical English tradition in defence of the Union that again always appeared to subsume Englishness as part of a wider ‘One Nation’ British politics in which resentment at the nature of devolution had grown since Brown’s administration (Jeffery et al, 2011; Jeffery et al, 2013).

The second related to the so-called ‘Rochester-gate’ scandal in which the Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, Emily Thornbury was forced to resign from the Shadow Cabinet over a tweeted image of English flags adorning a house in the Rochester and Strood constituency with a white van parked outside it. (BBC News, 2014).36 Thornbury’s actions gave weight to the idea that the Nairn Mk I framework ‘can be used to legitimate sweeping expressions of disappointment in, and even a thinly veiled contempt for, the English lower orders’ (Kenny, 2014: 64). The predilection for self-defining English voters to vote for UKIP further distanced many progressives from Englishness (BSA 32).37

The need for a reappraisal of political Englishness became even more apparent in the wake of the Labour Party’s 2015 election defeat. The Labour Party found itself in a comparable position to the Conservatives in 1997: with only one seat in Scotland and existing as a de facto parliamentary English party. Calls for the creation of an English Labour Party grew. However, converting the extant Labour Party to the type of radical Englishness advocated by Cruddas and Denham will not be easy. As Emily Robinson has shown, the Labour Party’s traditions are British rather than English (Robinson, forthcoming).38 Nor did the Conservative leadership adopt English nationalism with any alacrity when it was in the same position even though it could inhabit the role of an English party far more comfortably than its chief protagonist (Gamble, forthcoming).39 But ‘Nairn Mk I’ still haunts the politics of nationalism in England like Banquo’s ghost. The group of English Labour MPs organised as ‘Red Shift’ made the development of Englishness as the second of their top ten political priorities for 2020:

We have to show [the electorate] that we are English too. We have to find new ways to accommodate a positive English nationalism and pride without the

---

38 Robinson, Emily. ‘Labour’s English Problem: radical nostalgia, progressive patriotism … PSR
39 Gamble, Andrew. ‘The Conservatives and the Union’, PSR
divisive language and posturing of the Tories, or indeed the hatred and bigotry of far right extremists (Red Shift, 2015).

[Sub-concluding sentence.]

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have argued that much of the centre left’s current anxiety over how to respond to the emergence of contemporary English nationalism can be traced to Tom Nairn’s critical theorisation of the pathologies and fantasies that are expressed via Englishness, which he contrasts with a modern, democratic and therefore ‘normal’ nationalism. Normal nationalism for Nairn meant a historical development ‘something like France’ after 1789. In the 1970s Nairn’s thoughts on nationalism in England were pessimistic – what we have labelled Nairn Mk I – and English progressives embraced this view. But Nairn’s own position altered from the late 1990s, to the point where he endorsed English nationalism as a vital component if Britain were to break up. This view did not translate well in England, where progressive attitudes predominately remained wedded to Nairn Mk I even as Labour joined the Conservatives as a de facto parliamentary English Party.